



Living on the edge

Wetlands and birds in a changing Sahel

'This well-produced book provides a step-change in our knowledge of Sahel migrants. Eminently readable, well chosen photographs, a fascinating read for those who want to know more about European birds in the Sahel zone than they can find in European bird journals.'

Ian Newton - British Birds - 2010

'*Living on the Edge* est un livre fascinant qui suscite l'admiration, et c'est bien plus qu'un livre sur les oiseaux.'

Walter Bellis - Alauda - 2010

'*Living on the Edge* is a worthy successor to Reg Morau's book 'The Palaearctic-African Bird Migration Systems' (1972). It is much more detailed and scientific and, because of the high quality of its production, it is also a book that will help many non-scientists understand the complex ecology of migrant birds. It deserves to be very widely read by anybody interested in the quality of life that we have in Europe.'

Will Cresswell - Ibis - 2010

'Ce travail rigoureux ne peut être salué autrement que par des éloges.'

Olivier Girard - Malimbus - 2010

Of the more than 500 bird species breeding in Europe, some 1300 – 2600 million pairs altogether, about a quarter migrate south to sub-Saharan Africa. These migrants spend the greater part of their life in Africa and return north to breed. The Palearctic-African bird migration system draws birds from Europe, but also from Asia, even from eastern Siberia. The long-distance migrants in this vast region, apart from those wintering in southern Asia, pour into sub-Saharan Africa, not just scattered across the continent, but mainly amassing in the northern savannas and avoiding the equatorial woodlands. These savannas are dry during the northern winter, the last rains normally falling in September or October. From then on, conditions become drier by the day, and only after most of the surviving Palearctic birds have vacated the region in March-May do the first new rains arrive. Hence the highest densities of Palearctic birds are to be found in the most desiccated vegetated region of the northern tropics where there is little prospect of rainfall during their stay. The main drivers of life in the Sahel are rainfall in the short wet season, the flood extent of the inundated areas and the 'greenness' of the vegetation. They are the potential key factors in the rise and fall of migratory bird populations. The Palearctic hordes wintering in Africa comprise mostly waterbirds and insectivorous passerines. For the period 1970 to 2005, a staggering 59% of all trans-Saharan migrants under consideration, 75 out of 127 bird species, were in decline. Birds wintering in the northern savannas and in the Sahelian wetlands suffered the strongest declines. The Sahel-Sudan zone clearly stands out as a trouble zone. This book explains why.



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