

Bird flyways and stopover conservation sites in the Arabian Peninsula

Mohammed Shobrak

Abstract. The Arabian Peninsula is important for migratory bird species crossing between Africa, Asia and Europe. Implementing the flyway approach to conservation, the key sites in the Arabian Peninsula should be identified and protected. In this study the important sites were identified using information published on the migration strategies of individual populations and the data available on the Important Birds Areas (IBA) published in 1994. The results showed that the bottleneck sites, IBA in the coastal areas, and islands with breeding seabirds are probably the priority sites need urgent attention and protection. Factors negatively affecting the migratory species need to be identified and removed. The Wing Over Wetland (WOW) project could be one of the possibilities for migratory birds conservation, as it supports coordination between countries in the flyway and is in the legal framework of international conventions such as Ramsar and AEWA.

Key words. Bird migration, Important Bird Area (IBA), migration bottleneck, winter quarters.

Since early times, the annual journeys of birds have inspired and fascinated humans. In the earliest historical documents there are numerous accounts of the migration of birds, or at least their seasonal appearance and disappearance, without any real understanding of why birds moved or where they went. Many bird species undertake long annual migrations, most commonly to utilise longer day lengths and temporarily abundant food resources in northern regions, returning to warmer wintering grounds in the south. For many species, migration may commence along broad fronts, but traditional routes are often along narrow belts called flyways. The term “flyway” has been used in publications since the 1950s to describe these narrow bird migration routes. The general definition presented by BOERE & STROUD (2006) hints at the conservation significance of flyways that touch on both geographical and political domains: *“the entire range of a migratory bird species (or groups of related species or distinct populations of a single species) through which it moves on an annual basis from the breeding grounds to non-breeding areas, including intermediate resting and feeding places as well as the area within which the birds migrate.”* This all-encompassing definition has led to a flyway approach to conservation that explicitly seeks to protect the condition of all key sites along a bird’s flyway (DODMAN & BOERE (2010).

The Arabian Peninsula forms a bridge between Africa, Asia and Europe that is crossed along north-south or east-west flyways by some three billion migrating birds each year (CMS 2006). To understand the importance of the Arabian Peninsula for migratory species, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the migration strategies of individual populations. Information on population migration strategies was summarized using data from NEWTON (2008); DELANY et al. (2009) and DODMAN & BOERE (2010), and for the