

Review

Atlas des Oiseaux de France en Hiver. By **Dosithée Yeatman-Berthelot**, assisted by **Guy Jarry**. Société Ornithologique de France, Paris, 1991. 575 pages; 271 line-drawings; 351 distribution maps. Fr.350.00.

The late Laurent Yeatman—a name perhaps not known to the latest generation of British birdwatchers—was the driving force behind the pioneer French breeding bird atlas. Scarcely had he finished it, Jean Dorst recounts, when he proposed an even more revolutionary atlas of winter bird distribution. The Council of the Société Ornithologique de France urged him to launch the new project. He hesitated, for his health was fast failing, but his daughter Dosithée promised to help, and to take charge when he could no longer manage.

No matter how interesting it was in breaking new ground, the *Atlas des Oiseaux Nicheurs de France* (1976) was, to be frank, a somewhat hurried and drab publication. In contrast, the atlas here reviewed is a most elegant volume, deserving a place on the bookshelf of both bibliophile and active birdwatcher.

Fieldwork for this atlas covered the four winters 1977/78 to 1980/81, winter being defined as the period from 1st December to 20th February. As in the breeding atlas, the area unit—the equivalent of the British 10-km square—was a rectangle measuring 20km × 27km. Of the total of 1,087 units, 14 were not visited at all and 13 were very superficially covered. Most rectangles (504) produced 61-80 species, the maximum score being 164 species for 'Rue' in the Baie de Somme. In the detailed and informative introduction, the Blackbird *Turdus merula* is noted as the most ubiquitous species in France in winter.

The main body of the atlas takes the now familiar form, with a vignette and signed text on the left-hand page and a main map on the right. The maps show département boundaries, not rectangles, but a very effective bookmark/overlay allows one to identify the rectangle in which any dot lies. In addition to the main map, small maps are used to show summer distribution, where appropriate, or distribution in contrasting winters (1977/78 mild, 1978/79 'rigoureux'). Species regularly present in winter receive full treatment; 56 irregular winterers receive shortened treatment, only nine with maps.

Some of the maps are of particular interest to the British reader. For example, the British Redpolls *Carduelis flammea cabaret* wintering in France are geographically separated from those of Alpine origin.

Fieldworkers attempted to estimate numbers, by orders of magnitude on a five-band scale from 0-10 to over 10,000. Some texts quote numbers, and a few maps (e.g. that for Rook *Corvus frugilegus*) plot abundance using different-sized symbols.

Dosithée Yeatman-Berthelot, assisted by Guy Jarry, has produced an admirable volume, but one must criticise the inordinate delay in publication, ten years after fieldwork finished. What would the present-day maps for Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* or Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*—both species extending their ranges—look like now? We are told where some of the blame for the delay lies. Maps were sent out to authors in September 1987, with instructions to submit texts by 15th January 1988. Alas, some texts did not reach the editor until 1990.

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