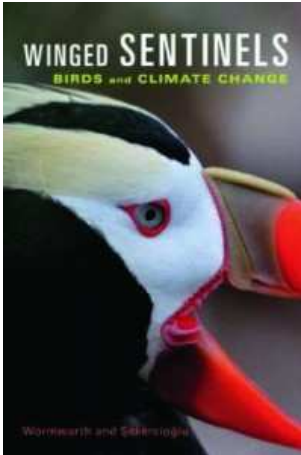


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[Winged Sentinels: birds and climate change, by Janice Wormworth and Çağan Şekercioğlu](#)

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The subject of climate change is rarely out of the news and its effects are obvious to anyone with an interest in weather, landscape or natural history. Many biologists believe that, if change continues at its current rate, it is likely to present the major conservation problems of the coming decades and that many plant and animal species will become extinct. Not surprisingly, the scientific literature on the effects of climate change on plants and animals has mushroomed over the last 20 years or so, but this book is an attempt to summarise this literature as it relates to birds. The first author is a freelance science writer, while the second is an academic and conservationist, working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at the University of Utah.

As expected, the book covers all the major known effects of climate change on bird populations, from shifts in the timing of seasonal events, such as migration and breeding, to changes in population levels and distribution patterns, discussing, wherever known, the mechanisms involved. In the northern hemisphere, the breeding ranges of many bird species are spreading northwards or upwards, while at the same time retracting from the southern and lower limits of their recent ranges. The book is truly international in its approach, with examples provided from every continent, and a good coverage of the European literature. One chapter deals specifically with the oceans, the changes in sea temperatures, acidification and water-current systems that underlie some of the major reproductive failures and population declines witnessed in recent years among some British seabirds. But it is not just 'our' seabirds that are being affected, as similar events are occurring at various localities around the world. Although many bird species are likely to 'benefit' from climate changes, developing larger populations that extend over wider areas, others are expected to decline in numbers and distributions. It is the potential problem-species that the authors concentrate on throughout. The last chapter describes how conservation thinking and actions are being modified and developed to take account of the population and range changes that are already underway, but are likely to gather pace in the coming years. According to the literature that the authors quote, extinctions are inevitable. Some of the research in this field is based on what has happened already, and any argument about it is likely to centre on the importance of climate as opposed to other human impacts that could have caused the changes observed. But other research, just as necessary, is concerned with the prediction of further changes likely to occur in the coming years. However well founded, this is essentially speculative. This is not a criticism, but a necessary aspect of this field of study, but it is important to keep this in mind when digesting the authors' predictions. This field thus consists partly of well-founded facts based on past happenings, and partly on assumption-laden predictions of a future for which we have to plan. It is unusual in ornithology to have to deal with the future as well as the past.

The authors seem to have done a thorough job in searching for and pulling together the relevant scientific literature and, as far as I could tell, it has been reported accurately. The most recent references, of which there are many, date from 2010. The book is also readable, the result perhaps, of having a professional writer as one of the authors. There is, however, a fair bit of repetition through the book, but this may be justified on the grounds that some readers may only dip into particular chapters.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book to anyone interested in this subject, particularly those who want to absorb current scientific thinking on the topic in a relatively painless manner.

Ian Newton

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