



REVIEWS

Manual of British Birds. By Howard Saunders. Third edition revised and enlarged by William Eagle Clarke, I.S.O., LL.D. (Gurney and Jackson). 30s. net.

FOR years Howard Saunders's *Manual* was the standard authority for British ornithology until his last (1899) edition became too out of date to be so regarded. The present edition we fear falls short in the accuracy sustained in Saunders's own two editions. Even on the first page of the Preface the name of Mr. Grönvold, the well-known bird artist, is spelt Gronwöld, and a number of other mistakes, to some of which we refer later, occur throughout the book.

The form of the work is the same as previous editions, but the plan of devoting to each species exactly two pages (which Saunders himself never approved) is rightly abandoned. The descriptions of young birds are fuller than in previous editions and the measurement of wings is given in millimetres as well as inches. Many additions have been made and newly-admitted species have been illustrated by Mr. Grönvold, whose drawings are cleverly done to match the style of the old ones, notwithstanding the fact that they are reproduced by a different process. In some of the drawings insufficient care has been used to make them comparative in size, so that, for instance, Baird's Sandpiper and the Semi-palmated Sandpiper appear relatively gigantic.

In nomenclature, Dr. Clarke has followed the B.O.U. List of 1915 "with a few desirable exceptions," but why a list of twelve years ago should be preferred to the latest list of the B.O.U., namely that for 1923, and why other names are used is not explained. We cannot trace any consistent plan, and the adoption without explanation of what are now considered wrong names is a useless and totally unconvincing procedure.

In the same way Dr. Clarke rejects certain forms from the list without adequate discussion. For instance, under Crested Tit he states that to which race those obtained in England belonged is "uncertain." As he appears to ignore our article on the subject (*British Birds*, V., pp. 109-10), and does not state that he himself has examined the specimens nor gives any reason for the uncertainty, the statement is valueless. In the case of the Guillemot the author's reason for not accepting *U. t. albonis* is that its distribution is uncertain, yet we have made it quite clear that northern breeding birds are much darker than southern ones and this race has been considered as well differentiated by every ornithologist who has compared a series. The fact that intermediates occur in intermediate localities is entirely natural, and indeed certain ornithologists consider the existence of intermediates to be a necessary condition in a sub-species as opposed to a species. Although Dr. Clarke thus excludes *P. c. cristatus* and *P. c. mitratus*, specimens of which have been critically examined by others, yet he adds the Western Little Bustard (*Otis t. tetrix*), although not a single example of this form taken in the British Islands has been identified. In fact, he seems to have made no critical examination of existing specimens of this and other birds such as Spotted Eagles, one of which, stated to have been shot in Aberdeenshire September 20th, 1861, is additional to those listed in *British Birds*, XIV., pp. 180, 209.

There are many details in the book to which we take exception, and there are also certain records which do not appear to have been published previously, and it must suffice to refer here to a few of these items. Under Continental Jay the first Kent occurrence is omitted, and Norfolk should be five and not three. Coues's Redpoll is recorded from Fair Isle, May 5th, 1908, which appears to be a fresh record, while three obtained there in 1910 are put down as 1920, and two recorded from Norfolk in 1910 and 1926 are omitted. The Yellow-breasted Bunting is recorded from Fair Isle in September in 1907 and 1909 and at St. Kilda in 1910. We suppose these escaped identification until after the publication of Dr. Clarke's *Studies in Bird Migration*, since they are not mentioned there and no explanation is vouches. The supposed breeding of the Snow-Bunting at Flatholm in the Bristol Channel in May, 1911, is, we are sorry to see, solemnly accepted as a fact. Had the supposed female taken at the time and stated to have had a well-developed ovary been examined by Dr. Clarke, he would have found it to have been an undoubted adult male. The Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal-Tit and Long-tailed Tit are given as breeding at Stornoway in the Outer Hebrides. Five examples of the Continental Coal-Tit are recorded for Norfolk in October, 1891, but no details are given and it is impossible to accept such a record without evidence. The occurrence of Eversmann's Warbler in Norfolk in September, 1922, is omitted, as are those of the Scandinavian Chiffchaff at Holy Island in April, 1923 although we believe the latter were identified by Dr. Clarke himself (see *British Birds*, XVIII., pp. 19-20). The occurrence of the Siberian Chiffchaff on the last-named island is given as October, but the correct date would appear to be November 10th (*loc. cit.*). The date of the first Dusky Warbler, obtained by Dr. Clarke himself and originally given as October 3rd (*Scot. Nat.*, 1913, p. 271), is now stated as October 1st. We can only suppose that the original date is the right one, as no indication of a correction is given here. The Indian Stonechat is stated to have been exhibited at the B.O.C. by Mr. G. F. Arnold, by whom it was shot, whereas it was shown by Howard Saunders on behalf of Mr. E. C. Arnold. The nest of the Alpine Swift is described as being a saucer-like structure "composed of mud," whereas it is like that of the Common Swift. Among the few quotations in the book that from the *Zoologist*, under Needle-tailed Swift, contains two mistakes, the year and page being given as 1847 and 1496 instead of 1846 and 1492. The introductions of the Little Owl made by Mr. St. Quintin (not Quentin as printed) and Lord Rothschild did not, we believe, have any influence on the subsequent distribution of the bird in England. The date of the Lesser Kestrel in the Scilly Isles, given as February 24th, 1925, should be 1926, but another was seen in May, 1925. Of the Osprey it is said that a pair may have survived until 1926 and that, if rumour is to be relied on, a pair nested in the Highlands in 1916. The Great Bustard is said to remain some time unable to fly when moulting, but we believe this to be a fiction which might well have been expunged from this edition. The occurrence of Bartram's Sandpiper in Scilly in September, 1922, the omission of which from the *Practical Handbook* was pointed out in *British Birds*, XVII., p. 259, has escaped Dr. Clarke's notice. The nesting of the Greenshank in the lowlands in 1925, and perhaps also in 1924 (*Scot. Nat.*, 1925, p. 107) is not referred to. In the Appendix a record of the Continental Blue Tit is referred to as the second British occurrence, whereas two others are already given in the text of the work.

Enough has been indicated to show that the work contains many errors, which is a pity as most could have been avoided by more careful proof reading. As a consequence, this edition cannot be pronounced reliable and owing to the lack of reasons for opinions expressed it cannot be accepted as authoritative. The advice given in the preface that trinomials should be retained for birds which were so described but need not be used in other cases is a very unsound doctrine and shows a lack of perception of the nature of the system. H. F. W.

Birds of the Ocean. By W. B. Alexander. Pp. xxiv., 428, 140 illustrations. 1928 (Putnam). 25s. net.

The perusal of many bird books of the present day leaves the reviewer in great doubt as to whether there can be any object in their publication, beyond the satisfaction of the author. In this case, however, we have a book written with a definite object which certainly fills a very decided gap. It is handy and compact, profusely illustrated with photographs and diagrammatic sketches by the author and arranged on a plan which should greatly simplify the identification of any of the birds which are likely to occur during a voyage in any part of the world.

In order to keep the book within reasonable compass it has been necessary to compress the paragraphs on distribution very strictly. Even such a local species as the Caspian Tern is said to breed "in various parts of N. America, Europe and Central and Southern Asia (*H. c. caspia*)". As the Common Tern is described as nesting "across Europe and Asia from the British Isles to Mongolia (*S. h. hirundo*)," it would have been better to qualify the former statement by the words "very locally."

On the whole, the distribution has been very carefully worked out, though there are occasional slips. Ross's Gull is said to breed "in Western Greenland, Spitsbergen and Northern Siberia." The only known breeding place is in the Kolyma Delta. The Great Skua is said to breed in Labrador and Greenland, but the evidence is far from conclusive, and Kumlien's accounts of the nesting habits of this bird and the Pomatorhine Skua are contrary to all experience on the part of other ornithologists, and require confirmation.

In his treatment of the Yellow-legged Herring-Gull, Mr. Alexander follows Dr. Dwight, but, like him, omits all mention of the birds which breed along the coast of Portugal and northern Spain. The Glaucous Gull nests in large numbers on Bear Island and also off the North Russian coast, while on the American side it breeds south to Newfoundland as well as in the localities mentioned.

The diagrammatic sketches of birds on the wing are extremely useful, as the wing pattern is in many cases a valuable field character, too much neglected in our handbooks. Our only regret is that these sketches are not more numerous.

The derivation of Malle-muck as given on p. 5 is quite erroneous; the true meaning "mad fly" is obscure, but any one who has seen the hundreds of white specks sailing apparently aimlessly to and fro before the face of some vast cliff, will be struck, as were the old Scandinavian and Dutch sailors, by their resemblance to a swarm of dancing gnats.

We can heartily commend this little book to all who are interested in bird life and have the prospect of a long sea voyage before them.

F. C. R. JOURDAIN.