



REVIEWS

The British Bird Book. Edited by F. B. Kirkman, B.A.
Illustrated in colour and monochrome. 4to. Vol. I.,
pp. xx + 156. (T. C. & E. C. Jack.) 10s. 6d. net.

THE principal object of this work, which is to be issued in twelve "sections," is to "bring together from every source, foreign and native, all the available information of any importance concerning the habits of British birds." Various writers are employed in this task, and each is solely responsible for the work under his signature—consequently we have varied styles of treatment and, more important, a varying quality of discrimination.

The plan of the work is to give for each species what are here termed "Preliminary classified notes," which provide a brief description of the bird and short accounts of its distribution, migration, nest and eggs, food and song-period. A family having been dealt with thus in brief, a full account is given in one chapter of the habits of all its members. Great advantages are claimed for this plan, but although we approve of the idea of the "classified notes," which are much in the style of the volumes in *Allen's Naturalists' Library*, the discussion of the habits of a number of species together is a plan which must surely fail. However good the promised index may be, it will always be necessary to read through many pages in order to learn what are the habits of any one species. In this section, for example, seventy-three pages are devoted in one long chapter without a break to the "Finches," and we note, as an example, that the Crossbill is referred to in the first page and in the last, as well as in many in between.

The "classified" notes, for which Messrs. Kirkman, W. P. Pycraft, A. L. Thomson and the Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain are responsible, seem to be well and carefully done so far as they go, but the information is not so detailed as, for instance, in so compressed a work as *Saunders' Manual*. The descriptions seem to us too meagre and general to enable anyone who did not know the bird to identify it satisfactorily, while the accounts of distribution are often inadequate, as, for example, in the Twite, whose distribution is local and requires detailed treatment, but is here described in too general a way; and, incidentally, the bird is said to be absent from the east of England. The descriptions of the nests and eggs are, however, much more thoroughly done.

As to nomenclature, the Editor does not seem to have grasped the significance of the use of trinomials. It is stated that "the use of trinomials has been avoided except in the rare cases where two races of the same species occur in this country." Yet the Jay and the Goldfinch are given only two names in the headings, although it is *stated* that immigrants from the Continent occur; the distinct Scottish Crossbill is recognised in the text but is treated with the Common Crossbill under the name of *Loxia curvirostra*, L.; in the case of the Bullfinch, although the typical form has fairly frequently occurred and the British race is recognised in the text, the bird is named in the heading *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (L.), while, on the other hand, the Redpolls are treated trinomially. This is inconsistent as well as inaccurate, for if the local races are recognised, then why put them under names which belong to the typical races? It should now be obvious that it is of the utmost importance to recognise the differences between some of our breeding-birds and those of the same species which breed on the Continent, and if we are to advance, it behoves the authors of works dealing with the birds of these islands to emphasize this point and to treat of these races separately under trinomials.

Turning again to the main feature of the book—the accounts of the habits—we have first some pleasing essays on the Crow family by the Editor, who has had the wisdom to depart somewhat from his own plan and to treat of the Raven and the Chough separately and the other species in pairs! The bulk of this "section" is, however, devoted to the "Finches" by Mr. Edmund Selous, whose seventy-three pages are more in the style of a diffuse and extravagantly worded magazine-article than a serious work, and further criticism of them is, we think, unneedful.

The illustrations in black are mostly from useful photographs showing the structure and position of nests. The coloured illustrations by various artists are for the most part pleasing and fairly accurate.

H. F. W.