

REVIEWS.

Birds in Britain To-day. By Geoffrey C. S. Ingram and H. Morrey Salmon. (Ivor Nicholson). Illustrated. 12s. 6d. net.

THE authors of this book are to be congratulated on having produced a sound piece of work. All the breeding birds and usual visitors and migrants on the British list are mentioned in the systematic order adopted in the *Practical Handbook*, arranged in chapters. Brief notes of the habits of many are made and a short account of their status

and distribution is given. A good deal of this is based on personal observation and for this reason the book should be studied by ornithologists. Perhaps the most valuable parts are those concerning such birds as the Raven and Chough, which the authors know well in Wales, the first-hand accounts of the status of the scarcer or more irregularly distributed birds in Wales, and the accounts of habits of certain birds, such as Petrels, Nightjar, some of the Hawks, which they have watched to good purpose, and diving of Ducks, Coot and other birds.

The photographs illustrating the book are numerous and excellent, and we especially admire those, such as the pictures of the Kite, Chough, Nightjar, Redshank, Ducks, Shearwaters at sea and others, which give a good idea of the birds and their natural haunts, and are much more interesting than the close-up portrait of the bird at the nest, which has been so much overdone. The flashlight photographs of the Storm-Petrel and Manx Shearwaters gathered outside their burrows in a natural way are also novel and interesting.

Although the book, as a whole, is so sound, this is not to say that we can agree with everything the authors write, and sometimes they appear to be arguing on too limited data. A good deal is said about the prolonged period of adolescence (in several cases put down at two to three years) of certain waders. It is well known, of course, that there are a good many non-breeding waders and that in several species the first summer plumage is distinct from the adult, but, except for the Stilt, we know of no British wader which can be distinguished in plumage from the adult after its moult, when just over a year old. Moreover, because some individuals of a species do not breed in their first year, this is no proof that all do not. Terns have been shown to breed sometimes in first summer plumage and some Hawks perpetually breed in juvenile plumage.

Another point we might mention is the authors' contention, on a very slight basis, that the Scandinavian Lesser Black-backed Gull is a winter visitor and not a passage migrant. We think the records show that it is both, and we do not agree that it is unlikely to be a passage-migrant by its winter distribution, as suggested. The bulk, of course, keep to the east, but certainly a fair number pass down the west coast of France and north-west Spain, where we have ourselves seen it in September.

At the end of the book we have a full list of birds amended and brought up-to-date from the *Practical Handbook*. In this we may note a slip in spelling—*Phylloscopus inornatus* appearing as *inoratus*, and it is a pity that the Continental Song-Thrush was called *planiceps* before it could be corrected, while the American Black-billed Cuckoo has been omitted.

We can conclude by thanking the authors for a very useful and attractive book from which "padding" is conspicuously absent.

LOCAL REPORTS.

The London Naturalist, 1933. (London Nat. Hist. Soc.). 5s.

As has been usual in recent years this annual contains much of value to ornithologists and is especially interesting to those who live near London. The report on birds of the area for 1933 contains a number of interesting items, and among these we note occurrences of the scarcer ducks such as Pintail, Scaup, Long-tailed and Common Scoter at various reservoirs. Perhaps the most notable event for the year, not already recorded in our pages, was the occurrence of a number of unusual waders at the Barn Elms Reservoirs, and especially the King George V. Reservoir, which was practically emptied during the autumn and winter. Amongst these visitors were Grey Plover, Ruff, Sanderling, Knot, Curlew-Sandpiper, Little Stint, Greenshank, Grey Phalarope, Bar-tailed Godwit and Whimbrel. A summary of the observations made on certain species (Corn-Bunting, Yellow Wagtail, Reed-Warbler, Whinchat, Stonechat and Red-legged Partridge), selected for special study of their range and status, is of considerable value.

Besides the report this number contains a very useful article on "Gulls in the London Area", by E. C. Rowberry, in which he summarizes their history as London birds from the time they first came, in the great frosts of 1887-8, 1892-3 and 1894-5, and gives details of the status and approximate numbers of each species in recent years. Mr. Rowberry also has a little to say about their roosting and feeding habits, and these are aspects which would bear more observation.

A further article of special historical interest is that by Dr. N. F. Ticehurst on "The marks used by swan-owners of London and Middlesex". Dr. Ticehurst considers that our Mute Swans are descended, at any rate in part, from an indigenous race in East Anglia and Lincolnshire, and he thinks it likely that the bird was also indigenous in the Thames Valley judging by the enormous numbers of the semi-domestic birds recorded by writers in the fifteenth century. The earliest record of Swan keeping in the Thames is dated 1230.

Report of the Oxford Ornithological Society on the Birds of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, 1933.

This Report, edited by Mr. B. W. Tucker, assisted by Mr. W. B. Alexander, contains many valuable observations from these three counties. A pair of Blue-headed Wagtails, seen on Port Meadow from May 11th to 26th, is interesting. There is a curious record of a black looking Woodpecker, but evidently not *Dryocopus martius*, seen on Sunningdale Golf Course. This is quite properly enclosed within square brackets as indeterminate. A Berkshire heronry, hitherto overlooked, has existed for about ten years at Buckland. This appears to have originated from Hinton Waldrist when the trees there were felled. Grey Lag-Geese were definitely identified for the first time both in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Several Brent Geese, all of the dark-breasted form *Branta b. bernicla*, were shot in Oxfordshire and one was seen at Reading Sewage Farm. Among waders seen at the latter well-known locality may be mentioned—Turnstone, Ruff, Sanderling, a Red-necked Phalarope (September 25th) and Black-tailed Godwits. A Little Gull was also seen here on September 25th. Port Meadow (Oxford) was visited on May 3rd by Black, Common, Little and Sandwich Terns.

Results of special investigations (Starling Roosts, Barn-Owls, Red-shanks, Great Crested Grebes), and ringing records, are also contained in this Report, which maintains the high standard set in previous years.

Report on the Birds of Wiltshire for 1933.

Many of the observations in this Report are much too vague to have any value. There are also several surprising records, which cannot be accepted until evidence of their accuracy is forthcoming. For instance Mealy Redpolls are stated to have been seen in January, but no details whatever are given as to their identification. Great Grey Shrikes were reported in *July*. Bitterns are recorded as "undoubtedly breeding" on the Salisbury Avon, "birds being seen all the year for the last three years in one particular place". No dates or details of the observation are given. Spotted Crakes were also seen throughout the summer from time to time at Britford. All these interesting happenings in Wiltshire were well worth enquiring into minutely, and publication of such insufficiently documented records is really valueless.

Several new localities are given for the Dipper, which appears to be increasing as a breeding bird. The Peregrine Falcon again reared a brood on Salisbury Cathedral. A Brent Goose appeared on Clarendon Lake (December 17th). The Clarendon heronry is reported as deserted in 1933.

Report of the Sanctuary Club, 1932, 1933, 1934.

This Report concerns a small sanctuary at Cambridge. It comprises only two acres of land and two acres of water and owners of much larger reserves would be envious of the number of birds occupying it. The most interesting part of the Report is the account of the number of nests of Blackbirds, Thrushes and Moorhens. Although the observations made were not sufficiently prolonged and the number of pairs concerned could not be positively ascertained, fair evidence is given to show that 13 pairs of Blackbirds made 35 nests and laid over 100 eggs, yet reared only 24 young to the stage of flying. Song-Thrushes were equal in number and built 39 nests, but reared only 27 young. The birds appeared to keep to definite small nesting areas notwithstanding loss of eggs and broods. The Moorhens increased from two to nine pairs as a result of an extra abundance of water. Further and closer studies on these lines would be valuable, especially if the difficulty of identifying individual pairs could be overcome.