

## REVIEWS.

*Birds in Colour.* By Walter Higham. (Collins, 1945). Price 25s.

THIS book comes as something of a shock to those who are acquainted with the excellence of the colour rendering in Mr. Higham's cinematograph films. The gap between colour transparencies and reproductions on paper is still great in spite of the extravagant claims made by publishers. One can state at once that if any ornithologist entertains the idea of using colour photograph reproductions for illustrating precisely colour values in such biological problems as are concerned with them, he will at the moment be doomed to disappointment. As an example, the reviewer turned to the photograph of a Tawny Owl to discover whether it depicted a bird in the brown or in the rufous phase. It is quite impossible to tell.

However, on more general grounds than this the colour plates still fail to achieve a standard that one might reasonably require. Blues usually appear far too vivid (the Kingfisher pictures are quite painful to regard) and greens are exceptionally tricky, often erring on the yellow side and turning brownish very abruptly as they pale. It is also noticeable how the intensity of the light affects the colours: this is seen in the two photographs of the Robin on the same plate and in the four pictures of Merlins. In the latter case the difference in colour between the male and female is almost too arresting: only when one remarks that in the latter the foreground as well as the bird is redder, can allowance be made for the range of error in the technique.

Most of these criticisms can hardly be levelled at the author. No doubt it is the hope of the publishers to sell the book mainly by its illustrations, and a large public is usually attracted by a new venture, even if it has not yet mastered its medium.

However this may be, one may hope that some buyers at least will be attracted by the frank and simple writing and refreshing enthusiasm of the author as he tells about his first interest in birds and the development of his passion for observing and photographing them. The latter part of the text contains a list of the commoner species of British Birds with condensed descriptions of plumage and habits arranged under headings. This telescoped version of *The Handbook* may be useful to people who wish to avoid the complexity of the original work.

H. N. SOUTHERN.

*A Guide to Bird-Watching.* By Joseph J. Hickey. (Oxford University Press). Price 16s.

THIS is without doubt one of the very best and most original books—in many ways certainly the best—which have appeared on the subject of bird-watching. Being written for American observers it is naturally primarily concerned with American birds and American conditions, but since the basic methods of ornithological field-work are the same everywhere it can be read with profit and pleasure by any observer of birds on this side of the Atlantic. Even the points of difference between conditions here and in the United States are often instructive. For example, the extraordinary passage of birds-of-prey to be observed in certain parts of the States, to which we in this country have nothing really parallel, emphasizes one of the differences as regards migration phenomena between a group of islands situated, as ours are, as outliers of a Continent and a great continental land mass like North America with vast territories in high latitudes.

The book is written in a pleasantly informal style, which successfully avoids the pitfall of cheap "chattiness," and the author constantly illustrates his points by anecdotes and descriptions of the experiences of field observers. Accounts of different types of field study are illustrated by tables freely interspersed in the text, based on the actual observations of the author and the published results of many other workers. Though the sources of information in these tables are duly recorded, references to observations quoted in the text are deliberately excluded for reasons which the author gives in his preface. Nevertheless we think an appendix giving such references would be welcome to many.

The opening chapters on identification, equipment, note-taking and so forth are mainly for beginners. The others, to quote the author's own words, "deal with bird study in progressively increasing detail and with a continuous development of ideas." Migration and homing experiments, ecological and distributional studies, census work, life-history and other studies on particular species are all covered, and an appendix gives a remarkably comprehensive list of questions meriting attention in life-history studies, which should be very suggestive and helpful to less experienced observers. Other useful appendices provide an annotated list of bird books dealing with field subjects and a list of bird clubs in Canada and the U.S.A. An original feature is a section on bird tracks.

We have very few specific criticisms of this excellent book. It might, however, be noted that the implication that "abmigrating" ducks are always males (p. 34) is mistaken, and the statement that the experiments of Lack and Lockley (of whom only the latter is mentioned) on the homing of Manx Shearwaters transported to the Continent *proved* that the birds "could return to their Welsh island *on a straight line*" (italics ours) is hardly a sound presentation of the case, though the results of the releases in Switzerland may fairly be said to favour this conclusion.

If we have a more general criticism it is that as regards certain fields of enquiry the author seems at times almost *over-optimistic* as to what can be achieved by comparatively untrained amateur observers, with or without the general direction of bird clubs and similar bodies, great though the possibilities undoubtedly are. Experience in this country in recent years has shown both the potentialities and the weaknesses of such work. But few things could be more effective than Mr. Hickey's book itself in assisting such amateurs to graduate from the level of untrained and rather superficial observation to something more original and constructive. It is eminently practical in its treatment and few bird-watchers in any country could read it without being made aware of new problems and new angles of approach to old ones or without benefiting from its suggestions and advice. It deserves the widest circulation amongst field ornithologists, not only in America but outside.

*How to Study Birds.* By Stuart Smith. (Collins, 1945). Price 8s. 6d. net.

DR. STUART Smith's book deals broadly speaking with much the same subject as Mr. Hickey's, but the approach is quite different, and it is in some ways interesting to compare the two. While the American book is expressly a practical "guide to bird-watching," Dr. Smith's method is to give the reader a general picture of the results of modern biological studies of birds, and so to arouse interest in profitable lines of enquiry rather than to provide detailed guidance as to methods. The result is a stimulating and interesting book, which we can commend to amateur bird watchers, though it also lays itself open to some criticism in certain respects.

The need to avoid overburdening a popular text with bibliographical references is met by the method adopted by Lack in *The Life of the Robin* of giving in an appendix references under page numbers to the papers or other publications on which statements are based. Even names are avoided in the text, and indeed the treatment is so resolutely impersonal that even the experimental study of the stimulus to migration is mentioned without Rowan and territory without Howard, who figures merely as "one famous ornithologist," while Mrs. Nice, in connexion with her famous Song-Sparrow studies, is only permitted a similarly anonymous appearance as "an American worker." We feel this is applying a sound general principle too rigidly and that some reference by name to well-known workers associated with progress in particular fields enhances the vitality and general appeal of a popular account of scientific data; but this is no doubt to some extent a matter of individual taste.

As regards the actual presentation, the course adopted in Part I is to take the reader through a bird's year, discussing migration, territory, courtship, nesting, the rearing of young, winter behaviour and so on in the light of modern biological knowledge and concepts. The second part deals with a few selected

topics, beginning with bird vision and flight, followed by very brief chapters on population problems, equipment, and the bird mind. The two chapters on vision are an interesting and welcome presentation of facts not easily accessible to ornithologists in non-technical form, and this last point no doubt provides the main reason and justification for treating the subject so much more fully than some others.

It would certainly be rather easy to criticize the balance between the relative amount of space devoted to some of the subjects, but in a small book of under 200 pages the treatment is bound to be rather highly selective, and a good deal must necessarily depend on the writer's special interests. But, from a slightly different angle it might be said that, at least in the first section, the author has if anything tried to cover almost too much and has not invariably mastered the diverse aspects of his subject as completely as is desirable for a fully satisfactory presentation even at the popular level. We note a certain tendency to devote too much attention to relatively recent papers and communications in the most accessible journals or published works, although these are not always the most important available on the subject concerned, and the book is also not entirely free from mis-statements and inaccuracies which a more careful checking should have eliminated. In the latter category are the use of "oviduct" for "ovary" on p. 66, of "interocular" for "intra-ocular" on p. 141, of "radii" for "rami" on pp. 145 and 146, and the mis-spelling of several names in the references.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the opening chapter, dealing largely with the complex and difficult subject of migration, is one of the less successful, and it displays rather conspicuously the defects just mentioned. The account of Southern's studies on the northward migration of the Willow-Warbler and other species in spring reads as though the figures arrived at represented the average rate of travel of individual birds, whereas the original papers make clear that what is being studied is the *rate of spread of the species*, by no means the same thing. Rowan's suggestion that the more advanced development of the gonads of Starlings from London roosts as compared with birds from roosts in the country is due to the effect of disturbance by traffic is quoted without regard to the fact that the work of Bullough leaves very little doubt that the real explanation is that the London birds are mainly British residents and those using the large rural roosts mainly immigrants from the Continent, in which the inherent rhythm of sexual development is behind that of British birds. Observations on migration in the African desert during the recent war no doubt amplified previous findings in a welcome manner, but the general fact of such migration was clearly established by Moreau (*Ibis*, 1927, p. 443) years before.

There are some other statements here and there with which we must disagree. For instance the positive (and even italicized) assertion that a bird which has gone through an "injury-feigning" display will never return and repeat the performance, although it has published authority, is simply not true for a number of species.

Nevertheless, the fact that the book cannot altogether escape some necessary criticism should not affect its recognition as in general a sound and interesting presentation of a wide range of biological facts and conclusions about birds in readable and straightforward language for amateur observers. It should certainly achieve its avowed object of bringing home to such readers that field ornithology is something much more than the uncritical pursuit of rarities, and it deserves a second edition, in which it should not be difficult to rectify the main weaknesses of the first.

*Modern Bird Study.* By Ludlow Griscom. (Harvard University Press, 1945. London: Oxford University Press). Price 14s.

THE author of *Modern Bird Study* is a distinguished authority on bird systematics and distribution, who is also one of the most expert field ornithologists in the United States. The present work, however, is not primarily a field book, and indeed the precise audience for whom it is intended is not so

obvious as in the two just noticed. The chapters on distribution and classification assume, as the author states in his preface, some previous knowledge of birds and of North American birds in particular, but the earlier ones, which, it is stated, "will appeal to any layman with a genuine interest in birds" are evidently directed more to this class of reader than to ornithologists, though it is not to be supposed that the latter will not find much of considerable interest in them.

In the preface reasons are given for omitting "anatomy, physiology, the contributions of bird banding, life-history studies, modern experimental work in behaviour and homing instincts, and other equally important phases of ornithology," and in this the author is quite within his rights, some selection of topics being, indeed, quite necessary; but at least one American reviewer has criticized the title of the book on the ground that the subjects excluded comprise fields in which some of the most important modern advances have been made. The criticism is one with which we cannot but agree, but we need not take the title too seriously; it is less important than the contents.

Turning to the latter, it must be said that, apart from a certain unevenness of treatment already noted, the several chapters are not all of equal merit. Those on migration provide an instructive short presentation of the subject, which, because of the rather different emphasis on some aspects, such as migration in the tropics and—naturally—in North America, may be commended to British readers as giving in some ways a picture from a rather different angle from that to which they are generally accustomed. Incidentally, we note with interest that the migratory behaviour of the American Golden Plover, so often quoted as the classical example of alternative routes in spring and autumn, has undergone some modification in recent years.

The chapter on "Capacity and intelligence in birds" is much less successful, and it cannot in honesty be said to be a very satisfactory presentation of "modern bird study" in this field. The most valuable section is that on geographical distribution, in which the author is dealing with one of his own chosen fields of research. This is most informative and provides information not readily available in any other non-specialist work on birds. The chapter on classification and the species also affords at least an introduction to some modern concepts of which most ornithologists are insufficiently, if at all, aware. But we must record a protest against the description of the cross between the Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers as showing inheritance "of the type popularly called Mendelian," as though inheritance in general were not "Mendelian" too!