

BOOK REVIEWS.

The Birds of the British Isles. By D. A. Bannerman and G. E. Lodge. (Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1954). Vol. 3. 45s.

This third volume completes the Passerines, covering the warblers, thrushes, chats, nightingales, Robin etc., wrens and swallows in the same generous manner as the earlier species.

Dr. Bannerman has an unusual gift for re-examination of evidence and some interesting re-assessments emerge. The winter-quarters of Savi's Warbler, he considers, remain to be established; the Grasshopper Warbler winters S.E. from Europe, and not in N.W. Africa as *The Handbook* gives it; of the Aquatic he says we have no idea where this warbler passes the winter months; and he revises *The Handbook's* winter distribution of Marsh Warbler. His foreign breeding distribution is not always quite up to date, for example, Arctic Warbler (now breeds Sweden), Olivaceous Warbler (has reached N. Jugoslavia), Red-flanked Bluetail (now in Finland in summer); but in other respects it is evident that the author has been at pains to incorporate new material right up to the time of going to press, and for detailed, up-to-date information on most aspects it is unlikely that this work will be equalled for a long time to come.

In rejecting the Cambridge breeding record of Moustached Warbler, Dr. Bannerman agrees with Col. Meinertzhagen that the only certain way of distinguishing the bird from Sedge Warbler is by the first primary. If this is in fact the case, Dr. Bannerman's description of the Moustached Warbler seems somewhat misleading. The strongly sedentary nature of Cetti's Warbler throughout its range is stressed, showing up the 3 British records as remarkable; these records came from Sussex but in no case was the bird apparently seen alive by a reliable ornithologist. They occurred during a period in the earlier part of this century when an unprecedented and never repeated succession of rarities was reported from the Hastings/Romney Marsh area, most of them coming to light in the hands of a taxidermist.

Both illustrations and text are fine works of art, but for accuracy of detail and reflection of character the text is undoubtedly superior. Information new to English literature is contained in accounts of Russian, especially Siberian, species; and in this connection we are very glad to have heard that Madame Koslova's correspondence with Dr. Bannerman has recently been resumed, to the undoubted benefit of future volumes. These are eagerly awaited.

Dr. Bannerman has asked us to draw attention to an error regarding Melodious Warbler, which requires correction. In the account of this species its status is correctly given, but in a reference to the bird in the account dealing with Icterine Warbler, on page 102, line 9, there appears "the Melodious Warbler—a bird that has been proved to breed in Britain." It should read "that has never been proved to breed in Britain." P.A.D.H.

Bird Pageant. By A. W. P. Robertson (The Batchworth Press, London, 1954) pp. 192. 21s.

This record of personal observation of East Anglian breeding birds is a valuable source of information for the student of bird behaviour. Commander Robertson has chosen for his field studies districts other than the well-known sanctuaries, except for his visits to Havergate. Habitat is, as he says, the basis of his book, but the impression left with the reader is one of intimate details of breeding biology recorded by one of our most observant and ardent field-workers. Six chapters deal with the Suffolk coast and marshes, Breckland heaths and woods, farmland and meres and pools. The breeding birds of each habitat are discussed, much of the information gained from observation in a hide. Where all is full of interest it is difficult to choose items for special comment but the following are particularly noteworthy: the Avocet at its nest, the hen Montagu's Harrier that reared a brood after the disappearance of her mate, the change of habitat of the Yellow Wagtail from water-meadows to heather, the coming of Curlews to nest regularly on heather-bracken heathland, the notes of the Crossbill, its feeding-habits, and those of the Wryneck,

a case of Corn Bunting's polyandry, a particularly close study of the Moorhen. Courtship display has received attention, that of Wheatear, Stone Curlew and Long-tailed Tit, for example, and distraction display of Lapwing, Willow Warbler (to a tractor!) and Little Grebe. All this is written in a charming descriptive style that makes the book a pleasure to read and it is enlivened by many happy touches, such as the comparison of an Oystercatcher with a dignified butler or the pair of Sheld Ducks with a hundred ducklings that had reduced baby-sitting to a fine art.

To the 44 excellent photographs the approximate scale of the bird is appended, a scheme that all bird-photographers might follow with advantage.

A.W.B.

The Birds of Farleigh and District. By Hubert E. Pounds. (Privately published, 1952, and distributed by Witherby, London). pp. 90. 8s. 6d.

THIS is a useful record of the birds of the N.E. corner of Surrey, chiefly Downland, and lying between Croydon, Caterham and the county border. It has been carefully compiled over a period of nearly 30 years, but with records, where available, extending back to the 19th century. The accounts average about 2 species per page; status is briefly indicated, the occurrences of the less usual birds are detailed, while movements of commoner species are outlined, local migration dates are given, and unusual nesting particulars noted.

Increases are evident especially in formerly "keepered" species such as Carrion Crow, Magpie, Jay and Sparrow Hawk. Birds which no longer breed in the area include Stonechat, Whinchat and Corncrake, while the following in particular have diminished:—Nightingale, Swallow, Lapwing, Red-backed Shrike, House Martin, Wryneck, Swift and Nightjar. In the case of the Nightjar, Mr. Pounds considers that food supply must be taken into account to explain its reduction in numbers. In this connection it may be recalled that in other areas where these species, particularly the last five listed, have been studied over a period of years, there are thought to have been decreases. Several of the birds are late arrivals, which suggests some dependence on summer insects, and these in turn could perhaps be affected by the slight climatic changes which are taking place. It would be interesting to know whether entomologists have found a decrease in high-flying insects in recent years, while the ornithological aspects might well repay further attention by observers and the editors of local reports, especially in those parts of the country where comparisons can be made with past years.

P.A.D.H.

Brown's Coppice. A Survey by the Natural History Society of King Edward VI Grammar School, Camp Hill, Birmingham. 5s.

THE Natural History Society of King Edward's School, Camp Hill, has in 18 months of intensive work achieved outstanding success in a field survey. The area chosen was a site of 130 acres, from 420 to 475 feet above sea level at the edge of a built-up area of S.E. Birmingham, near Solihull. It is called Brown's Coppice after the principal piece of woodland. The ecology of the area is discussed and maps give the various habitats: woodland (mainly oak-birch), bog, pasture, arable, hedgerows, waste, water, and houses and gardens, which occupy $\frac{1}{3}$ th of the whole. A brook crosses the area and there is a pond. There are chapters on geography, local history and agriculture, but the main part of the work is devoted to natural history in detail: botany (fairly fully), mycology, bacteriology, mammals and amphibians, insects and other invertebrates, and birds, with the last of which we are here concerned and which were the first attraction when the field survey was suggested. Birds of 85 species have been recorded in the survey area and three more just outside it. A census was taken three times: December 31st, 60 birds of 15 species; May 11th, 115 of 23 species; September 13th, 105 of 22 species—in an area of 6 acres. Despite nest destruction by irresponsible local youths some 36 species breed regularly. The territories of four pairs of Tree Pipits and of two pairs

of Grasshopper Warblers were mapped in two seasons; there is a graph of the varying numbers of Woodpigeons and a song chart. Actual numbers of breeding birds were determined: e.g. (to make an arbitrary choice) 8 pairs of Jackdaws, 6 of Jays, 20 of Blue Tits, 6 of Great Tits, 3 of Chiffchaffs, 30 of Willow Warblers, 4 of Mistle Thrushes, 5 or 6 of Song Thrushes, 40 of Blackbirds, 20 of Robins, 15 of Wrens, 2 of Great Spotted Woodpeckers. There are notes of display of Coal Tit and Goldfinch, courtship-feeding by Willow Warbler, Robin and Goldfinch, and threat-display by Tree Sparrow. Casual arrivals of Pied Flycatcher (twice), Hawfinch, Buzzard and Red-legged Partridge are recorded.

This successful publication makes one realise how much, especially with insects and other invertebrates, there is still to do, even in so restricted an area. We must hope that the school has a long-term plan to continue this survey for years to come. That this admirably organised survey can achieve so much in 18 months certainly justifies further efforts and will stimulate all future natural historians of the school.

A.W.B.