

Reviews

A Field Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa. By O. P. M. Prozesky. Collins, London, 1970. 350 pages; 40 plates, 32 in colour. £2.50.
Roberts Birds of South Africa. By G. R. McLachlan and R. Liversidge. Published for the Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund by the Central News Agency, Cape Town, 1970. 643 pages; 64 plates, 56 in colour; many distribution maps. R6.75.

Almost simultaneously, two important books on the avifauna of Southern Africa have appeared. One is a field guide more or less following the lines of the system developed by Dr Roger Tory Peterson; the other is the third edition of a much used book which, since its first publication in June 1940, has gone through no fewer than 17 impressions. The latter has already stimulated Southern African ornithology to a considerable extent and has helped to bring it to high standards; the former fills the niche of a handy pocket book, aiming to be 'as authoritative and as complete as any of the books published on birds of Southern Africa'. This will be a hard task to achieve, for there are at present several other fine and helpful volumes on the birds of that part of Africa, such as the two popular books by Dr G. Broekhuysen (*The Birds Around Us*, 1966, and *Field-Guide to the Birds of the South African Sea-Shore*, 1969), the monographs by C. J. Skead and others (*Canaries, Seedeaters and Buntings*, 1960, and *Sunbirds, Sugarbirds, White-eyes and the Spotted Creeper*, 1967), and P. A. Clancey's handbook on *The Birds of Natal and Zululand* (1964), besides that simple, but remarkably good book by E. Leonard Gill, *A First Guide to South African Birds* (1936), which by 1956 had sold 28,000 copies.

Like the second (1957), this third edition of *Roberts Birds of South Africa* went through the able hands and minds of Dr G. R. McLachlan of Cape Town and R. Liversidge of Kimberley. The contents have not been changed greatly, but the layout has been modernised and the text for each species rearranged under separate headings, which facilitates checking and comparing details. The maps have been printed in the margins and brought up to date. The illustrations on the 56 colour plates are those by Norman C. K. Lighton as they appeared in the first edition: accurate, but reproduced on a small scale and lacking a balanced selection of different plumages. The eight black-and-white plates of flying albatrosses, petrels, birds of prey and waders by J. Perry and K. Hooper are of a high quality. The book covers roughly 875 species occurring south of the Cunene and Zambesi rivers and the southern boundaries of Angola and

Zambia, and will probably remain Southern Africa's standard reference work for a long time to come. Renewal of the colour plates in new editions will become essential, however, not least to eliminate errors which, though mostly minor, affect in places the distinctions between species. It would have been worthwhile, also, to have added a little more about the decline of certain birds, such as the Jackass Penguin which, despite serious threats from recent oil spillage, is still referred to as 'a common resident of the coastal islands'.

May I take this opportunity of mentioning a plumage detail in a widely distributed raptor, which has long intrigued me? The underwings of the Long-crested Hawk Eagle are shown in *Roberts Birds of South Africa* as virtually white. In the new field guide by O. P. M. Prozesky they are described as white, with the ends of the flight feathers distinctly barred, and this is what I have seen both in specimens and in the field. But I have also seen black undersides to the wings of this species, with distinct and extensive white patches formed by the basal halves of the primaries, as illustrated by J. G. Williams in his *Field Guide to the Birds of East and Central Africa* (1963) and depicted in Leslie Brown and Dean Amadon's *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World* (1968). I have tried in vain to find any pattern of geographical, sex or age variation in this obvious difference.

Mr Prozesky's field guide presents a difficulty both for the reviewer and for the ultimate user. Although it is well produced and contains a wealth of information based on the author's personal experience in the field, it is only honest to state that the 40 plates by Dick Findlay are below the standard that must be set for a book like this. One needs merely to compare the Garden Warbler and the Willow Warbler on plate 31, or the Common Sandpiper and other Palearctic waders on plate 15, with current British and European field guides to appreciate this. In describing the 900 or so Southern African species (including numerous northern migrants which mix annually with the indigenous bird-life), Mr Prozesky, a well-known ornithologist at the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria, states that 'only half the number could be illustrated'. This means that the text and illustrations cover about 410 of the species recognisable in the field, leaving an equal number mentioned in the text only under a heading 'Allied species' or merely referred to by name as 'rarer species'. This system, which was also followed by Williams in his field guide referred to above, works out rather unsatisfactorily, as I know from personal experience in East Africa. Apart from identification there are also remarks on general habits, food, habitat, voice and distribution, and, where appropriate, names are given in Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho as well as English.

Nevertheless, Mr Prozesky and Mr Findlay have produced an economical and convenient introduction to the rich and colourful avifauna of the East and South African savannah, high veld and arid regions, the montane and tropical riverine forests and the wonderful Cape area. Rocco Knobel, director of the South African National Parks, has written a fine foreword for this guide to the birds of his enormous country, where both the destruction and the conservation of nature have been on such a grand scale.

K. H. VOOUS

Die Graugans. By Karel Hudec and Jan Rooth. Number 429 in the series *Die Neue Brehm-Bücherei*, A. Ziemsen Verlag, Wittenberg Lutherstadt, East Germany, 1970. 148 pages; one colour plate; 87 black-and-white photographs; 27 maps and drawings. DM 13.00.

The Czech and Dutch authors of this monograph have produced an excellent, methodical review of our present knowledge of the Grey Lag Goose. Systematics, scientific and popular names precede descriptions of the nominate race and the eastern *Anser anser rubrirostris*, whose exact distributions are difficult to define because of the many intermediates in central and perhaps northern Europe. A colour plate by D. Bárta illustrates the bills of the two races and of various intermediate forms present in a mixed population, as observed in the Czechoslovak reserve of Lednice in June 1966. The status of the breeding and wintering populations in the countries of Eurasia and the movements during migration are discussed with data from numerous sources. All the recorded food components, mentioning which parts of the plants are taken and when, are shown in an interesting table. Voice and behaviour also receive ample attention. Accounts of breeding biology and the development of the young are followed by chapters on mortality, longevity, diseases and enemies. Agricultural damage appears to be negligible, and in many instances grazing seems merely to have the effect of clearing fields of weeds: grazing tests in wheat-fields in May made no significant difference to crop results. An extensive list of references concludes this very useful book which also contains a great number of good photographs, characteristic drawings and interesting maps.

E. CARP

Norges Fugler. By Svein Haftorn. Scandinavian University Books, Oslo, 1971. Norwegian text. 873 pages; 48 black-and-white photographs; numerous maps. Norwegian Kr160.

The last work dealing with the birds of Norway—*Håndbok over Norges Fugler* by H. L. Lövenskiöld—was published in 1947. To regard this useful volume as out of date is no reflection on its author. Apart

from additions to the Norwegian list, the years between have seen changes, often striking, in the status and distribution of many species. Ornithologists, therefore, can hardly have been surprised to find the first printing of Professor Haftorn's eagerly-awaited manual sold out in a matter of days. The new work is more comprehensive than its predecessor, three or four pages of double-columned text—the equivalent of nine in an English octavo format—often being devoted to one species. Following modern practice, the text is conveniently divided under appropriate headings. The opening paragraphs on plumage and structure amply fulfil their purpose of assisting identification in the field. Brief notes are given of any outstanding varieties, such as the parti-coloured Black Grouse found in the south of the country. As attention is called to hybridisation among ducks and game-birds, and at greater length to interbreeding between Guillemots and Brünnich's Guillemots, mention might well have been made of the very interesting thrush hybrids recorded by Robert Collett (1906, *Forh. Vidensk. Selsk. Christ. 1905*, no. 11). Professor Haftorn has drawn largely on his own wide experience for his excellent renderings of bird calls and songs, and for his equally commendable descriptions of display. Students of breeding biology will find here a wealth of Norwegian data; and in his very full notes on food, he also gives prominence to Norwegian material, such as that assembled by Yngvar Hagen in his outstanding field-work on predators (1952, *Rovfuglene og Viltpleien*).

British readers will perhaps be most interested, however, in the very full paragraphs on distribution in Norway, many of which are so detailed as to amount to histories of the species concerned. In compiling these, the author has clearly appreciated the importance of reassessing the work of earlier Norwegian ornithologists so often ignored by their successors. A small map of Fenno-Scandia showing the normal zone of distribution, together with any isolated nesting records, is provided for nearly every breeding species. Equally informative are the paragraphs on migration with their lists of ringing recoveries. In the very useful systematic list, which includes four recent additions, square brackets indicate that the evidence for the admission of certain rarities cannot be regarded as entirely satisfactory. Records received too late for incorporation in the main text are given in an appendix, and the volume concludes with a glossary of scientific names and a well-compiled index.

When quoting from literature, Professor Haftorn contents himself with adding the author's name and the year of publication. This may suffice in the case of a book, but becomes totally inadequate when the source is a scientific journal. This minor criticism apart, I can unhesitatingly recommend this important book to all who are familiar enough with the Norwegian language to avail themselves of it. This will remain the standard work on the subject for many years to come.

H. M. S. BLAIR