

## Reviews

**The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland.** Prepared by the British Ornithologists' Union. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford, 1971. 333 pages; 69 line-drawings. £3.00.

**A Species List of British and Irish Birds.** Edited by Robert Hudson. B.T.O. Guide 13. British Trust for Ornithology, Tring, 1971. 20p.

As long ago as October 1962, the British Ornithologists' Union decided that its *Check-list of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 1952, should be replaced. Now, some nine years later, the devoted labours of many people have borne fruit in this remarkably useful and handsome volume. The welcome decision to extend the scope of the 1952 list, and in particular to amplify greatly the comments on status and distribution in Britain and Ireland, inevitably meant some delay. A special enquiry was launched in autumn 1964, which drew on the experience of local ornithological bodies, but, after this and other material had been digested, difficulties arose over the questions of sequence and nomenclature. The ensuing controversy need not be detailed here. It ranged widely for some years with many different solutions being proposed. Finally, it was decided to use the sequence in J. L. Peters's *Check-list of Birds of the World* and the nomenclature in C. Vaurie's *The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna*, both modified slightly in the light of more recent work. This inevitably has failed to satisfy many of the protagonists. In particular, the editors of local bird reports had long opposed any changes in the 1952 order until one sequence was accepted internationally for European birds. In January 1971 at their national conference they asked the British Trust for Ornithology to prepare a simplified list of current species of British and Irish birds in the Wetmore order, following the 1952 check-list with no more than minor alterations. This has now been produced with commendable speed as a straightforward numbered list of species with scientific and English names.

The B.O.U. publication is, of course, very much more than a list. Each species is allocated on average some three-quarters of a page, consisting of a summary of world distribution, the distribution of the subspecies relevant to Britain and Ireland, and the status and distribution in both countries. For breeding species very full details are given, together with an estimate of the probable size of the breeding population ranked in orders of abundance. For other species, usually allocated a single line in the 1952 check-list, a full analysis of occurrences is given, with every record detailed for the rarer visitors. These species accounts are based on information up to 1968 or earlier and a

special appendix gives the more interesting occurrences, including breeding records, in 1969 and 1970. A new feature is that the species are divided into three categories depending on whether they have been recorded in the wild state during the last 50 years (category A) or earlier (category B) or are species originally introduced by man which have now established regular feral breeding stocks (category C); there is an appendix listing the few species which, for various reasons, are not yet added to the main list (category D). The result is a storehouse of information on the birds of Britain and Ireland, which will be an essential purchase for every keen ornithologist. It is most attractively produced, well printed and arranged, with felicitous line-drawings by Robert Gillmor to illustrate each family. Although it has suffered somewhat from its over-long gestation, and a few will remain infuriated by the sequence and nomenclature finally adopted, this work sets a new high standard for a national bird list.

STANLEY CRAMP

**Større Danske Fuglelokaliteter [Major Danish Bird Localities]. Part 1. By L. Ferdinand. Dansk Ornithologisk Forening, Copenhagen, 1971. 230 pages; many photographs, maps and sketches; one large-scale folded map in end pocket. Danish Kr. 85.**

This remarkable book consists of a register of ornithologically significant localities surveyed during the 1960's by teams of Danish bird-watchers. A total of 669 localities are listed: considering the greater size and more varied habitat of Great Britain, an equivalent list for this country would probably contain between four and five thousand entries. Each entry provides a map reference, a statement of the size and terrain of the locality, and a summary of its importance; it concludes with an indication of the threats facing the locality, a list of the observers who surveyed it and references to further published information, if any. The scope of the ornithological summaries can best be indicated by a random example, like this from Karlsgårde lake near Varde in Jutland:

Breeding (a fairly well covered locality of some importance for marsh birds). 5-10 pairs Great Crested Grebes, 5-10 pairs Mute Swans, 5 pairs Mallard, 5 pairs Shelduck.

Passage (well covered, of importance for wildfowl). Up to 20 Great Crested Grebes, 50 Little Grebes, 10 Herons, 50 Mute Swans, 50 Whooper Swans, 10 Bewick's Swans, 3,000 Mallard, 50 Pintail, 100 Wigeon, 500 Teal, 100 Tufted Duck, 75 Pochard, 150 Goldeneye, 300 Goosanders.

Information on this scale and in this detail, and with a scientific organisation behind it, puts it in a different category altogether from the agreeable, but sketchy and impressionistic, work of John Gooders in his *Where to Watch Birds* (1967). The coverage as a whole is quite excellent, especially for water birds: in 18 years' birdwatching in Denmark I have never been to an interesting coastal locality which I

could not find well described in the register, and all the breeding localities are listed for 50 species as diverse as Tufted Duck, Grasshopper Warbler, Turnstone and Wryneck.

The underlying purpose of this book is the defence of bird localities under increasing pressure from changing land-use: this volume is to be followed by a second analysing the relationship between bird life and the environment in a systematic way, and the two together will form a corpus of scientific information available to educate the public and, at least, to make planners pause.

Should we do it here? It could form the perfect sequel to capitalise on the energy and enthusiasm generated by the teams of observers in the British Trust for Ornithology's Atlas project, to which in many ways it would be complementary. We have not done anything very like it yet: the Nature Conservancy is said to be producing for eventual publication a review of the major sites of natural history interest in Britain, but it will almost certainly be far less comprehensive than what the Danes have done; the Estuaries Enquiry and some of the work of the Wildfowl Trust has had some of these objectives; county and regional trusts do only what they can on a limited basis. A systematic official national list on the Danish model, apart from its enormous intrinsic interest to thousands of birdwatchers, would arm us with a conservation weapon of outstanding value. By being accessible, comprehensive and co-ordinated it could do for us what this splendid book is designed to do for the Scandinavians, so let us hope someone in authority on this side of the North Sea will give it more than a moment's consideration.

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