

Reviews

A Checklist of the Birds of the World. By Edward S. Gruson. Collins, London, 1976. xii + 212 pages. £3.95.

In 1966, the late David Lack proposed that an international committee should prepare an authorised list of the birds of the world which would be followed by regional publications, so ensuring for non-taxonomists a period of uniformity and stability. This met with a cool response from the taxonomists who argued that the time was not ripe and indeed that it might never be. Only one took up the challenge in part: when Professor K. H. Voous began publication of his list of recent Holarctic bird species (*Ibis*, 115 (1973): 612-638). The need, so clearly seen by Lack, for a modern compact list, still exists, and increasingly attempts have been made to meet it. Four world lists have already appeared in North America (for a full review of the advantages and disadvantages of these, see *Auk*, 92: 818-830). This fifth list is the first to be published in Britain.

The author states clearly that his book is for 'listers and tickers'. He is not a taxonomist and has used standard regional avifaunas where available as his main sources, and followed Peters' *Check-list of Birds of the World* very closely for the sections on families and genera. He has not used the Voous list. Subspecies are not included, nor fossil and extinct species. He states that he has frequently made an arbitrary choice of English common names, in some cases inventing his own. The list includes simple keys to indicate the main avifaunal regions in which each species occurs and the sources he has used. There is also a short selection of notes indicating the decisions he has made in some of the difficult cases, a brief bibliography, and indexes of genera names and English group names.

Inevitably, every taxonomist will criticise some aspects of this, and indeed any, check-list. Many will unit to condemn his decision to follow R. E. Moreau's suggestion of listing alphabetically the species in each genus. Some species, both new and old, have been missed; some are listed twice and some dubious species included, while there are a number of typographical errors. Despite all this, many, not least the birdwatchers who are travelling more and more widely all over the world, will find it a useful compilation, even though, increasingly as their knowledge grows, they will want to start amending it.

STANLEY CRAMP

Der Zug Europäischer Singvögel: Ein Atlas der Wiederfunde Beringter Vögel. Part 2. By Gerhardt Zink. Vogelwarte Radolfzell, 7760 Möggingen, West Germany, 1975. 130 pages, including 61 of maps. DM62.

Part 1 of this atlas of passerine ringing recoveries was reviewed in *Brit. Birds*, 67: 217-218, to which readers are referred for a description of the scope of this work. Two further parts are in preparation. The second instalment, now available, follows the format of the first, apart from one welcome change: a form of temporary binding replaces the original loose-leaf arrangement. Part 2 covers 26 species—the larks (six), House Martin *Delichon urbica*, Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*, flycatchers (three), accentors (two), pipits (six), wagtails (two) and shrikes (five). Naturally, the space allotted to individual species varies considerably according to the amount of data available, ranging from half a page for the Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cinerea* to 14 pages (including ten of maps) for the Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*. Where justified by numerous recoveries, as in the last-mentioned species, separate maps are given for different areas of origin and seasons of ringing and recovery. The accompanying text is brief but informative, and standardised so that it can be readily understood even by those who have made limited progress with the German language. This atlas draws together a good deal of widely scattered and often barely accessible data from the plethora of European ringing schemes. It is a 'must' for serious students of bird migration.

ROBERT HUDSON

Bird Observatories in Britain and Ireland. Edited by R. Durman for the Bird Observatories' Council. T. & A. D. Poyser, Berkhamsted, 1976. 292 pages; 16 black-and-white plates; several maps and diagrams. £5.00.

This book is a description of bird observatories and their work. It covers those 14 recognised as functioning in 1974: Bardsey, Calf of Man, Cape Clear, Copeland, Dungeness, Fair Isle, Gibraltar Point, Holme, Isle of May, Portland, Sandwich, Skokholm, Spurn and Walney. There are 230 pages devoted to this, and there is a chapter for each, written by an author familiar with the particular observatory.

The book starts off with a clear 'setting the scene' by Robert Spencer, which puts into perspective the history of the bird observatories and their work. He ascribes the current run-down of observatories to two factors. First, the advent of mist-nets (and perhaps cannon-nets) has made the ringer more mobile and less dependent on the huge, expensive Heligoland traps of the observa-

tory. Second, radar studies showed that bird migration as seen at the observatories was only a small part, often only a very small part, of the migration that went on overhead; worse, the observatories' observations and theories did not tally with what was observed on radar.

While these factors have radically altered the observatory, the rest of the book makes clear that they have not killed it; the aficionados remain. The chapters, which describe their activities, each have a similar layout, with area map, the history of the observatory, seasonal activities and major specialities; there are often brief tables, totals or analyses of aspects of their work and usually also a short section on the flora and other fauna.

Though it is not easy to suggest another layout, this format makes for rather heavy reading, not always helped by frequent references to obscure local place names. The migration work in particular is very similar at most observatories, and 14 blow-by-blow accounts of the annual round do not make for excitement. For example, at least five chapters and the introduction refer to the sudden decrease in Whitethroats in the late 1960's.

In addition to the sections already mentioned, there are a number of monochrome plates—not of very good quality—and a long list giving, for each observatory, the status of the 393 species recorded at the observatories. The book is well produced, with very few typographical errors, and there is an adequate index of the species mentioned, except that those in the introduction do not seem to have been included.

Each observatory has certain special features and, though these are discussed, more could, I think, have been made of them. Nevertheless, the book will provide a valuable guide and a useful source of information to those for whom the observatories are a way of life.

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