

# Reviews

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**Bird Hazards to Aircraft.** By Hans Blokpoel. Clarke Irwin, Toronto, 1976. xiv + 236 pages. £6.65 hardback; £4.20 paperback.

This is a clear, concise, comprehensive, conventional child's guide to how a bird can cause the greatest possible embarrassment to man in the shortest possible time. It is produced under the auspices of the most publicity-conscious national committee on the subject, and, as we have come to expect of Canadians, tends to stress local achievements, but deals with the subject nonetheless thoroughly for that. The main headings include birds and bird migration; bird strike statistics; bird-proofing aircraft and engines; on-board equipment to disperse birds; prevention of strikes at airfields and in flight; and organisations working on the problem. There are 445 references extending down to a deadline in the spring of 1974, many of them to obscure departmental memoranda and conference proceedings, and the rest covering a variety of work on related subjects.

It is reported that 12 major civil crashes have cost about 100 lives, and the loss of 65 military aircraft (usually equipped with ejection seats) 35 lives, at a total cost of at least \$100,000,000. There has also been a vast amount of other expensive damage to and delay of aircraft. Many other incidents have undoubtedly passed unreported or unconfirmed, especially in the military sector, and this category includes the disappearance of a Viscount over the Irish Sea in 1968 (at a time when Bewick's Swans were on the move). There is limited useful ornithological information about such matters as the heights at which strikes have occurred, and some useful recommendations, notably that too little attention has been given to the way in which birds react to aircraft, with advice to pilots that they should try to fly in straight lines and keep their landing lights on at night below 10,000 ft, to give birds more chance to avoid them.

The main novel information relates to developments with radar. It appears that ten years after my unwelcome views on the subject were filed away in the library at Oxford in 1963, technologists finally decided to abandon the methods of estimating bird density in the air developed for use with plankton in the sea, and set about trying to count the birds directly. Unfortunately, they also seem to have discarded all the knowledge already gained with radar, so that, for example, the official German map of European bird hazards reproduced in the book still indicates that they normally migrate on a narrow front. There is little discussion of the varying natures of the threats presented by different types of bird hazard and how to distinguish between them, and the quality of the work of the Royal Radar Establishment in particular has already been indicated in *British Birds* (69: 77-87; on further reflection we now wonder whether the birds identified as raptors soaring over Gibraltar could be the local gulls).

Ornithologists may continue to question the development of expensive new types of radar for detecting birds which are not adequately identified: does this really represent an improvement on the more careful study of what can be seen with existing radar?

W. R. P. BOURNE

**The Thames Transformed: London's River and its Waterfowl.** By Jeffery Harrison and Peter Grant; photographs by Pamela Harrison. Andre Deutsch, London, 1976. 239 pages; 13 colour and 62 black-and-white photographs; 8 maps and diagrams. £5.95.

The transformation of the Thames, from a heavily polluted river to one that is sufficiently clear to attract back a wide variety of aquatic life, is one of the great natural history success stories of our time. Hopefully, it will persuade authorities in other parts of this country and abroad that there is no real need for the disgrace which so many rivers bring to the environment.

The first part of this book describes how the transformation came about, and is the real reason for the whole. It describes not only some of the technical details, but also the various stages in the return of the food chain that has enabled wildfowl and waders to exploit once again an estuary in which, a hundred or more years ago, they may well have been an even more conspicuous feature. There follow two chapters in which the status of wildfowl and waders in the Inner London section of the river (defined as London Bridge to Tilbury) is reviewed species-by-species, with special emphasis on the changes that have followed the cleaning-up of the river.

This section of the book, however, occupies rather less than half the total, the remainder being devoted to the North Kent Marshes, which are taken to extend to the eastern end of the Isle of Sheppey and the south Essex shore. The changes in status in the last 25 years have been considerable, with a tendency for the Medway and Swale to grow in importance at the expense of the Thames. Though many wildfowl appear to have left the outer estuary of the Thames for the inner reaches, there seems to be good evidence for a total increase in numbers in many cases. In spite of the title of the book, it is the Medway and Swale which receive most attention in the outer part of the estuarine complex, and their status as wetlands of international importance for a number of species is well documented, with numerous tables of changing numbers since the early 1950s. Such tables, both in this section and in that on the Inner Thames, provide very valuable data for future research.

Throughout, it is the single-mindedness of the authors in studying this period of great transition that makes the book so interesting as a chronicle of what can be done by practical conservation. It is a telling appeal for recognition of the importance of the area to wildfowl and waders in the face of increasing pressure for various developments. The multiplicity of authorities which can trigger off such development is one of the most alarming aspects of the story, and illustrates the need for unremitting attention on the part of conservationists.

Valuable though the book is, it would have been less stimulating without the magnificent series of photographs by Pamela Harrison. These concentrate on wildlife in an environment frequently backed by factory chimneys and other symbols of industrial desecration of the landscape, but there are, as a bonus, some lovely studies of birds alone.

R. C. HOMES

**Airborne Birds.** By T. P. Inskipp and G. J. Thomas. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Sandy, 1976. 26 pages; several photographs and line-drawings. £1.00 including postage.

The publication in April 1975 of *All Heaven in a Rage*, the first report of an RSPB working party on imported wild birds, led to a public outcry and speedy adoption by the Government of two of its recommendations, with action promised on five others. The RSPB decided, however, that more information was needed, particularly about the trade in endangered species and the conditions under which birds are imported into the United Kingdom. So, once again, T. P. Inskipp made careful studies of birds handled by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals hostel at Heathrow and analysed records kept there and by HM Customs and Excise, and also scrutinised advertisements in the trade press. Compared with 1975, the total numbers brought in dropped markedly (partly due to stricter control, for veterinary reasons, on the import of captive birds in March 1976), but Senegal, India and the Netherlands remained at the top of the exporting countries. The RSPCA hostel handles only part of the imported consignments, and much larger numbers of birds in transit.

More than one in 20 of the imported birds were dead on arrival at the hostel, the heaviest mortality being among near-passerines and soft-billed passerines. A horrifying table gives details of the 23 cases of highest mortality, rising to 2,029 dead birds out of 2,120 in the worst instance, where the airline concerned was successfully prosecuted. The main causes of death were unfitness to travel, lack of water and food, delays en route and disease, but, as the detailed examination of 117 consignments showed, there were also many cases of overcrowding (some cages of parakeets held 30-65 times the recommended numbers) and the use of unsatisfactory containers. The report recommends many changes in the International Air Transport Association's regulations, but makes clear that even the existing ones are rarely observed by exporters or enforced by the airlines concerned. The implementation of the Washington Convention on Endangered Species (including all birds of prey and owls) on 1st January 1976 tightened controls considerably on these species, but trade advertisements and other evidence suggest that they are not always observed, nor is the transit trade adequately controlled; thus, large birds of prey sent from India to Germany via London appear to be avoiding the regulations simply by being described as 'ravens'! Action is recommended on all these aspects, particularly the urgent need to restrict ports of entry and to establish reception centres under veterinary advisers, for it seems likely that some less scrupulous importers may avoid the well-conducted RSPCA hostel at Heathrow. There is still much to put right in Britain, but this shocking report covers only a small part of the death and suffering caused by the international trade in wild birds.

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