

# Reviews

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**A Dictionary of Birds. Edited by Bruce Campbell and Elizabeth Lack.** T. & A. D. Poyser, Calton, 1985. 670 pages; over 500 black-and-white plates, line-drawings and diagrams. £39.00.

The majority of books that one is asked to review one sits down and reads, with more or less enjoyment, from cover to cover. With this book, though, such an approach is an obvious impossibility, so I have to say, at the outset, that I have not read all the million plus words that it contains and it is entirely possible that, apart from the editors, their helpers, and the publisher, no-one has, and no-one will. So how does one review such a work? In my case, by having it by my desk for some weeks, consulting it as often as I could, getting side-tracked frequently into reading far more than I intended, and by a certain amount of random dipping, as well as checking on topics in which I feel I have a certain expertise.

Comparisons with its predecessor, Sir Landsborough Thomson's prestigious *New Dictionary of Birds* (1964), are inevitable, though I do recognise that many of those reading this review will not own that work; but, equally, those that do will be wondering whether they should also own this one. My answer to the latter has to be an unqualified yes. Thank Sir Landsborough for his long and faithful service as an indispensable reference work, push his tome firmly to one side on your shelves, and purchase this magnificent *Dictionary* instead. It has the same qualities of all-embracing authoritativeness, an outstanding list of contributors, and that sense of feeling that if it is not to be found within these pages then it somehow cannot be worth knowing. Add to this the incorporation of so much new material that it was thought necessary to produce another 'Dictionary' after only 21 years, compared with the gap of 68 years between the *New Dictionary* and its predecessor, Alfred Newton's *Dictionary of Birds*, and, apart from wondering what the gap will be next time around, here is the book that everyone must have.

If you do already own the *New Dictionary*, then you will find many articles which are repeated here with only minor up-dating amendments, not quite enough in one article on a subject I am familiar with, but just as many which have been completely rewritten. For example, dipping brought me to Endocrinology, a subject which qualified for some 1,250 words in the *New Dictionary*. In this *Dictionary*, the same topic has been completely rewritten from scratch and is given over 4,500 words, together with three detailed diagrams. Almost the next subject is Ectoparasite. Here, by contrast, the original article from the *New Dictionary* (2,500 words) has survived more-or-less intact, though broadened in scope to include a slightly more detailed coverage of the Protozoa, to a total of just over 3,000 words.

The above is as good an example as any of the developments that have occurred in ornithology in the last two decades and which are so accurately reflected here. There are many others. The article on Breeding Season has been expanded from perhaps 1,800 words to about 5,000, plus two diagrams. This reviews some of the many studies being carried out, particularly long-term, aimed at a better understanding of the ultimate and proximate factors affecting breeding seasons. Radio-tracking appears as a new subject, complete with circuit diagrams for two transmitters. Respiratory System is not only rewritten to double the previous length, but is now illustrated with some superb three-dimensional drawings. Such examples are legion.

The presence of so many excellent diagrams and photographs is a feature of this work. The *New Dictionary* was illustrated with 16 colour plates and twice as many black-and-white, while line-drawings were sprinkled through the text. Here, colour has been eschewed, but extremely well-executed and apposite line-drawings and good-quality black-and-white photographs are to be found on a majority of page openings, illustrating points in the text with great clarity. Indeed, the whole lay-out and design of the book are as attractive as one has come to expect from this publisher. (British ornithology is indeed fortunate to have the firm of Poyser in its midst.) A much increased page size has, among other things, cut down the thickness of the book compared with the very fat *New Dictionary*, so that one has no fears for the binding, a source of considerable weakness in the earlier volume, though I would surmise that the use of only 8 pt (the same type size as this) may prove a good test of the need for spectacles.

Moving away from the technical, whether book production or subjects, I thoroughly enjoyed the articles on birds in art, poetry, and music. All are very greatly expanded, and that on poetry has many delightful quotations, though I was sad that no room could be found for an

Edward Lear limerick. If I may be allowed another niggle: while due mention is made of Messiaen's frequent incorporation of bird song into his compositions, ornithologically it surely would have been relevant to mention his unique system of notating bird song on paper, which he does in the field, for later incorporation in his music.

A further article deals with bird illustration, and, while there is reference to the development of illustration for the purposes of identification, including the influence of Roger Tory Peterson, and more recently Lars Jonsson, I was disappointed not to find any treatment of identification as a subject in its own right.

I have only sampled here and there since I received this fine *Dictionary*. Undoubtedly, there are many advances recorded which I have yet to find, but which I will be glad to do so when the need arises. I can finish only by whole-heartedly recommending it, congratulating the editors on a magnificent job, and praising the publisher yet again.

M. A. OGLIVIE

**Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Vol. IV: Terns to Woodpeckers. By S. Cramp et al.** Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985. 960 pages; 98 colour plates; numerous line-drawings. £60.00.

This, the fourth volume of the highly acclaimed '*BWP*', completes the non-passerines. The 14-man editorial team and its Chief Editor, Stanley Cramp, are to be warmly congratulated on this volume and on the work as a whole. In real, inflation-adjusted terms, each volume seems to be more expensive than the last; but anyone seriously interested in birds and failing to acquire *BWP* will live deeply to regret it. The work is dedicated to the memory of H. F. Witherby, editor of the great *The Handbook of British Birds* (1938-41). Formerly it was *de rigueur* for any contributor to *British Birds* to refer to *The Handbook*; now it is equally essential that he or she refers to *BWP*. So, take advantage of the various reduced prices on offer, and buy now!

This reviewer finds it astonishing that a work of such scholarship, detail and complexity, demanding exacting liaison at all stages of researching and writing between editors, artists, and an army of contributors and informants, has been produced with such perfection. Inevitably there are a few errors (e.g. the absence of 'Flicker' in bold print from page 813), and I shall have to embark on a little dutiful nitpicking. But first let it be clearly stated that the work is easily the most authoritative, and simply the best English text available. It is performing an incalculable service to European and world ornithology. Like previous ones, volume IV is a fascinating compendium and, at the same time, a very handsome book: a delight to use and to own.

This volume deals with terns (20 species), skimmers (1), auks (9), sandgrouse (7), pigeons (14), parrots (1), cuckoos (8), owls (17), nightjars (6), swifts (10), kingfishers (5), bee-eaters (3), rollers (4), hoopoes (1) and woodpeckers (12)—118 species in all. Species accounts average 7.7 pages each, perhaps rather longer than those in earlier volumes. The longest accounts are of Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, Barn Tyto *alba*, Tawny *Strix aluco* and Long-eared Owls *Asio otus*, Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, with 16-21 pages each. Readers may be surprised by the high totals of western Palearctic species in some of these families. The reason is partly that the inevitably slightly arbitrary delimitation of the southern boundary of the region through the central Sahara has included many essentially Afrotropical birds. Some extend marginally into the Palearctic as breeders (African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*, Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*, Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis*, Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus rubicundus*, Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala*) or former breeders (Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*, Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*); others are accidental vagrants (Jacobin Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*, Golden Nightjar *Caprimulgus eximius*, Abyssinian Roller *Coracias abyssinicus*, Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*). A number of additional birds are vagrants from the eastern Palearctic and elsewhere, and the species total is further increased by four pigeons and swifts endemic to the Canary and Cape Verde Islands and by two extinct birds, the Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius* and the Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis*. It is a pity that the Great Auk merits neither illustration (except for its egg, which unaccountably has an entire colour plate to itself), nor a text more substantial than 200 words. Sven-Axel Bengtson's unusual paper on its breeding ecology, published in January 1984 (*Auk* 101: 1-12), receives no mention, but that is doubtless because the effective cut-off time for literature surveillance seems to have been about late 1983.

Mostly, these 'peripheral' birds have been dealt with fully and laudably; but treatment of some Afrotropical species in particular suggests that their authors have not always obtained the best available information. Prozesky's (1968) *A Field Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa* is referred to several times, which is surprising in view of the fact that some earlier and many later texts provide longer and more authoritative data on African birds. For Broad-billed Roller habitat, reference to data in Thiollay (1971, *Oiseau* 41: 148-162) would have been more valuable than the citations made to Bannerman (1933) and Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1952). Some germane papers of Thiollay's are not referred to at all, and it would have been preferable for J. M. Thiollay to have been consulted personally, about this and some other species. Likewise G. J. Morel and M. Y. Morel should have been consulted about African Collared Doves: they have extensive food and weight data which are not utilised.

Style and format are the same as in previous volumes. The reader has to turn to volume I for the required detailed explanations of Distribution and maps, Population, Movements, Social pattern and behaviour, Voice, sonagrams, and other sections under which every regional-breeding species is discussed. Some modifications and amplifications were provided in short Introductions to volumes II and III. In the present volume, the only further introductory notice is a brief warning about the mapping and population-data accuracy of desert-dwelling sandgrouse, owls and nightjars, and a note about map-colour conventions for terns and auks. In spite of the disclaimer, the maps are remarkably detailed and make fascinating study. As remarked by reviewers of earlier volumes, distribution sections are merely to supplement information presented visually in the maps, and they are restricted to documenting changes in status. But, in the absence of any guidance more recently than volume I, that fact is not at all obvious, and many distribution texts appear curiously disjointed and almost irrelevant. It will be a very considerable service to users of *BWP* if all introductory explanations can be integrated and reprinted, say, in the first of the three forthcoming passerine volumes.

Higher groups or taxa of birds are defined, but not genera. That is a pity, for I feel that *BWP*, dealing with such a substantial part of the world's avifauna, should have taken as authoritative a lead in that respect as in others. Few generic allocations in this volume are controversial; but one would like to know why, amongst the terns, for instance, *Gelochelidon* is recognised, but not *Thalasseus*. The huge compilation of behavioural data here could and should be used to validate (or otherwise) generic boundaries based in the past largely on morphological criteria. When one reads (page 733) that the Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon* is 'perhaps better placed in a separate genus *Megaceryle*, leaving *Ceryle* with a single species, *C. rudis*' one is entitled to know why *Megaceryle* was not used for the Belted Kingfisher, as it properly should have been.

Further, on the topic of names, I would have preferred Pied Cuckoo to Jacobin Cuckoo for *Clamator jacobinus*, since the former name has greater currency in both Africa and India. More importantly, the absence of qualifiers from English names of several common Palearctic birds is unfortunate, potentially ambiguous, and contrary to the world bird-name trend. Birds called simply 'Guillemot', 'Cuckoo', 'Nightjar', 'Swift', 'Kingfisher', 'Bee-eater' and 'Roller' all require qualifiers in order to avoid confusion in an avifauna with, respectively, three, seven, five, ten, five, three and four species sharing the appellation.

All birds and eggs are portrayed in colour, and throughout the text there is a generous number of excellent line-drawings of behaviour. Eggs are shown in 12 plates of beautiful and informative photographs (the three eggs of Brännich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia* being slightly out of focus); the 28 eggs of Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* matched with 28 eggs of many passerine hosts (plate 96) comprise a particularly valuable illustration. Bird plates are by Norman Arlott (16 plates), N. W. Cusa (14), Håkan Delin (13), D. I. M. Wallace (13), C. J. F. Coombs (12), C. E. Talbot Kelly (ten) and Robert Gillmor (eight). In my view, Delin's owls are quite the finest portraits in all volumes of *BWP* to date. The artistry is simply magnificent—a pity that the owls could not have been enlarged and represented in more plates. Arlott's kingfishers and woodpeckers and Gillmor's auks are exquisite too. Wallace's cuckoos and swifts and Talbot Kelly's nightjars—all difficult birds to portray—are very fine, although the cuckoos-in-flight plate (42) may not please everyone. Talbot Kelly's rollers and hoopoes are delightful; but the Broad-billed Rollers in plate 74 are too long-billed and insufficiently large-headed (these features are shown correctly in plate 73, where, however, adults of the same species look too heavy-footed and their legs appear black, rather than olive as correctly described in the text). But her bee-eaters are less successful, and barely do justice to the remark on page 748: 'plumage multicoloured, more vivid and contrasting than any other bird in west Palearctic'. Birds 1 and 2 in plate 69 are too yellow, bird 3 has too stout a bill, and the blue parts of bird 6

are too vivid and too extensive; birds 1 and 2 in plate 70 are too fluffy, and have their secondaries impossibly fanned out across the primaries; and, in plate 71, birds 1 and 3 are much too round-winged. I have to be even more unkind with the remaining artists: the pigeons are mostly lumpy and muddy; and, while the tern plates are helpful guides to identification and are artistically pleasing, they are spoilt by flagrant retouching (e.g. plates 11 and 13).

Lastly, a plea. Relating a given bird in a plate with its facing caption is unnecessarily and distractingly difficult. The same criticism was made of volume I of *The Birds of Africa*, whose editors have responded by designing an improved system for forthcoming volumes. *Please will the editors of BWP do likewise?*

It's easy to criticise; but let my carping not detract from the general conclusion: a superlative book.

C. H. FRY

**Nests and Eggs of Birds found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania. vol. 1. By Alfred J. North.** Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985. 382 pages; 48 black-and-white plates; 39 line-drawings. £79.00.

It is difficult to avoid calling this facsimile reproduction a period piece; many photographs of nests and eggs show them removed from their sites and the original drawings by Neville Cayley, father of *What Bird is That?* Cayley, are delightfully stilted. Cayley also coloured the egg plates, here reproduced by 'the heliotype process' in uniform sepia. This volume covers some 170 passerine species in 69 genera, and contains many first descriptions of nests found by the pioneer Australian ornithologists at the turn of the century. The only modern addition is the Foreword by Walter Boles of the Australian Museum. He reveals North's intense personal feud with my namesake, A. J. Campbell, resulting in some unfortunate omissions from this classic work, first published in 1904.

BRUCE CAMPBELL

**Birds in Your Garden. By Nigel Wood.** Hamlyn, Twickenham, 1985. 160 pages; over 100 colour plates; 80 line-drawings. £7.95.

The subtitle to this book is 'How to attract and identify over 70 common species'. This is a splendid aim. My own garden list, after eight years, is 67 species (35 of which have nested in the garden). Thus, I have taken an interest in 'gardening for birds' for some time, and put much of what I have learnt into practice, but Nigel Wood's book nevertheless provided me with very interesting reading, and a remarkable number of excellent suggestions (things to do, or ways of doing things) which were new to me. So, on the 'how to attract' part of the subtitle, I strongly recommend this book to all garden-owners. The nest-box designs, suggestions for planting, general management, and so on, are all really useful. A total of 54 pages is devoted to species-by-species accounts, under the headings of 'Status', 'Habitat', 'Identification', 'Behaviour', 'Voice', 'Nesting', and 'General notes'. While some of the information here is quite useful to the bird-gardener, it does seem a mistake to have brought identification into the book at all (and especially into the book's subtitle), since it is dealt with only very perfunctorily, and I would in many cases be hard put to identify the species of bird from the description provided if the account did not have a heading (perhaps the publisher insisted that the author should include this aspect). Similarly, the colour photographs and other coloured illustrations are not really necessary, since most are merely portraits of birds which one might expect in a garden. Perhaps, however, these illustrations will attract purchasers; if so, inclusion of the photographs will have been justified, for the book as a whole will be really useful for the non-birdwatcher who merely wants to bring some wildlife into the garden as much as for the ornithologist. Whereas the latter may find the colour photographs superfluous, both classes of purchaser will find the line-drawings in the margin and text very useful. These are not just for decoration, but show clearly how to make, do, prepare, and so on, the various gadgets or garden features described in the text. The very reasonable price should ensure that this book is widely purchased. It will prove to be very useful to its purchasers, and to the wildlife under their control. I recommend this book, even if you think you already know all there is to know about bird-gardening.

J. T. R. SHARROCK