

# Short reviews

**The Oxford Dictionary of Natural History.** Edited by Michael Allaby. (OUP, 1985. £20.00) Despite three years at university studying botany, two studying zoology, and a further three researching in ecology, 90% of the words in this dictionary are still totally unknown to me. Even after reading the definitions, I am little the wiser in many cases. This is not the book in which to look up the meaning of 'rut' or 'gonys' (neither is included). The definition of 'imago' is not very helpful, since it defines it as 'The fully developed adult among pterygote insects', but 'pterygote' does not merit an entry. These are just examples from a book with a title suggesting that it might be of use to the amateur naturalist, but which in reality is far more likely to be of value to the professional scientist. There are no illustrations (perhaps not expected in a dictionary, but many books called dictionaries these days are really well-illustrated encyclopedias). **Birds Beyond Belfast: a guide for birdwatchers.** By Belfast RSPB Members' Group. (RSPB, 1985. Paperback £2.95) This 118-page paperback is a companion volume to the 66-page *Birds Around Belfast* published in 1981. Both have been produced by the Belfast RSPB Members' Group, and together they cover the whole of Northern Ireland. After a foreword by Bill Oddie, the well-known foreword writer, and an introduction and acknowledgments, the text is divided into the six counties, within each of which are set out the various birdwatching localities, shown on accompanying maps. For each locality are set out details of location, access, habitat, birds and items of general interest. The text is enlivened by line-drawings by Rob Hume.

This is a well-produced, clearly laid out booklet, with accurate and up-to-date information, despite a rather unprepossessing cover. The Belfast Members' Group is to be congratulated on an excellent job. [TONY MARR] **Kennzeichen und Mauser Europäischer Singvögel.** By Hans Bub. (Die Neue Brehm-Bücherei 570. A. Ziemsen Verlag, 1985. DM23.40) These 200-plus pages and 106 illustrations provide a general insight into the subject of characters and moults of European songbirds, following the three previously published parts dealing with 58 species (*Brit. Birds* 77: 637-638). Eighteen chapters by a total of 19 authors cover a very wide range of topics—geographical variation, feather morphology, causes and effects of moult, ageing, etc—including a 'rare' one on the brood-patch. All extremely useful, despite the (in places) rather tortuous German style. [DAC] **Black Robin Country: the Chatham Islands and its wildlife.** By David Cemmick and Dick Veitch. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985. Paperback £14.95) The Black Robin *Petroica traversi* is one of (if not the) rarest birds in the world (see *Brit. Birds* 77: 575). This 130-page large-format paperback illustrates it and the other wildlife of the Chatham Islands (870 km west of New Zealand), with superb paintings by David Cemmick and text by David Veitch. Very evocative; a delightful book. **Wildlife in Towns and Cities, Gardens, Parks and Waterways.** By Michael Chinery and W. G. Teagle. (Country Life Books, 1985. Paperback £5.95) It really is quite useful to have a field guide covering all the groups of animals and plants that the general naturalist is likely to come across indoors and outdoors in urban areas.

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The species included are, of course, only a selection of what might be found, but the text is authoritative and the illustrations helpful and attractive. **God's Acre: the flowers and animals of the parish churchyard.** By **Francesca Greenoak.** (Orbis, 1985. £12.95) Britain's 20,000 churchyards mean 20,000 acre-sized nature reserves (a total of 8,000 ha), providing sanctuary for an astonishing variety of plants and animals. Francesca Greenoak writes of the history and natural history of these ancient enclosures throughout the length of Britain, giving an eloquent plea for their conservation as microcosms of a countryside under threat. Her own research was helped by that of the members of Britain's Women's Institutes, who were dragged into making wildlife surveys of their local churchyards: useful involvement of hundreds of potential conservationists. This is a delightful book, scarcely a page without at least one of Clare Robert's delicate drawings, mostly of flowers, shrubs or trees, but also of insects, mammals, particular churchyards and, occasionally, birds. [ROBERT GILLMOR] **The Dragonflies of Great Britain and Ireland.** 2nd edn. By **Cyril O. Hammond**; revised by **Robert Merritt.** (Harley Books, 1985. Paperback £9.75) It is very useful to have a relatively cheap paperback edition of this 116-page classic. The 20 colour plates depict 44 species, for which there are also standard Biological Records Centre dot-distribution maps. There is also an 18-page key to the identification of larvae. Essential for anyone interested in dragonflies and damselflies. **The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Vermont.** Edited by **Sarah B. Laughlin and Douglas B. Kibbe.** (University Press of New England, 1985. £37.50) The first North American breeding bird atlas to appear, this 456-page volume adopts the conventional system of recording each species confirmed, probably and possibly breeding on a grid basis. It differs, however, from the European atlases published to date in that the organisers recognised, following a pilot survey in 1976, that it would not be possible to cover every one of the approximately 1,000 25-km squares into which the state was divided. As a result they used a selective sampling system based on one priority square selected randomly from each group of six squares. In addition to the 179 priority squares chosen by this method, an extra 24 squares containing unique and fragile habitats were surveyed, though records were accepted and published for all squares. The success of this

project illustrates how the use of sample squares can enable ornithological groups in sparsely populated areas to carry out atlas surveys. [C. D. HUTCHINSON] **Physiological Strategies in Avian Biology.** By **J. G. Phillips, P. J. Butler and P. J. Sharp.** (Blackie, 1985. Hardback £19.95; paperback £9.95) Introductory review of the subject by distinguished non-ornithologists for advanced undergraduates, but also claimed to provide commentary for informed amateur ornithologists. *BB* readers would certainly learn from this text, although the biochemistry left me gasping. Chapters on locomotion, migration and thermoregulation are the most readable, but surely the publishers cannot justify the expense of the hardback. [NORMAN ELKINS] **Birds of the Norfolk Broads.** (Jarrold, 1985. Paperback 90p) An interesting, good-quality booklet, with some very good colour photographs of Broadland birds. The text is generally informative, about both the bird-life and the habitats. For the serious student of Broadland, it is too brief, but at only 90p it is ideal for tourists as an introduction to this threatened environment. [D. J. HOLMAN] **Der Indische Brillenvogel.** By **Frank L. Radicke.** (Die Neue Brehm-Bücherei 572. A. Ziemsen Verlag, 1985. Paperback DM13.00) About 100 pages on the Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa*, mostly behaviour and breeding biology, based on the author's extensive studies of captive birds (eight males, five females, and their offspring). A four-page table shows the development of the young from day 1 to day 30 (the eye-ring begins to show at 14-15 days and is fully developed at 22-23). The biology of *Zosterops* in the wild is very little known. May this excellent book stimulate field research! [DAC] **Vertebrate Flight: a bibliography to 1985.** By **Jeremy M. V. Rayner.** (University of Bristol Press, 1985. Paperback £5.75) This 182-page softback lists some 2,500 references to the mechanics, physiology, ecology, morphology and anatomy of flight mechanisms of birds, bats, pterodactyls, gliding reptiles, gliding mammals and flying fish. **Monterey Birds: status and distribution of birds in Monterey County, California.** By **Don Roberson.** (Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society, 1985. \$16.00). Monterey County boasts some of the best birding in North America and a list of 427 species: the status of each is described, together with an at-a-glance occurrence bar-chart. Also much other useful information, including seven

recommended birding routes, an extensive bibliography, and details of the famous seabird-watching in Monterey Bay. This very attractive book (59 of its 81 plates in colour) is an absolute must for any birder visiting this or nearby parts of California. [PJG] **The Effects of Oil on Birds: a multi-discipline symposium. 1982 Proceedings.** Edited by Don Rosie and Stephen N. Barnes. (Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research, Inc., 1983. Paperback £11.00) The 17 papers cover a wide range of studies, from veterinary analysis of the physiological effects of oil, especially on ducks and gulls, to the rehabilitation of affected birds and the use of post-mortem examinations as a research tool. One paper illustrates the effect on populations: that of the Esso Bernicia oilspill at Shetland in 1978. Discussion on sub-lethal effects of oil on reproductive success brings together a broad range of studies. Most papers relate to work in the USA, but all have excellent references. Those on conditions for bird hospitals and rehabilitation should be of special interest in the UK. [PETER MORGAN] **A Tour of British Bird Reserves.** By Valerie Russell. (Crowood Press, 1986. £12.95.) Of the 3,000 nature reserves in Britain, some 50 are described on the basis of short—often one-day (or shorter)—visits. Snettisham RSPB Reserve is illustrated by an Arctic Skua on its nest, Cley Marshes by an adult summer Red-throated Diver (from the calmness of the water, surely on a breeding lochan) and Hickling Broad National Nature Reserve by a photograph of a Greenshank which 'on a better day we might have seen'. The impression is almost of a bundle of photographs randomly scattered—often inappropriately—throughout the book. There is even that classic error of a Treecreeper photograph apparently

misaligned by 90°. The idea of this book was a good one, and the brief word-pictures of the reserves do give some of the flavour of the places which I know well, but the task was really too great for one person, and a better book would have been produced by having a team of regional authors. **Der Kampfläufer.** By Horst Scheufler and Arnd Stiefel. (Die Neue Brehm-Bücherei 574. A. Ziemsen Verlag, 1985. Paperback, DM24.00) Based on a very comprehensive review of the world literature, this compact East German paperback details, with the aid of photographs, a wealth of information on all aspects of the biology of the Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*. It is a pity that such a publication is unlikely to be readily available or translated into English, and thus will not be read by many British birders. Anyone interested in monographs, waders in general, or Ruffs in particular should make a special effort to read this book. [BOB SCOTT] **Der Zug Europäischer Singvögel: ein Atlas der Wiederfunde beringter Vögel. Part 4.** By Gerhard Zink. (Vogelwarte Radolfzell, 1985. DM76.00) This large-format atlas of ringing recoveries is wholly in German (a language in which I flounder and then sink), but this must still be regarded as an essential part of any serious ornithologist's reference collection. The maps are large and clear, and easily understood. In its four parts, this atlas maps the migration routes of 95 species of European passerines, with over 16,000 ringing recoveries plotted on 535 maps. This Part, for instance, contains no fewer than 39 maps plotting ringing recoveries of Pied Flycatchers *Ficedula hypoleuca* (only one of the 14 species covered in this Part). Unless migration bores you, you should look at a copy; if you look at one, you will probably want to own it.

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