

Short reviews

Birds of North Rona and Sula Sgeir. By Seabirds at Sea Team: Stuart Benn, Stuart Murray and Mark L. Tasker. (Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough, 1989. 47 pages. Paperback £5.00) A remarkably comprehensive and concise publication on two of Scotland's remotest islands. Intriguing sections on their human history are complemented by full systematic lists which contain some surprising migrants. The islands' immense value to seabirds is underlined by an extremely useful account of their seasonal use of surrounding waters, highlighting their potential vulnerability. The authors are to be congratulated on the informative, yet thoroughly readable, text. A must for seabird enthusiasts.

[ANGUS HOGG]

The Birds of Cambridgeshire. P. M. M. Bircham. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989. 280 pages. £19.50.) A detailed account of the birds of Cambridgeshire (excluding Huntingdonshire) up to the end of 1986, including the changes that have taken place since Lack's (1934) work with the same title; also a summary of the best localities. The systematic list adds 41 species to Lack's total of 253, but this includes Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*,

all records of which are likely to refer to escapes. Other species recorded as 'escapes' have been excluded, even the extraordinary breeding record of Crowned Cranes *Balearica pavonina* (two young reared at Fulbourn Fen in October-December 1959; *Nature in Cambridgeshire* 2:36). There are many useful histograms but, on the debit side, a liberal sprinkling of typographical errors.

[TIM INSKIPP]

Les Oiseaux d'Islande: écologie et biogéographie. By Michel Breuil. Illustrations by Jean Chevallier. (Editions R. Chabaud-Lechevalier, Paris, 1989. 288 pages. FF195.00) This book covers much of the recent knowledge on Icelandic birds found in local and foreign books and magazines. There are chapters on the history of breeding birds, on passage migrants and vagrants, with a list of accidentals (incomplete), on protection and exploitation, and on different habitats, including a list of bird-rich localities. There are many drawings of birds and 23 photographs. The distribution maps are enlarged and sometimes revised versions of those in *BWP*, occasionally somewhat inaccurate. In short, this is a fine small handbook.

[GUNNLAUGUR PÉTURSSON]

continued ...

RSPB Where to go Birdwatching: a guide to RSPB nature reserves. Edited by Anthony Chapman. (BBC Books, London, 1989. 127 pages. Paperback £6.50) Guaranteed sales to many of the RSPB's half a million members have allowed the production of this glossy guide to the location of the Society's 102 nature reserves, with birds and habitats shown in colour, clear maps and easy-to-use layout. This book is obviously expected to have a short shelf life, for the reserve wardens are named. You are never far from an RSPB reserve, wherever you are in the United Kingdom. It must be worth having this book in the car.

Avian Genetics: a population and ecological approach. Edited by F. Cooke and P. A. Buckley. (Academic Press, London, 1989. 488 pages. Paperback £18.50) Many of the leading figures in the field contributed to this volume, which first appeared in hardback in 1987. The book is divided into three main sections: how genetic variation is measured, the factors which shape the genetic structure of bird populations, and case-studies of four species. An excellent review, although, inevitably, much has happened in the last couple of years. Some basic knowledge is essential. [ALAN KNOX]

Birds of the Sea, Shore and Tundra. By Theodore Cross. (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, New York, 1989. 208 pages. \$65.00) A large-format book, full of stunningly spectacular bird photographs, all in colour. There is no text, just captions to the photographs, most of which are of North American species, particularly herons and other large water birds, with just one passerine. A remarkably high proportion are 'birds in action': herons displaying, waders and terns wing-lifting, and many fine flight shots. A tour-de-force. [R. J. CHANDLER]

The Great Cypress Swamps. By John V. Dennis. (Louisiana State University Press, 1988. \$29.95) The experience of visiting a 'new' habitat is one of life's most exhilarating experiences. The joy of discovering a whole new ecosystem for oneself is even more rewarding if one takes the trouble to do a little background reading beforehand. John V. Dennis has provided us with the ideal introduction to the Great Cypress Swamps of the southeast USA, which are one of that country's great treasures. [PETER HOLDEN]

Où Voir les Oiseaux en France. Compiled by Philippe J. Dubois. (Nathan, Paris, 1989. 321 pages) Where to watch birds in France, with 278 routes shown very clearly on 120 maps, with indications of what is likely to be seen, using symbols of birds on the maps, keyed to the same symbols in the text. Well thought-out, nicely illustrated, and with easy-to-follow directions. A nine-page introduction explains how to use the book. Wholly in French.

Bird Watching in East Yorkshire, the Humber and Teesmouth. By Stephen C. Elliott. (Hutton Press, Beverley, 1989. 120 pages. Paperback £4.90) The title implies a detailed guide to the best places in the area, but a lot of the information is irrelevant, and the style is quaint and rambling, with a confusing mix of general information, topographical features and 'other orders', birds often having less than adequate mention. As well as 54 pages dealing with 49 sites, there are 41 pages of systematic list of dubious value, with misleading and sometimes inaccurate content. Erroneous use of capital and lower-case letters in the species names is annoying, and the 'field vole' being carried by a Barn Owl on the front cover is surely a young rat. A brave attempt, and cheap at the price, but falling somewhat short. [JOHN R. MATHER]

The Blackcap and the Garden Warbler. By Ernest Garcia. (Shire Publications Ltd, Princes Risborough, 1989. 24 pages. Paperback £1.95) Another in this excellent series of handy booklets. There's enough to satisfy the normal enquiring mind, and to whet the appetite for more.

Dynamics of Biological Invasions. By Rob Hengeveld. (Chapman and Hall, London, 1989. 160 pages. £22.50) A multi-discipline survey, examples described ranging from measles epidemics to invasions of muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus*, with some bird species, notably Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, Serin *Serinus serinus*, Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*, Scarlet Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*, Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* and Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. I was interested to read that Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* had 'contracted southwards'. The Preface notes 'only a knowledge of basic statistics is required'. From a bibliography of about 220 titles, I recognised the names of about 30 authors, not all of those ornithological. Not a work for the ordinary innumerate birder like me. [ROBERT SPENCER]

Thailand. By Francis Hill. (New Holland, London, 1989. 24 pages. Paperback £2.49) Lots of colour photographs and an informative, intelligently written and useful text by an author who lives in Bangkok; very suitable for any birder planning to do some sightseeing on a first trip to Thailand.

The Birds of Sicily. BOU check-list no. 11. By Carmelo Iapichino & Bruno Massa. (British Ornithologists' Union, Tring, 1989. 170 pages. £16.00 UK; £18.00 overseas) A very thorough check-list of all accepted (and considered but rejected) records, with useful maps and 16 black-and-white habitat photographs. An essential reference.

Birds of Birstall: bird life in the parish of Birstall, Leicestershire: a ten year study. By M. D. Kirkman. (Leicestershire Museums, Art Galleries & Records Service, Leicester, 1988. 48 pages. Paperback £3.25) During 1968-82, Martin (son of P. B.) Kirkman compiled a local inventory of breeding birds. Birstall is very largely residential, but he was allowed to search for nests in most gardens. The report is A4 in format, with many maps, tables and photographs. It is partly anecdotal, and partly a rare quantification of birds in suburbia.

[JOHN MARCHANT]

Snakes & Lizards. By Tom Langton. Illustrated by Denys Ovenden. (Whittet Books, London, 1989. 127 pages. £6.95) See review of *Stoats & Weasels, Polecats & Martens* by Paddy Sleeman in this same series. The text is at just the right level for the interested amateur, and Denys Ovenden's drawings are delightful as well as being useful. Despite this series' usual cartoons (of varying comic standard), I can still recommend this volume. I wish, however, that there had been colour photographs (or paintings) of the six British species.

The Reintroduction of the White-tailed Sea Eagle to Scotland: 1975-1987. By John A. Love. (Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough, 1988. Research & survey in nature conservation: no. 12. 48 pages. Paperback £4.00) This attractive report, written by the man most closely involved with the project, describes in fascinating detail the reintroduction of the White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* to the west coast of Scotland. The events of each year are carefully documented; by 1987, no fewer

than five pairs attempted to breed, with two chicks fledged at one nest and one at another.

[DAVID FISHER]

The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland. Volume 7, part I. The Butterflies. Edited by A. Maitland Emmet and John Heath. (Harley Books, Colchester, 1989. 370 pages. £49.50) The latest volume in the excellent Harley series on moths and butterflies covers all 111 species of the latter which have been recorded in Britain and Ireland. Detailed descriptions and accounts of life history and distribution are given clearly and concisely for each species. Distribution maps, updated to the end of 1988, are included for 74 species of more regular occurrence. The book contains 24 excellent colour plates which illustrate all of the species covered, including extreme rarities and 'escapes'. The price may put off many potential purchasers, but the high-quality production typical of this publisher and the excellent contents certainly justify the cost. A first-class book.

[DAVID FISHER]

Raptors in the Modern World: proceedings of the III World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls, Eilat, Israel, 22-27 March 1987. Edited by B.-U. Meyburg and R. D. Chancellor. (World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls, Berlin, 1989. 611 pages. Paperback, £25.00/\$45.00/DM75.00) The proceedings of specialist conferences always contain a wealth of material for conservation consideration and action and this one is no exception. Important sections in the book are on migration and wintering grounds, population biology and breeding, conservation of rare species, raptors in polluted environments, habitat analysis and census techniques, legislation and education.

The resolutions are sound, but it is a sad reflection on modern times that proceedings for a conference held in Israel may not be given the consideration they deserve by some countries in the World. For that reason, it might have made wiser conservation sense to have held the conference elsewhere. Political awareness is an important conservation consideration.

[RICHARD PORTER]

Bird Habitats of Great Britain and Ireland—a new approach to birdwatching. By Paul Morrison. (Michael Joseph, London, 1989. 256 pages. Hardback £16.95) Over 200 photographs illustrate lengthy text accounts of British habitats and their bird

populations. Too many close-up photographs of nesting birds spoil the author's attempt to portray species in their natural context.

The text bravely covers some complex ecological issues, but an unimaginative layout makes reading difficult. This book offers a nice approach for anyone seeking an introduction to avian habitat ecology, but the presentation could have been more exciting.

[ROB STILL]

The Gannet. By Bryan Nelson. (Shire Publications Ltd, Princes Risborough, 1989. 24 pages. Paperback £1.95) See review of Garcia, *The Blackcap and the Garden Warbler*.

Der Rotmilan. By Rudolf Ortlieb. (Die Neue Brehm-Bucherei 532. A. Ziemsen Verlag, Wittenberg-Lutherstadt, 1989. 162 pages. DM18.80) Third edition of Ortlieb's very comprehensive digest of the scientific literature about the Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. Strong on facts, with many tables and figures, accessible to those who cannot read the German text. Rather short on interpretation, and Ortlieb is too reticent about his own intimate 40-year experience with the species. Numerous illustrations, often badly reproduced. All serious raptor enthusiasts need this book.

[PETER DAVIS]

Collins Guide to Wild Habitats. By Chris Packham with illustrations by Chris Shields. Deciduous Woodlands, 128 pages; Grasslands and Scrub, 128 pages; Heathlands, 112 pages; Rocky Shorelands, 128 pages. (Collins, London, 1989. Paperback each £4.95)

The author uses photographs, facts and personal recollections to describe a series of habitats and their residents, plus a list of relevant nature reserves. The style and content are summed up by the following example, under Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* in 'Heathland residents' (a list that surprisingly overlooks Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*): 'its tail . . . is a very long graduated white-edged affair which distinguishes the species from any other European warbler.'

The Song Thrush. By Eric Simms. (Shire Publications Ltd, Princes Risborough, 1989. 24 pages. Paperback £1.95) A useful addition to this excellent series of little guides. Although it would have dated in time, it seems a pity in this particular case that

population changes are not shown graphically by means of the BTO's Common Birds Census indices.

Stoats & Weasels, Polecats & Martens. By Paddy Sleeman. Illustrated by Guy Troughton. (Whittet Books, London, 1989. 119 pages. £6.95) An excellent summary in this slightly quirky but very useful series of books covering small groups of birds and animals. The drawings by Guy Troughton are excellent (but I still have my personal doubts about the need to include cartoons mixed in with educational or decorative illustrations).

Birdwatching on Merseyside. By Ken Stoba. (Cicerone Press, Milnthorpe, 1989. 136 pages. Paperback £5.50) This book is a disappointment. 'Merseyside' is very loosely defined, many of the listed sites being outside the area. Although containing useful site information, there are numerous misprints and some poor photographs, including a Scaup *Aythya marila* captioned as a Pochard *A. ferina*. Amazingly, autumn sea-watching at Seaforth (the highlight of the year during strong northwesterlies) is omitted.

[STEVE YOUNG]

Birds on Coll and Tiree: status, habitats and conservation. Edited by D. A. Stroud. (Nature Conservancy Council/Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Edinburgh, 1989. 191 pages. Paperback £6.50) A detailed account, in 12 chapters plus a systematic list and comprehensive references, of the birds of these two Inner Hebridean islands, covering especially wildfowl and waders, with Greenland Whitefronts *Anser albifrons flavirostris*, Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*, breeding waders and Corncrakes *Crex crex* to the fore. The various habitats and their conservation importance are thoughtfully discussed. A must for anyone interested in islands and their birds.

[M. A. OGILVIE]

The Nightjar. By Peter Tate. (Shire Publications, Princes Risborough, 1989. 24 pages. £1.95) Another 'popular' derivative work. You cannot say much in 13 BB-sized pages of text culled from *BWP*, which has rather more on the Nightjar, and from general sources. Two papers and two amateur reports (difficult to get) are suggested for further reading. This is the book to give to your unlikely friend who comes across Nightjars but has no interest in birds. There is a much wider choice to suggest for people with a dawning general enthusiasm.

[COLIN J. BIBBY]

The Birds of Morecambe Bay. By John Wilson. (Cicerone Press, Milnthorpe, 1989. 96 pages. Paperback £4.95) A more polished update of his 1974 guide. Includes good locality and optimal-tide tips for the visiting

birder (maybe some locals), a bonus chapter on the birds of Leighton Moss, and some cracking colour photographs. Some literals need correcting before the next printing.

[BOB SPENCER]

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