



## Reviews

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**The Great Tit.** By **Andrew Gosler.** Hamlyn, London, 1993. 128 pages; 24 colour plates; 22 black-and-white line drawings. ISBN 0-600-57950-6. Paperback £9.99.

It is difficult to believe that so much information could be contained within so few pages. Doubtless a slightly small typeface and innate editorial skills have helped the author achieve this, but there is an enviable wealth of expertly organised knowledge and fascination between the covers of this super paperback. Andrew Gosler's familiarity with the Great Tit *Parus major* through personal research shines out, be it in biology, behaviour, beak size—or simply how best to keep out hungry weasels *Mustela nivalis*, the scourge of many a nestbox study. The text is succinct, but remains eminently readable throughout, and certainly embraces far more than most readers might have thought at the onset would be of interest about just one bird species. References to sources and further reading abound without destroying the reading flow, and there are many useful cross-references to other parts of the text. Usefully, accurately and also delightfully illustrated by photographs and by Norman Arlott, this book is excellent value and cannot be too highly recommended, no matter who you are or what your ornithological interest: even proverbial maiden aunts with a fixation for cats will find it difficult to put down.

JIM FLEGG

**Wildfowl of the British Isles and North-West Europe.** By **Brian P. Martin. Paintings by Alastair Proud.** David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1993. 192 pages; 52 colour plates; 17 black-and-white plates; 14 line-drawings. ISBN 0-7153-9996-9. £16.99.

Who am I to say: 'What! Another book on wildfowl?'. This one is better than most. The author has done his homework well and information up to at least winter 1990/91 on numbers and habits is included in the detailed species accounts.

The full-page colour plates are quite pleasant, but sometimes suffer by comparison with the photographs, which are mainly of captive birds. Thus a photograph shows the bill colour of the Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* much better than does the facing painting; the Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* is too large in body and bill; the Northern Pintails *Anas acuta* too short in the neck.

Marginal notes add lots of facts to the main text. Note, though, that the weights and measurements are described as 'averages', when what are given are ranges. Had there been a full bibliography, reflecting the author's diligent researches, I could have wholeheartedly recommended this as a very useful reference work on this ever-popular group. Alas, it is restricted, by the publishers one presumes, to little more than a page of 'Further reading', when three adjacent pages are devoted to rather poor flight silhouettes.

A near miss, then, but good value for money, nonetheless.

MALCOLM OGILVIE

**Collins Field Guide: Birds of Britain and Europe.** By **Roger Tory Peterson, Guy Mountfort & P. A. D. Hollom. Fifth, revised and enlarged edition. In collaboration with D. I. M. Wallace.** Harper-Collins, London, 1993. 320 pages; 1,520 colour illustrations; 366 maps. ISBN 0-00-219900-0. £14.99.

This book was redesigned for the fourth edition, with the plates in a central portion between blocks of species descriptions and distribution maps at the back. This format presents problems,

readers having to flick between description and plate, compared with the standard text and plate on a double-page adopted by many other guides.

The big advantage of 'Peterson' over other genuine field guides—Jonsson (1992), Lewington *et al.* (1991) and Harris *et al.* (1989) are not really field guides—was that the plates were so much better than the competition. Some of these plates have been repainted, but more reformatted. Generally this works well, although the colour reproduction leaves a little to be desired on the review copy, with many of the old plates very dark and blue (I've never seen a pale blue Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*). The new plates are variable, with the scoters *Melanitta* and eiders *Somateria* superb, but the 'rare' warblers (Sylviidae) almost as bad as those in any other field guide.

The textual information is generally comprehensive, but because of the comparatively large type has perhaps less detail than Bruun *et al.* (1986).

The information is accurate and sufficient to identify the majority of birds. It is not the ideal guide (which still does not exist), but is as good as any other, if slightly more difficult to use. If someone were to produce the text of Bruun *et al.* or Ferguson-Lees *et al.* (1983) with the Peterson paintings (or, even better, a full set by Dan Zetterström) then we could have the ideal field guide.

COLIN BRADSHAW

**Birds in Brazil: a natural history. By Helmut Sick.** Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993. 725 pages; 47 colour plates; 21 black-and-white plates; numerous figures and line-drawings. ISBN 0-691-08569-2. Cloth £90.00.

When Dr Helmut Sick died in 1991, he was in the process of updating his original two-volume *Omitologia Brasileira* and having it translated from Portuguese into English by William Belton. *Birds in Brazil* is fundamentally a handbook, virtually the original work, now translated. The original colour plates by Paul Barruel have been supplemented with the work of John P. O'Neill. Weight precludes taking this tome into the field, so this is a volume to be digested from the armchair, prior to travelling to Brazil, and for reference on returning. Being a handbook, Sick deals with ecology, morphology, physiology; encompassing habits, plumage, vocalisations, taxonomy, distribution, conservation, etc. Such weighty subjects as these are dealt with in a conversational manner where personal observations and anecdotes make for pleasant reading.

The 'Family and species accounts' concern 1,635 species and form the bulk of this work, which deals sufficiently with the subjects, for the most part, though 'Distribution' could have been expanded. English names have kept abreast of the ever-changing views on nomenclature. The accounts of non-passerine families are excellent; those dealing with passerine groups are, in general, almost as good. The antbirds (Formicariidae) are, however, disappointing, which is regrettable, since they are in essence the South American family: many merely have their name listed or just the state in which they are found.

The original work, produced in the mid 1980s, was a milestone in Brazilian literature and of great credit to Helmut Sick. This treatise is better still, but could have been updated even more during the intervening period. In this respect, the credit for this volume should perhaps go especially to William Belton for his patience with translation. Anyone interested in going to Brazil for more than a token holiday should buy the book and will find it a worthy asset.

BRUCE C. FORRESTER

**A Field Guide to the Waterbirds of Asia. By Bharat Bhushan, Graham Fry, Akira Hibi, Taej Mundkur, Dewi M. Prawiradilaga, Koichiro Sonobe and Shunji Usui. Illustrations by Takashi Taniguchi.** (Wild Bird Society of Japan in collaboration with Asian Wetland Bureau, Tokyo, 1993. 224 pages. ISBN 4-7700-1740-5. Paperback £21.95) This attractive and well-produced pocket-sized guide covers 327 species of waterbird, encompassing cormorants, herons, bitterns, storks, wildfowl, rails, cranes, waders and gulls and terns, occurring within

Asia, defined here as the area from Pakistan east to Japan and Siberia and south to Indonesia (excluding Irian Jaya). The text is succinct yet quite detailed for the more difficult species, and the illustrations (86 colour plates) are of a high standard. There are no distribution maps, but a systematic list gives the status of all species by country. The book aims to promote interest in waterbirds and wetland habitats in the region. It will appeal to all Asian waterbird enthusiasts and complements other more general works on this region. IAIN ROBERTSON

**Mountain Reflections.** By **Keith Brockie.** (Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 1993. 128 pages. ISBN 1-85158-557-5. £17.50) Readers of Keith Brockie's previous books will be familiar with the style: a collection of delicate studies in pencil, wash and crayon. The Ptarmigan *Lagopus mutus* and the mountain hare *Lepus timidus* figure prominently; the work on Ptarmigan from egg to full-grown is particularly fascinating. Some pages would have benefited from a little more text (usually restricted to a few lines). There are some fully worked-up paintings, but the sketches of mountain hares within the first few pages are beautifully observed studies which truly delight.

ALAN HARRIS

**Portrait of a Living Marsh: 32 international artists visit northeast Poland.** By **Robin D'Arcy Shillcock.** (Innerec BV, The Netherlands, 1993. 192 pages. ISBN 90-6611-053-B. £25.00) What a marvellous ideal! The Artists for Nature Foundation (ANF), in association with the World Wide Fund for Nature International, invited 32 internationally renowned wildlife artists to visit the Biebrza and Narew marshes in Poland for two weeks in spring 1992. This large-format book describes, with interesting text, magnificent photographs (mostly by Fred F. Hazelhoff) and a great variety of wonderful artwork, the habitats and wildlife of these wild areas in Eastern Europe. With 32 artists from 14 countries, it may be foolish to mention just a few in this review, but art appreciation is a personal matter, and my own favourites are Robert Bateman's Narew marsh, Vadim Gorbатов's elk crossing the Biebrza valley, Bruce Pearson's otter in morning mist, and Chris Rose's reflected cranes. This whole book provides a magnificent documentation of an inspired idea as well as a volume which every art-lover will wish to add to his or her collection; it is a very fine appreciation of an area of wonderful wildlife habitat which *must* be treasured and should be visited.

JTRS

**Atlante degli uccelli svernanti in Lombardia.** Edited by **Lorenzo Fornasari, Luciana Bottoni & Renato Massa.** (Regione Lombardia & Università degli Studi di Milano, 1992. 378 pages. No price given) This *Atlas of Wintering Birds in Lombardy* generally follows the methodology and format of our *Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Lack 1986), using the same field period, 15th November to 28th February. The region of Lombardy in the very north of Italy has an area of about 23,800 km<sup>2</sup>. Distribution within the 323 squares wholly or

partly within this area is shown in blue on a black base map for each species. Abundance is shown by four different sizes of symbol (plus one indicating 'present'). Even if one does not know this part of Italy, it is fascinating to compare and contrast the distributions of, for example, Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*, confined to the southern half of Lombardy, and Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, almost confined to the northern half, Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*, much commoner in the south, Common Redpoll *C. flammea*, almost confined to the north, and Goldfinch *C. carduelis*, found almost everywhere (92.9%). The text is *wholly* in Italian (though it is interesting to see that English names were apparently used by field-workers on the recording cards), but the standard format and very clear diagrams, histograms and graphs make it easy for anyone to use this atlas. There are, however, five wholly blank pages at the back, where brief résumés in English, French or German would probably have been widely appreciated. Production is first-rate, the traditional line-drawings are imaginative and lively, and the whole project is a great credit to all those responsible.

JTRS

**Finding Birds in Southern Morocco.** By **Dave Gosney.** (Gostours, Sheffield, 1993. 28 pages. ISBN 1-898-110-042. Paperback £4.00) Some bird-finding guides are lavishly produced with professional artwork, elegant maps and typesetting, and numerous line and half-tone illustrations. Usually, however, the most useful information is an informal sketch-map by a friend who has recently visited the area, annotated with his own personal comments and supplemented by second-hand notes from other birders. This Gostours booklet falls into the latter category—and is the better for it. It certainly fulfils its stated aim that 'the maps . . . present the information more clearly, more conveniently, or in more detail', and the caveat that they are 'up-to-date, at least for the time being' suggests that Dave Gosney realises the importance of regular revisions. His text also reveals his awareness that areas change from year to year: strangely, a basic fact not acknowledged by some guides—though there are still some generalisations formed from isolated experiences. This book contains a digest of information which will be invaluable to a first-time visitor to this most fascinating and exciting of birding locations, well worth the modest investment (which represents a fraction of the dirhams which a gullible visitor could waste on a local guide or his brother).

BRYAN BLAND