

REVIEWS.

More Songs of Wild Birds. By E. M. Nicholson and Ludwig Koch. (H. F. & G. Witherby.) Gramophone Records and Illustrated. 15s.

PERHAPS the best thing that can be said of these three new double records of British Bird songs is that they are even better than the first set. Not all are of equal merit; but most are extraordinarily good. And, unlike the first records, many of these give clear records of songs that are not very easy for most observers to hear in the open. To listen to a Wood-Lark in almost continuous, full song for two minutes is a rare treat. Those who find difficulty in distinguishing the songs of Blackcap and Garden-Warbler should have much less difficulty after listening to the records of the two species. There is just enough of the characteristic call-note of the Willow-Tit—happily without any background interruptions—to enable many who do not already distinguish it from the Marsh-Tit to go out into the country with hopes of discovering it in districts from which it has not yet been recorded. And so on.

Two of the records might be described as “Studies in Ornithological Cacophony”. One is taken underneath a Heronry, and records the weird bill-clapping and strident cries of old and young Herons, whilst a number of other woodland species (carefully noted in the Programme of the Records) provide a more musical background. And there is a record which includes the clamorous cries of Little Owls and most of the Crow tribe. These records are very amusing, and provide an effective contrast to the song-records. The Curlew record is one of the finest, the Wood-Wren is very good, and so one might go on.

The accompanying book is in this case more strictly a commentary on the records than the first book was. In addition to the useful Programme of the Records, we have vivid accounts of the way in which they were obtained written by Mr. Koch and Mr. Nicholson; the latter, especially, as the observer who was not making the records, can bear witness to the extraordinary difficulties that had to be overcome last spring. Mr. Nicholson also provides a useful account of the life-history of each of the birds whose voices are recorded, and there are good photographs of them all. In fact, another very good fifteen shillings worth. H.G.A.

A Book of Birds. By Mary Priestley. (Gollancz.) Illustrated. 7s. 6d. In this anthology Mrs. Priestley has given us a wide and somewhat haphazard collection of extracts. They range from the Bible to books and papers of the present day, and from those authors who see but charm and poetry in birds to those who view them with discrimination and describe their actions with exactness. The birds concerned are also widely spread and range from the Arctic to the Antarctic and from South America to Malaya.

Mrs. Priestley's aim indeed has been to make a book for everybody “who has ever taken a moment's joy in watching a bird”, and in this she may be said to have succeeded. It is gratifying that she has generously decided to divide her share of royalties between the British Trust for Ornithology and the International Committee for Bird Preservation.

The book is illustrated with most excellent engravings by C. F. Tunnicliffe. Most of the modern wood-cuts of birds which we have seen portray what can only be termed as monstrosities, and one can scarcely imagine any genuine bird-lover looking at them without shuddering at their distortions, and wishing that we might have a Hitler to order their abolition. But no such feelings are evoked by Mr. Tunnicliffe's engravings. These are really like birds, not only in detail but in their characteristic and natural poses. Though some of those of birds in flight are not very successful most are good and not a few very good.