

## REVIEWS

EXTINCT AND VANISHING BIRDS OF THE WORLD.  
By JAMES C. GREENWAY, Jnr. Illustrated by D. M. REID-HENRY.  
(Special Publication No. 13, American Committee for International  
Wild Life Protection, New York, 1958). 518 pages; a coloured  
frontispiece and 86 ink drawings; maps and diagrams.

THIS IS A DISPASSIONATE BOOK, but it loses no effect through the almost completely factual treatment of its subjects. Mr. Greenway has chosen as his part that of a chronicler; that his book will succeed in doing more than merely cataloguing the losses to world avifauna is mainly due to the unimpeded view that such a treatment allows of the birds that are gone for ever and those likely to follow them.

The book is divided into an introduction and summary of the species included, a section on the geography of extinction, separate accounts of all extinct and vanishing forms, a full bibliography, and an appendix listing the museums which contain remains of extinct birds. The professional ornithologist and students of natural history will welcome the ease of reference that the book affords and, if they cannot find all the details that they may wish, the many footnotes and references included will cut down the time of their search for them elsewhere. For the lay reader, the chapter on the geography of extinction will be the most readable, but, if he needs encouragement, the illustrations will lead him on through the species section. Mr. Reid-Henry's style is at times meticulous but always very pleasing. Few living ornithologists will be able to comment on the accuracy of his drawings. However, those who know, for example, species of the genera *Pterodroma*, *Grus*, *Rallus* and *Zosterops* may well ponder, seeing his representations of certain rarer individuals of these groups, on the difficulty of the task that he was given.

Just to turn a few leaves of the book may tempt European ornithologists and bird-watchers merely to regret the passing of the Great Auk (how many of us have at one time cherished fancies of finding this species alive again) and then pass on to note with dissatisfaction the much more numerous losses in other parts of the world. Going deeper into the text they must realise, however, just how large a part was taken in the total erasion and decimation of so many species and sub-species, both avian and terrestrial, by the fore-runners of western civilisation. Not so much perhaps from their actions of exploration and economic development (these can be justified, for Man will always be the world's most needy species), but from what they took along with them and carelessly left behind them. Hungry sailors and pigs, cats and rats and that arch enemy, the Mongoose, can all be counted in this category. Isolated and uncommon species were in many cases defenceless when confronted by such indiscriminate predators and the speed of extinction was then incredible. In others Man merely removed entirely the necessary minimum of habitat. Mr. Greenway includes some interesting factor correlations on

this subject. Some species have successfully contended with these and other sorts of pressure; others have adapted themselves to a new environment but they are comparatively few. The scene is still set for further extirpation. As the manuscript was finished in 1954 and publication was not until 1958, certain recent attempts at preservation and re-establishment, notably the Ne-Ne project at Slimbridge, find scant mention. Such action, still largely unsubsidized in Britain but sensibly supported in North America, points the way. The target for reclamation is immense. One or two breaches have been sandbagged, but disturbance is still at a dangerously high level.

One new factor needs comment, the part to be played by the great number of modern bird-watchers. We should not be innocents. This book will help us all to gain real regret for those species that are gone and which we will never see, and to accept a share of the responsibility that our enjoyment of those that remain to us entails.

D. I. M. WALLACE

THE BIRDS OF BRECKNOCK. By GEOFFREY C. S. INGRAM and H. MORREY SALMON, C.B.E., M.C. (Published by *The Brecknock Society*: reprinted from *Brycheiniog*, Vol. III, 1957). 78 pages. 5s.

THIS AUTHORITATIVE LIST is the result of a painstaking collection of records which goes back for over 30 years. It is based on the only previous list for the county, that of E. Cambridge Phillips (1899), and includes the thoroughly sifted observations of many observers. The authors themselves have explored every corner of the county and are able to give us their personal view on the status of every species. A full introduction summarizes the county's ornithological history and describes its topography.

The list includes 207 species and 4 subspecies which are made up as follows: breeding residents, 75; breeding summer visitors, 26; regular visitors and passage migrants, 18; occasional visitors, vagrants, etc., 92. Eight other species are in square brackets, and perhaps the 1903 report of Rock Pipits breeding in this inland county would have been better placed in square brackets too. There is a useful appendix of place-names with their 4-figure map-references.

A comparison of the present status of the breeding birds with that at the turn of the century shows that, while about two dozen have appreciably decreased, only one dozen have shown a significant increase. A striking feature of these decreased species is that, whereas in the past Man has been clearly responsible for reducing bird numbers, very few of those that have declined in Brecknock this half-century have done so because of any obvious human interference. Of those decreased some have done so in common with many other counties: Merlin, game-birds, crakes, Lapwing, Nightjar, Wryneck, Stonechat, Red-backed Shrike and Gull Bunting. Other decreases are surprising and presumably very much more local: Coot, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Tawny

Owl, Swallow, Jay, Ring Ouzel, Wheatear and Meadow Pipit (and concurrently Cuckoo). The sharpest decline of any has been that of the Nightjar which has changed from abundant to rare in the last 25 years. The most noteworthy increases include Buzzard, Black-headed Gull, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Raven and Nut-hatch. Others which were always numerous and are now probably even more abundant are Pied Flycatcher, Willow Warbler, Garden Warbler, Blackbird and Yellowhammer.

As to the future, one can foresee a continuing decrease of marsh birds, through drainage, and probably of some woodland species, such as Wood Warbler, through the replacing of oak-woods by conifers. On the other hand the conifers are probably favouring such species as Black Grouse, Long-eared Owl, Goldcrest and others.

With the appearance of this hand-list ornithologists are placed further into debt to the remarkable Ingram and Salmon partnership which has already provided them with invaluable bird-lists for five other South Wales counties. It is to be hoped that the present work will stimulate bird-study in what is a most interesting and attractive county which is very poorly off for serious bird-students and bird-ringers.

W.M.C.