

# Short reviews

**Devil Birds: the life of the Swift.** By **Derek Bromhall.** (Hutchinson, London, 1980. 96 pages; 33 colour plates; many black-and-white plates. Hardback, £8.95; paperback, £5.95.) Readable account of the natural history of the Swift by someone who spent much of the summers of 1976 and 1977 filming at the colony in the tower of the University Museum at Oxford which was made famous by David Lack's *Swifts in a Tower*; illustrated by relevant (and often magnificent) photographs. **Survival in the Wild: the adventures of a film maker in Africa.** By **Cindy Buxton.** (Collins, London, 1980. 102 pages; 18 colour plates. £5.95.) Highly readable; sections on Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex* especially interesting. **Bird Atlas of Natal.** By **Digby Cyrus and Nigel Robson.** (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1980. 320 pages; 530 black-and-white line-drawings; 530 distribution maps. £15.00.) Bird-distribution in the South African province of Natal based on fieldwork during 1970-79, with splendidly clear maps showing presence in each of the 12 months of the year for each of the 166 quarter-degree grid 'squares' (for which standard maps are available). A total of 530 species is mapped. Each also has a line-drawing by Tony Clarkson, usually four or five lines of text on world distribution (breeding and wintering) and then two or three lines on habitat within Natal. Nicely produced; a model which, hopefully, birdwatchers in other areas within the African continent will emulate. **Basil**

**Ede's Birds.** Text by **Robert Dougall.** (Severn House, London, 1980. 128 pages; 70 colour illustrations. £9.95.) Produced as a vehicle for Basil Ede's bird-portraits. Not aimed at the twitcher or the biologist, but at bird-lovers and fans of Basil Ede's work. By fostering the enjoyment of birds, such books undoubtedly play their role in conservation. **The Guinness Book of Woodland Birds.** By **Michael Everett.** Illustrations by **R. A. Hume.** (Guinness Superlatives, Enfield, 1980. 160 pages; 50 colour plates; 58 line-drawings; 50 distribution maps. £3.95.) Thoroughly competent little book written for beginners and covering 50 common woodland species with a single colour photograph, a line-drawing by Rob Hume, a map showing distribution within the United Kingdom and a short text for each species. The introduction gives sound general advice on birdwatching. **Nature Detective.** By **Hugh Falkus.** (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1980. 256 pages; numerous black-and-white plates; £2.95). Fascinatingly crammed with photographs of traces of animals (including birds) which can be found in the British countryside. A nice book for browsing, which will inevitably lead to several exclamations of 'I've seen that! I didn't realise it was made by a . . .'. **Vanishing Birds: their natural history and conservation.** By **Tim Halliday.** (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1980. 296 pages; 16 colour plates; 46 black-and-white line-drawings; nine maps. Paperback £2.50.) Paperback version of this

Continued . . .

excellent book, reviewed previously (*Brit. Birds* 71: 543). **Children of the Wing: a study of Swallows.** By Raymond Howe. (Moonraker, Bradford-on-Avon, 1980. 68 pages; four colour illustrations, nine black-and-white line-drawings. £4.95) Story book for, perhaps, the eight- to 12-year-old. At one stage 'Ariel', the 'daughter of "Cumulus" and "Cirrus"', was caught in a mist-net and 'endured the agony' of examination and ringing . . . **Birds of Mountain Regions.** By Lars Jonsson. (Penguin Nature Guides, Harmondsworth, 1979. 132 pages; many colour illustrations. £1.95) This fourth of the series of five small guides should be purchased by all active birdwatchers: the bird portraits are painted by one of the world's supreme bird artists whose ornithologist's eye catches not only the essential plumage characteristics and the species' jizz, but also, quite frequently, wholly new or frequently overlooked identification points. The series arrangement (by habitats rather than by systematic sequence) still annoys and the text is not of the same quality or reliability as the paintings (Citrine Wagtails nesting in Scotland, for instance), but this fourth is just as much a 'must' as were the previous three (see reviews in *Brit. Birds* 71: 595-596; 72: 496). **The Hawaiian Goose: an experiment in conservation.** By Janet Kear and A. J. Berger. (T. & A. D. Poyser, Calton, 1980. 156 pages; one colour plate; 24 black-and-white plates; several line-drawings. £9.00) A splendidly readable and interesting account of the decline, captive breeding and re-introduction; well illustrated and attractively designed. My only regret is that *Branta sandviensis* is referred to as the Nene (which, to me, is a river flowing from Northamptonshire into The Wash and pronounced 'neen') rather than the Ne-ne or the Néné, pronounced 'nay-nay'. Wildfowl-watchers, wildfowl-breeders and conservationists will all welcome this monograph-cum-history of an interesting bird whose fate is still in the balance. **Collins Bird Guide: a photographic guide to the birds of Britain and Europe.** By Stuart Keith and John Gooders. (Collins, London, 1980. 764 pages; 613 colour plates; over 400 range maps. £5.95.) All the photographs are at the front and all the text at the back. Many of the photographs would be useful for reference, but some reproduction is mediocre and the colours are sometimes garish, which could be very misleading to a beginner; other plates are excellently reproduced. Extraordinary

shape (19 × 9½ × 3cm). Nearly all bird books do good, by encouraging an interest in ornithology, but this one is no substitute for Peterson, Mountfort & Hollom (1974, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe*) or Heinzel, Fitter & Parslow (1972, *The Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*). It claims to have 'more than twice as much text as any other standard European field guide', but it is not always helpful and, when difficult identifications are involved, it seems to give up; neither new identification criteria nor advances in technique are apparent. It will be a pity if beginners opt for this rather than for Collins's other very useful field guides.

**Rook.** By Deborah King. (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1980. 25 pages; 13 colour illustrations. £3.95.) Biology in 12 stages through the year for the seven- to 11-year-old, with a page of large print facing an appropriate colour painting. **The Island.** By Ronald Lockley. (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1980. 176 pages; 10 line-drawings. Paperback £1.25.) The story of R. M. Lockley's 13 years living on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, Dyfed, entertainingly written by a naturalist with a natural gift for story telling. **Orielton.** By Ronald Lockley. (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1980. 364 pages; 12 line-drawings. Paperback £1.50.) Full of thoughts, facts and reminiscences: a splendid read from a talented pen. **Birdwatching: a Kingfisher leisure guide.** By Steve Madge. (Ward Lock, London 1980. 125 pages; many colour photographs; some line-drawings. £2.50.) Novice birdwatchers have a wide choice of books to guide them through their first year or so in ornithology. This one is full of sound advice and will do nothing but good. Gremlins (or non-ornithological designers) have, however, been at work, with the first major colour picture in the book (Great Spotted Woodpeckers) misplaced through 90° and some strangely labelled drawings: clearly, an ornithologist should have been allowed to check page-proofs before publication. **Cage and Aviary Birds.** By Richard Mark Martin. Illustrated by Malcolm Ellis. (Collins, London, 1980. 256 pages; numerous colour illustrations. Hardback £6.50; paperback £3.95.) Although nine of the colour plates are devoted to budgerigars, eight to canaries and 16 to various parrots, there are also colour illustrations of over 200 other cage-birds, many of which could well escape and provide

tantalisingly difficult identification problems for birdwatchers (some, of course, are currently in Category D of the British and Irish list). The colour illustrations are the best which I have seen in any cage-bird guide; worth buying for tracking down the identity of that next 'hoodwink'. **The Birds Around Us: New Zealand birds, their habits and habitats.** By Geoff Moon. (Heinemann, Auckland, 1980. 207 pages; 357 colour plates. £20.00.) A total of 357 colour plates, all of them magnificent, excellently reproduced. **The Merlins of the Welsh Marches.** By D. A. Orton. (David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1980. 168 pages; four black-and-white plates. £6.50.) Observations on Merlins during 1971-74, written for your entertainment by someone who clearly gains his entertainment by tracking down, watching and guarding over these small, elusive and vulnerable raptors. Full of vivid descriptions of enthusiastically observed incidents; excellent light reading. **Song-birds.** By Karel Štátný; illustrated by Petr Rob. (Hamlyn, London, New York, Sydney & Toronto, 1980. 216 pages; many colour illustrations, some distribution maps and line-drawings. £2.95.) Translated from the original Czechoslovakian, some 100 species are covered, with texts obviously written mainly to interest the beginner. There are many useful small line-drawings to show nest-sites and so on. Unfortunately, the main illustrations do not match the texts: the birds often look wooden, stance and shape are often wrong and the colour shades are frequently incorrect (a far cry from the excellence of Lars Jonsson's work, for instance). **The Great Bird Illustrators and their Art 1730-1930.** By Peyton Skipwith. (Hamlyn, London, 1979. 176 pages; 65 colour plates. £7.50.) This book draws on nearly 200 plates which originally decorated the back pages of the part-work *Birds of the World* (1969). Peyton Skipwith has made the best of his task to trace the development of the illustrated bird book by selecting 65 plates from this collection although, inevitably, he had, at times, a rather unbalanced choice. Thorburn has three plates, but Gould has 12, and Bewick, who worked in black and white, cannot be included. The brief essays on the 15 artists, and the extended captions to each plate, are well researched with much cogent comment. [ROBERT GILLMOR] **Bird Student: an autobiography.** By George Miksch Sutton. (University of Texas Press, Austin & London, 1980. 216

pages; 10 colour illustrations; 10 black-and-white illustrations. £9.60.) Autobiography of the George Lynn Cross Research Professor Emeritus of Zoology and Curator of Birds at the Stovall Museum of Science and History in the University of Oklahoma; ranges from raising young roadrunners, sailing in Arctic waters and hunting bears to delivering speeches in Pennsylvania. **A Guide to Seabirds on the Ocean Routes.** By Gerald Tuck. Illustrated by Norman Arlott. (Collins, London, 1980. 144 pages; 53 line-drawings. £4.50.) A total of 25 ocean routes (e.g. the British Isles to east coasts of Canada and USA; Cape Town to Buenos Aires) are considered, with those birds likely to be seen mentioned for each stage of the journey. This companion to the same author's *A Field Guide to the Seabirds of Britain and the World* (1978) would certainly be in my suitcase if I was undertaking any of the sea-journeys covered. Norman Arlott's attractive line-drawings are clearly intended to be evocative and decorative and not mainly for identification purposes. **Plovers.** By Richard Vaughan. (Terence Dalton Ltd, Lavenham, 1980. 152 pages; 70 colour and 70 black-and-white photographs by the author. £7.95.) There are surprisingly few books on waders, so this well-produced one is particularly welcome. It can be recommended as a good general introduction to those members of the Charadriidae breeding in Britain and Ireland, though the handling of the taxonomy of the family as a whole is rather weak and out of date. For the plover specialist, the main attractions are the excellent series of photographs and Prof. Vaughan's own observations on plover behaviour which supplement the coverage of the literature. [K. E. L. SIMMONS] **The Island Waterfowl.** By Milton W. Weller. (Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, USA, 1980. 121 pages; many black-and-white illustrations. \$10.95.) An authoritative and fascinating account of the many ducks endemic to tropical and southern hemisphere oceanic islands. Adaptations to island life include plumage changes, reduced reproductive rates and, often, flightlessness. This last increases the vulnerability of the tiny populations of island waterfowl, threatened principally by introduced animals. [MAO] **Butterfly Watching.** By Paul Whalley. (Severn House, London, 1980. 160 pages; 26 colour plates; 41 black-and-white plates. £7.95.) British ones; how to watch and gain enjoyment; well produced. (JTRS)