

Reviews

The Plovers, Sandpipers and Snipes of the World. By Paul A. Johnsgard. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln & London, 1981. 493 pages; 32 colour and 32 black-and-white plates; diagrams, numerous maps and line-drawings. £27.00.

We needed a monograph on the waders or shorebirds (Charadrii) of the world, so this well-produced book by a distinguished professional biologist can be warmly welcomed. Though not an obvious author for such a work, Prof. Johnsgard has done a good job within the limitations imposed by a one-volume format, covering the literature well if not exhaustively and meeting most of my own requirements of a monograph (see *Brit. Birds* 73: 52). It is a pity, however, that space considerations excluded planned introductory chapters on population dynamics, migration, and moulting patterns. Even more unfortunate is the omission of the stone-curlews, the Crab Plover, and the coursers and pratincoles (as well as the seed-snipes and sheathbills), most of which are considered 'good' waders by the majority of authorities.

The brief introduction opens with a review of the wader families and of their taxonomy and relationships; this is supplemented by further discussions at the end of each species-account, a source of continuing interest and instruction. Johnsgard recognises 165 species in eight families and 40 genera, the two largest families—the Charadriidae (plovers and lapwings) and the Scolopacidae (sandpipers, snipes, and allies)—being further divided into sub-families and tribes. Considering the difficulties involved, I find this arrangement mostly sound and satisfactory, though some dissension on details is inevitable. The introduction closes with a review of reproductive biology, which includes a discussion of mating systems and, rather arbitrarily, an assessment of wattle, spur and toe variation in lapwings and of outer rectrix variation in snipes. Near the end of the book comes a glossary explaining the Latin and Greek derivations of generic and species names.

Apart from keys to and brief synopses of families, sub-families, tribes and genera, and keys to the species of all but the smallest genera, the bulk of the remaining text is devoted to the formal species-accounts, covering names, subspecies and range, measurements and weights, description (with brief concluding summaries of features to be looked for 'in the hand' and 'in the field'), habitats and foods, social behaviour, reproductive biology, status and relationships, and suggested reading. For the confusing *Calidris* 'peeps' and *Gallinago* snipes, a summary of field marks is given before the relevant species-accounts. Not every aspect of wader biology and behaviour is covered, understandably, but I personally regret that no consistent treatment of distraction-display and related strategies was attempted.

Most species are illustrated, mainly as adults, either by photographs or by the author's own distinctive text-drawings; additionally, two plates by Jon Fjeldså show downy young, and a painting by James McClelland depicts the adult Eskimo Curlew. The chicks of some 35 species are further depicted, mainly by drawings and in a diagram. The book abounds in figures of heads, including a 23-page comparative guide, so that many species are shown thus more than once, but birds in flight are poorly represented.

This book more than adequately fills the empty niche for a single-volume monograph on the waders, and can be recommended.

K. E. L. SIMMONS

A Field Guide to the Bird Songs of Britain and Europe: record 15. By Sture Palmér and Jeffery Boswall. The Swedish Radio Company, Stockholm, 1980. £5.75.

LP number 15 is a supplement to the highly-acclaimed 14-record series published during 1969-73 as a companion-in-sound to *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Roger Peterson, Guy Mountfort and P. A. D. Hollom. The original series includes over 1,000 vocalisations from 531 species, including many calls as well as songs, and is an invaluable reference for identification purposes. The inadequacy of most written bird-voice transcriptions

can be easily demonstrated. Form a mental impression from the book description before listening to the real thing. What a difference! This new record adds 73 recordings of 54 more species to the collection. They are either recent additions to the European list, or some of those hauntingly labelled 'no known recording' in the original series. They come mainly from the eastern Palearctic and North America; also Turkey, Iran and Nepal. It is inevitable that a few errors will have crept into a compilation such as this: Jeffery Boswall tells me that the Sabine's Gulls *Larus sabini* on record 4 are Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea*, the Veery *Catharus fuscescens* on the new record is a Swainson's Thrush *C. ustulatus*, and the disc notes for Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus humei* on the new record should read at 01.08: 'Recorded mono, wild, Tuva, USSR, June 1975, B. N. Veprintsev and V. V. Leonovitch', and at 01.30: 'Recorded mono, wild, Turkestan, USSR, May 1974, B. N. Veprintsev and V. V. Leonovitch'. On the new record, calls of Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* and Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* will be of especial interest to rarity identifiers, but the major appeal, as for the whole series, is surely an aesthetic one: sit back, with eyes closed, and let imagination fill in the birds and the scenery which go with the sounds. For a start, put me among the breeding colony of Ross's Gulls *Rhodostethia rosea* in northeast Siberia!

P. J. GRANT

LP number 15, or the complete set, can be purchased through British BirdShop, see page xi. Eds