

# Reviews

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**The Changing Countryside.** Edited by John Blunden and Nigel Curry. Christopher Helm, London, 1985. 269 pages; 14 colour plates; 46 black-and-white plates; 18 line-drawings. Paperback, £11.95.

**The Countryside Handbook.** Edited by Alan Rogers, John Blunden and Nigel Curry. Christopher Helm, London, 1985. 98 pages. Paperback, £5.95.

These are complementary volumes, produced by the Open University in association with the Countryside Commission. The *Handbook* is simply a directory and reference to legislation, publications and voluntary and official bodies concerned with the countryside. As such, it is a useful volume, whether or not one agrees with the comments provided on each entry.

The main book, *The Changing Countryside*, was a disappointment. Much of it comprises a tedious account of bureaucratic history and procedures, which needed summarising. And why should material for such a book avoid objective analysis (see p. 20)? The material seemed intensely selective, so the book misses many opportunities. Thus, the extent to which modern agriculture has reversed the effects of the depression of 1885-1939 is not discussed, although, as noted in the author's note on further reading, this needs thorough examination, as do the true impacts of the depression on landscape and wildlife habitats, a subject hardly recognised today. Understanding these points seems essential to any discussion of present events or future action. Nor do the authors even mention the major changes in geographic distribution of farm enterprises, and therefore habitats, although regional changes in the structure of the countryside have been much more intense than the national ones, an important point when neither

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landscape, human population nor wildlife is uniformly distributed. Such regional changes also seem important in their themes of rural needs.

Sadly, the conservation section avoids any real discussion of the impact of farm technology and management on landscapes and wildlife. Yet, when habitat change is increasingly resisted, this must emerge as the strongest influence farming has on wildlife, a point at least recognised by one invited contributor. Here it might be stressed that organic farming is well established in British agriculture, but it works today because its products have scarcity value. Will it be viable if all farmers do it? Discussion of the economics involved here would have been far more useful than the subjective personal views provided.

The hook rightly doubts the efficiency of modern agriculture, but misses the fundamental basis of that doubt—that much of the labour shed directly from farming supports it indirectly in greatly increased ancillary industries, so remaining in food production. Such industries include many small businesses dependent on local agricultural prosperity. When agriculture declines or, perhaps more likely, is deliberately contracted, will this affect such rural employment and rural communities? When rural employment is sustained by bureaucratic artifice, is it sensible to undermine existing sources? Such points needed adequate examination. And why advocate shifting from arable farming to livestock and grassland (p. 154) when health authorities urge us to eat fewer livestock products? Such campaigns have been successful in reducing consumption, hence dairy quotas which severely restrict the opportunities for arable farmers to change. Nor is it true that modern grassland management is necessarily more beneficial to wildlife than modern arable farming. But little is said of the opportunities to make better use of farming, to widen the range of crops arable farmers grow or the uses, particularly industrial, to which we put the crops. This subject is an important research area in Europe today, and crop diversity is already visibly changing in England. What effects will this have on landscape (not everyone loves oil-seed rape!) or wildlife?

This hook has far too narrow a vision to achieve its declared objective of enabling its readers to 'indulge in meaningful debate' on its subject.

MICHAEL SHRUBB

**Statistics for Ornithologists.** By Jim Fowler and Louis Cohen. BTO Guide 22. British Trust for Ornithology, Tring, 1986. 176 pages. Paperback £10.00.

Only 20-30 years ago, statistics were rarely seen in ornithological journals. Now they are commonplace, if still baffling to some readers. While most professional ornithologists writing papers today were probably taught statistics, few of the many amateurs in Britain carrying out valuable studies and wanting to write up their results have that knowledge. In order to raise the ornithological understanding of statistics and, especially, to help the amateurs choose and use the appropriate statistical tests, the BTO has produced this guide.

The 'non-statistically inclined, but possibly interested' reader of this review should know that the hook covers the subject very thoroughly, but may wish to skip the rest of this paragraph. The 'already at least partially knowledgeable' reader will want to know that several introductory chapters explain the basic concepts of statistics, including populations, sampling, means, medians, probabilities, and data transformation; also, very usefully, presentation of data. Then follow chapters on the principal statistical tests (e.g. association using chi-squared), contingency tables, correlations, product moment, regression, measuring differences, differences between means, and analysis of variance. Both parametric and non-parametric tests are described as appropriate.

So what does this guide offer ornithologists which other available guides to statistics for biologists do not? For a start, ornithological data are used in the examples. Instead of the inevitable tomato plants, differently coloured flowers, or numbers of mice, here are weights and measurement of Dunlins and Robins, and observations of tits at bird tables or in different habitats. This use of 'familiar' data may ease the learning process for would-be ornithological statisticians.

More importantly, the basis and use of statistics are explained in more detail, while the very useful cautions and restrictions on applying each test are fuller and clearer than any I have previously read. There are, however, two areas where I feel the authors could have been even more helpful. First, in guiding potential users to the test they might require, and, secondly, in giving guidance in the correct design of studies.

In their Preface (but who reads this other than reviewers?), the authors rightly recommend

that the book be read through from the beginning. Whilst that is undoubtedly the correct approach for a student, I cannot help feeling that, clear though the introductory chapters are, a more direct key to the different tests might have helped potential users without the necessary time, or perhaps patience, to find the most appropriate test for their data.

Chapter 1 states: 'A programme of fieldwork should be planned anticipating the statistical methods that are appropriate to the eventual analysis of the data. Attaching some statistical treatment as an afterthought to make the study seem more "respectable" is unlikely to be convincing.' In view of this admirably clear statement, it is disappointing that the authors did not follow it with any detailed guidance to the potential user, merely suggesting another book on this admittedly large subject.

These fairly small criticisms apart, this is a worthy addition to the long line of BTO guides, and one that I can strongly recommend.

M. A. OGLIVIE

**Observers Birds, 50th Anniversary Edition. By Rob Hume.** Frederick Warne, London, 1987. 192 pages; 171 colour illustrations. Paperback, £3.50.

Although I was 'raised' on the Rev. C. A. Johns' *British Birds in their Haunts*, the first bird book I owned was *The Observer's Book of Birds*. It went everywhere with me, in my hip pocket, and I wore out (eventually, for it was a durable little publication) two copies.

Now we have a completely new, golden jubilee, edition by Rob Hume, and, for this reviewer, comparisons with the earlier version are inevitable.

To take the credit side first, the new text is so much more informative that it exposes, I fear, the inadequacy of its much-loved forerunner. Let the following compared examples speak for themselves.

REDSTART, 1937 'Haunt'

'Not very definite, usually near trees.'

REDSTART, 1987 'Habitat'

'Deciduous woods and parks with old trees, especially oak; also bushy woodland edges on hillsides and rocky slopes with scattered trees.'

REED WARBLER, 1937 'Notes'

'The song is a warble containing some of the harsh notes of the Sedge Warbler but lacking the volume and exuberance of that bird. There is also a scolding "churr".'

REED WARBLER, 1987 'Voice'

'Includes a low "churr". The song is rather low, rambling, with each phrase repeated two or three times to give a distinctive rhythm of churring, squeaky and chirping notes, and lacking the Sedge Warbler's vehemence—*chrr chrr trik trik trik chirup chirup* etc.'

In addition to body length, weights are now provided and, as is appropriate in 1987, both are in metric. Particularly satisfying is the fact that all (instead of half) the plates are in colour, including five additional ones by Robert Gillmor and one by Ernest C. Mansell.

On the debit side, I do question the wisdom of retaining the original Thorburn plates. No matter how attractive they may be, they fall somewhat short of modern standards of communication, with, for example, most of the waders depicted only in breeding plumage. And when I remember my tattered hip-pocket copy, I feel sure that there is a need for a hard-back edition.

Selecting 171 species to feature in a beginner's book is not easy. Fifty years ago, S. Vere Benson indulged herself with White-tailed Eagle, Golden Oriole, Hoopoe, Waxwing and Blue-headed Wagtail. Rob Hume's selection is sensibly work-a-day, but recalling the sequence in which I got my lifers, I regret the absence of, for example, Black-necked Grebe and Jack Snipe, and wonder about the retention of Avocet, a species which—as the saying goes—needs no introduction.

ROBERT SPENCER

**Waders: their breeding, haunts and watchers. By Desmond and Maimie Nethersole-Thompson.** T. & A. D. Poyser, Calton, 1986. 400 pages; 32 black-and-white plates; over 100 line-drawings. £18.00.

Dr Desmond Nethersole-Thompson has been a student of Scottish Highland birds for over 50 years and is well known for his monographs on Greenshanks, Snow Bunting, Dotterel, and

Scottish Crossbill. His contribution to our knowledge of these species, and Highland ecology in general, has been enormous. This new book, written with his wife Maimie and with contributions from sons Desmond and Patrick and others of the Thompson family, differs in covering a group rather than a single species. Like *Pine Crossbills* (1975) and *Greenshanks* (1979), *Waders* is published by T. & A. D. Poyser and is, as we have come to expect from these publishers, beautifully produced, printed and bound.

Potential readers should not be misled by the title, which suggests a comprehensive and year-round account. In fact, 'waders' are equated with 'nesting waders', and the book has almost nothing to say about the seven or more months of the year when the birds are absent from the breeding grounds, or the people who study them during that period. There are introductory chapters about waders, 'wader-watchers', and spacing and dispersion, but the core of the book is a series of 18 species accounts, mostly grouped by habitat. Shorter accounts follow for a further 16 species classified as 'new or returning' or 'pipe-dream' waders, and then a bibliography, five tables, and some sonagrams, mostly of rarely heard calls. Donald Watson's illustrations are, as ever, ornithologically accurate as well as pleasing and appropriate to the text. The photographs are mostly rather jaded portraits of incubating birds.

The real strength of the book lies in Dr Nethersole-Thompson's enthusiasm for nesting waders and in his ability to write passionately and interestingly about his subject. Many will enjoy it purely as a good read. Despite its anecdotal style, it also has value as a scientific text, both as a review of the literature and because it contains many previously unpublished data collected by the authors and their correspondents. To some extent, the authors are acting as a unique point of contact between the scientific community and various named and un-named nest-hunters whose efforts often would not otherwise result in any contribution to the general fund of knowledge. The bibliography is an extensive one, albeit with a bias towards early work, but it is unfortunate that many references quoted in the text are missing, and that there are several errors in alphabetical ordering. Obvious errors are most unusual in a Poyser book, but, in addition, at least two dozen authors or correspondents are mis-spelt, either in the text or the bibliography, and other mistakes or inconsistencies of spelling and punctuation are not difficult to find.

While the authors put themselves firmly in the conservation camp, this book may not be to the taste of birdwatchers who are especially concerned about species protection in the Highlands and Scandinavia, nor those who are squeamish generally about disturbing birds at the nest. The preface states that the authors' own egg-collecting has ceased, but the opportunity to condemn the practice is conspicuously missed, and some egg-thieves could feel that the many birds'-nesting stories are, if anything, an encouragement to their illegal activities. One such story, of pointless disturbance to Little Ringed Plover, then a rare new colonist, occupies nearly a quarter of the short species text. Surely, in the late 1980s such irresponsible behaviour should be forgotten or condemned, rather than retold with apparent admiration?

JOHN MARCHANT

**Wildfowl in Great Britain.** By Myrfin Owen, G. L. Atkinson-Willes and D. G. Salmon; illustrated by Sir Peter Scott. Second edn. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986. 613 pages; 69 line-drawings; numerous maps. £30.00.

Twenty-three years after the publication of the first edition comes the long-awaited second edition. But let us be clear from the outset, this is no mere updated reprint. Though it follows the same general format as the original edition, it is in fact completely rewritten. In the data that are reported, however, it summarises the old and then carries on where the first edition left off.

It is, of course, a vehicle with which to report the nationwide wildfowl counts carried out monthly each winter since 1947, year in and year out, by an indefatigable band of volunteer counters. As such, it is a major record of Britain's ornithological heritage that will prove to be of immense value to all who are interested in Britain's ornithology and its welfare.

The format of the book is that of the first edition. An introductory section, describing the wildfowl counts and counting methods, ringing techniques and results, is followed by the first of three major sections. This is a detailed, area-by-area, site-by-site review of wildfowl habitats and wildfowl numbers throughout Great Britain; Ireland is not included. The major sites and areas are all described, some in considerable detail; there are many maps. Wildfowl counts,

both for all species combined and for individual species separately, are freely quoted. Often, the data go back through the period covered by the first edition.

The next major section deals successively with each of the various British wildfowl species. These accounts have full-page distribution maps—both winter and summer if appropriate—the results of important counts, graphs illustrating population changes, maps showing migration flyways, and so on. The length varies with the species; for example, the account for the two races of White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* runs to nine pages, while that of Bean Goose *A. fabalis* merits only two. The scarce species are all covered, but only briefly.

The final section deals with conservation issues and usefully reviews a number of important topics. The several major proposals for reclamation and barrage schemes are described, and their general implications for wildfowl are discussed in a laudably objective manner. Other aspects of the influence of man are also covered. Shooting, recreation, agricultural practices, mining, sand and gravel extraction: the coverage is thorough.

Sir Peter Scott's delightful line-drawings are generously scattered throughout the book, and each of the species-accounts is headed with an appropriate portrait. Some of the drawings are old friends from the first edition, but many others are specially drawn for this new one. It was perhaps to be expected that the colour plates of the original edition would not survive.

The whole is a considerable work of scholarship, and is a more than worthy successor to the first edition. It will be of great value to those for whom conservation issues are important, and to all who have more than a passing interest in wildfowl. Many will accept that, even though it may seem moderately expensive, the wealth of wildfowl information that it contains will more than justify what I am sure will prove to be a valued addition to their book shelves.

R. J. CHANDLER