

# Reviews

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**Where to Watch Birds in East Anglia.** By Peter Clarke and Margaret Clarke. Christopher Helm, London, 1987. 262 pages; 16 black-and-white plates; 40 line-drawings; 41 maps. Paperback £8.95.

This book is a guide to the birds and their habitats of the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire. Peter and Margaret Clarke have combined their own extensive knowledge, gained from a lifetime's birdwatching, mainly in Norfolk, with both published and privately provided information from a wide variety of sources, to produce an excellent and very readable guide to the region's avifauna.

Each county is divided into areas (Norfolk six, Suffolk six, Essex nine and Cambridge five). These are illustrated with maps and then information is provided under the headings 'Habitat', 'Species', 'Timing', 'Access' and 'Calendar'.

It is the extensive and very readable habitat accounts which make this book far more than a simple account of what birds to find where. The authors have given a fascinating and thoroughly absorbing account of the history and changes that have occurred in recent years, clearly showing the need to conserve and manage the habitats that have survived urban and agricultural developments. The habitat sections may cause even the most experienced birder to pick up an unfamiliar field guide—one of the British Floras and Faunas—as many species of plants and animals peculiar to particular habitats are mentioned, often with an account of their status.

The species sections do not cover universally common species, except where large numbers may be seen on migration or in large flocks in winter quarters. Each area's special species are well described and many references are given to rare and semi-rare species that have occurred in the past, and that may reappear. These often lengthy descriptive passages are complemented by the 'Calendar' sections and, further, by the county check lists to be found in the appendix.

The 'Timing' sections are brief, and give a comment about seasons and favourable weather conditions. They also give an indication of the best tides and times of day, where these are important.

The 'Access' sections describe accurately a route to the birding area from the nearest town, but do not give details of internal layout of paths and hides at reserves because most reserves are so well organised in this respect nowadays.

The 'Calendar' sections are basic lists of resident species and separate lists of species likely to be encountered in each area in each season.

There are useful appendices listing organisations, reserves, some additional sites, birdwatchers' code of conduct, a further reading list, and the county check lists, with Huntingdonshire and Peterborough listed separately.

The book is illustrated with maps, black-and-white photographs, and 40 vignettes by Alan Wood, which are reminiscent of the work of Richard Richardson, to whose memory Peter and Margaret Clarke dedicate this very enjoyable and useful book.

ANDY LOWE

**Les Oiseaux de France en Concert. vol. 1. J'écoute vivre . . . Le Marais, L'Etang, vol. 1. Le Chant de Nos Oiseaux. vols. 1-3. Book cassettes by Daniel J. Pernin. 80FF; 85FF; 80FF; 85FF; 85FF.**

Since April 1986, Daniel Pernin has produced his first seven cassettes of bird songs and calls. These are five of them. *Les Oiseaux de France en Concert* is a straightforward sound picture of a Grey Heron colony and its surrounds, followed by a long sequence of singing Garden Warbler with a Blackcap coming in very briefly at the end. Side 2 continues the useful comparison between the two warblers, with Blackcap to the fore, singing both ecstatic and non-ecstatic song, and Garden Warbler performing nearby; this is followed by 3½ minutes of superb song plus calls of Golden Orioles with a varied background chorus. There are no announcements, and each side lasts about 13 minutes.

*J'écoute vivre* . . . is a series presenting bird sounds of different habitats. This first volume, covering wetlands, lasts about 15 minutes per side. Again there are no announcements, but, as with the previous tape, sequence of recordings is listed (French names only) on the back cover of the cassette 'book'. This tape, most of it recorded in east-central France, provides a nice atmospheric half-hour. The mixed colony of Night Herons and Little Egrets with young—you can almost 'feel' the stench—is well worth a listen for the 'behavioural noises' of the birds. Perhaps the main value is the songs of Bluethroat and of wetland warblers—Cetti's, Grasshopper, Savi's, Reed, Great Reed, Sedge and Marsh, the last-named with an excellent three minutes' worth of marvellous and varied mimicry. The general quality throughout is excellent, with adequate time devoted to each individual recording, all of which are admirably clear.

The series *Le Chant de Nos Oiseaux* presents the songs of passerines likely to be heard in France (and, of course, in many other European countries). Volumes 1-3 cover 56 species (17 warblers) in a total running time of about 90 minutes, thus giving lengthy sequences for each species; many calls, of various types, are also included, making this a particularly useful series. The author states that this series was conceived to enable the beginner to learn progressively—and I think he has succeeded. Of especial interest are the French 'dialects' of Great Tit (vol. 1) and of Goldcrest (vol. 3), and I like the way that immediate comparisons are made between, for example, Wood and Bonelli's Warblers, Pied and Collared Flycatchers, and Treecreeper and Short-toed Treecreeper (all vol. 3). The clarity of recordings is first-rate and the arrangement is sensible and helpful. Each individual recording is preceded by a simple species-name announcement (in French: if in doubt, refer to Peterson *et al.*'s field guide). These tapes are well worth hearing—for pleasure, or to refresh the memory; and anybody contemplating a trip to France (always to be recommended!) and needing to acquaint himself/herself with the voices of, say, Orphean Warbler, Melodious Warbler or Ortolan Bunting would profit from obtaining a set.

DAVID A. CHRISTIE

**Ducks of Sub-Saharan Africa.** By Gordon Lindsay Maclean. Illustrations by Gail Darroll. Acorn Books, Randberg, South Africa, 1986. xvi + 150 pages; 26 colour plates; many line-drawings. Standard edition £65; collectors' edition £200.

Dimensions of 17" × 13" (43 × 33 cm) give the exquisite paintings of Gail Darroll as handsome a setting as they deserve. Each of the southern African species of wildfowl is illustrated, both sexes where different and in some cases also the downy young, swimming or standing among rushes, water-lilies, or other typical vegetation. Though slightly old-fashioned in design, being roughly oval with generous white margins, the effect is extremely pleasing, while the technical expertise shown in the meticulous representation of feather and down is great, indeed. Just occasionally, I felt that brighter colours were needed, for example on the males of Pintail, Shoveler and Garganey, but the colouring of most species is true to life.

The text is thoroughly researched and competently written, essays of up to 2,000 words covering description, derivation of name, range (with a clear map), biology, behaviour, and so on. The author has perhaps failed in his stated aim of producing 'lyrical and evocative . . . words to match the emotion of the colours of the paintings', though he does say what a hard task that would be. Nor does he really bring the birds alive to the reader. But, with paintings as beautiful as these, that matters not at all.

Charming line-drawings are also scattered through the book—a quality production of which the publishers, Acorn Books, and the South African printers, can be justly proud.

M. A. OGILVIE

**A Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific.** By H. Douglas Pratt, Phillip L. Bruner, and Delwyn G. Berrett. Illustrated by H. Douglas Pratt. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1987. 409 pages; 45 colour plates; 5 black-and-white plates; 42 line-drawings. Hardback £33.50; paperback £13.30.

This is the first book to cover all the birds of the vast area of tropical Polynesia, with the entire Hawaiian archipelago, Micronesia and Fiji. All species which regularly occur (or which did occur) receive detailed treatment; rarities are covered briefly, with adequate references to more detailed texts; an appendix deals with hypothetical, enigmatic and temporarily established species (exotics) which cannot unequivocally be included in the islands' avifauna.

The book comprises four interrelated parts: an introductory section devoted to birding techniques in general, and in the tropical Pacific in particular; colour plates with accompanying thumb-nail notes; species accounts; and appendices including regional checklists, maps and a glossary. An extensive bibliography is included, and the index doubles as a checklist. Species accounts are detailed with sections on appearance, habits, voice, identification, occurrence, references, other names and extremely useful taxonomic 'signpost notes' where appropriate.

The myriad nature of the region creates particular difficulties for the reader unfamiliar with its geography, but they have been anticipated. Regional checklists, detailing the status of each species on all main islands, are presented for the Hawaiian islands, Micronesia, central Pacific islands, central Polynesia, southeastern Polynesia and Fiji. The complementary series of eight regional maps enables the reader to locate all islands mentioned in the text with ease. The introductory sections fully explain general issues relevant to visitors to the region: continental versus oceanic islands, kinds of oceanic islands, tropical Pacific habitats, island birding, and, most importantly, conservation.

The plates are superb and depict plumage variations where necessary. Of particular interest is the collection of illustrations of the famous and fantastic Hawaiian honeycreepers (Drepanidinae), widely known to biologists as an example of adaptive radiation. Despite their fame, I do not know of another easily obtainable collection of illustrations of this group in a single volume. Here we find them all, presented on just three plates for wonderment and ease of comparison. Prospective visitors have a grim shock in store: 15 of Hawaii's endemics are extinct, and the majority of those remaining are endangered.

This book is a brilliantly cohesive presentation of the birdlife of Earth's most disparate region, and I find it impossible to propose a significant criticism. It represents a landmark in the development of ornithology, and a revolution in the prospects for Pacific-island conservation. It will assist the effort to banish the spectre of extinction by raising public interest. As the populations of many of the region's remarkable species continue to dwindle, let us hope its arrival is not too late.

ROD MARTINS

**Foraging Theory.** By David W. Stephens and John R. Krebs. Princeton University Press, 1987. 247 pages. Hardback £26.70, paperback £9.70.

Studies of bird behaviour have changed over the last decade. The old approach was to describe everything—diet, habitat, courtship or even the scratching behaviour—in as much detail as possible. The modern approach takes an evolutionary perspective and asks *why* animals have evolved the behaviour they possess.

One of the many productive consequences of this new perspective is an approach, known as optimal foraging theory, which looks at the costs and benefits of the decisions made by animals. For example, we now understand why animals choose certain food items, why they prefer one location to another, and why they bring selected items back to the nest. As a result, we have gained a deeper insight into the behaviour of the many organisms studied; these include herons, Tufted Ducks, Redshanks, Oystercatchers, Great Tits, starlings, hummingbirds, wheatears, swallows, university students and Cree Indians.

This book is excellent, but very esoteric. Practically the entire book is devoted to theory and mathematical gymnastics, with most of the descriptions of the field studies relegated to one table. I suspect this book will not find its way into many *Barbour* jackets or onto many birdwatchers' bookshelves.

W. J. SUTHERLAND