



REVIEWS

In Search of the Cirl Bunting.

By Andrew Cole.

Andrew Cole, Devon. 1993. 127 pages; 26 colour plates; 20 black-and-white plates; 10 distribution maps; 4 line drawings; 10 tables; 3 graphs. ISBN 0 9521242 0 3. £25.00.

After years of casual birding, Andrew Cole took early retirement and moved to south Devon. It was not long before he discovered the satisfaction of focusing on a single species: the enigmatic Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*.

This book tells the story of the Cirl Bunting in Britain and all those who have studied it, going back to Colonel Montagu. It includes the results of Cole's personal studies covering 90-100 days per year over four years. In the introduction, he expresses admiration for the early naturalists, such as Walpole-Bond and Bannerman. He says they wrote books to be

read, weaving factual information in such a way that one arrives easily upon their conclusions. *In Search of the Cirl Bunting* is written in the same easy style. The six chapters cover the history of the species in Britain, the bird and its behaviour, the summer months, the winter months, breeding and a discussion of the factors which have contributed to the species' decline. It is very much a personal account and has no pretension of being a comprehensive monograph. It is a good read, written by an enthusiast for enthusiasts.

Humphrey Sitters

Where to Watch Birds in Eastern Europe.

By Gerard Gorman. Illustrated by Clive Byers & Mark Andrews.

Hamlyn, London, 1994. 214 pages; 8 colour plates; 34 maps and 30 line drawings. ISBN 0-600-57976-X. £16.99.

With the fall of Russian Communism, there has been a brightening on the Eastern horizon, and Western birdwatchers are awakening to the lure of rare European birds in a region rapidly becoming more accessible. Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria are featured, whilst 'European Russia' is covered briefly. This clearly presented package is enlivened by bold illustrations and aims to whet the appetite by pointing the way in to a relatively unknown area with plenty of scope for new discoveries. The format is familiar, and the site reviews cover a good variety of locations, some accompanied by excellent maps—but why not more? Having

been pointed vaguely in the right direction, the visiting birdwatcher might still have trouble finding the best areas. A calendar outlines the best times to visit and 'specialities' are highlighted, although sometimes the choices can be strange. For example, a widespread species may be chosen (Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* for the wonderful Biebrza Marshes in Poland) or one so unusual it would hardly seem worth mentioning (Rufous Scrub-robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* for Ropotamo in Bulgaria): some sort of country checklist and status report would have been more useful. Essential reading, however, for any visitor.

Nik Borrow

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds.

vol. 2: raptors to lapwings.

Edited by Stephen Marchant & P. J. Higgins.

Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993. 984 pages; 70 colour plates; numerous line-drawings and maps. ISBN 0-19-553069-1. £150.00.

The sheer bulk (1,400 pages) of the first volume of this ambitious project necessitated its production as two separate books, but this volume is down to 984 pages and is thus one substantial tome. The number of species is down from 196 to 118 and colour plates are down from 96 to 70: consequently, we can

now expect an eventual six volumes rather than the original five. The price, alas, has increased by 20%.

This volume covers all the birds of prey, such fascinating species as Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata*, Takahē *Porphyrio mantelli*, Plains-wanderer *Pedionomus torquatus* and the highly

endangered Black Stilt *Himantopus novaezelandiae*, and all the waders through to lapwings. Texts for well-studied species such as Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* run to 16½ pages, while Blacksmith Lapwing (Plover) *Vanellus armatus*, with one record on Iles Crozet, gets ¼ page, and even the introduced Feral Chicken *Gallus gallus* gets eight pages.

I have nothing but praise for the general layout, the clear typeface (better than in *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*), the capital-letter subheadings and thoughtful utilisation of bold type, which all combine to make 'HANZAB' a delight to use. A space-saving ploy in this volume is the use of a distribution map that includes much of Indonesia, New Guinea and some southwest Pacific islands, thus for many species there is no need for a World map as well.

All 70 colour plates are extremely attractive: 63 are by J. N. Davies (who did all the plates in volume 1) and the other seven (covering some of the game-birds, crakes and rails) are by P. Marsach, B. Jarrett and F. Knight. The degree of accuracy seems generally very high,

and the colour tones are excellent, and my only criticism relates to the body shape of the flying plovers and lapwings, which look rather unlife-like. The style of caption has been changed in this volume, numbers now appearing on the plates and the space-wasting quarter-page facsimiles being abandoned, and a page-number reference to the appropriate text is now included also.

In the first volume, it was highly regrettable that the British Antarctic Survey and the United States Bird Banding Laboratory were unwilling to contribute details of their innumerable banding recoveries of Antarctic species, whereas 11 other schemes did collaborate. Now, however, neither the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme nor the New Zealand National Banding Scheme has co-operated, which strikes me as extraordinary and, indeed, shameful: I can only presume that ornithological politics and professional jealousies are responsible.

I heartily commend this and the previous volume to everyone with an interest in Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds. *Nick Dymond*

BIRDING Database (computer disc, monthly photographic library, plus manual).

BIRDING Database, Melton Constable, 1994. Minimum subscription 12 months payable in advance. 3 issues £30.00, 6 issues £55.00, 12 issues £105.00.

There are several computer bird databases for storing your bird records by species, date, place, etc., but this one adds a new dimension by offering high-quality colour photographs as screen images. Using clever compression software, each photograph takes up minimal space on your hard disk, though you will need a good-quality colour display of 800 × 600 with 256 colours (16.7 million colours gives an even better image). This is, in effect, the first computer-based bird part-work. Each month, a new disk adds at least 20 new photographs, with accompanying text, to your collection, plus a longer illustrated identification article.

Photographs of recent rarities are promised. The database is not, though, restricted to the illustrated species and one can write lengthy notes as well as input basic information for each species entry. There are good search facilities, and both lists and reports can be generated and printed. Although you can have bird photographs on your computer screen using a CD-ROM, the text on a CD-ROM cannot be added to or changed as it can here. I was impressed both by the innovative concept and by the ease of use, as well as by the quality of the photographs.

Malcolm Ogilvie

'British BirdShop' subsidises 'BB'

Please order all your bird books by using the British BirdShop order forms which are included in *BB* each month (pages ix & x this month). All the profits received by *BB* go directly towards funding extra pages, extra photographs and the use of colour illustrations within *BB* itself. By using the POST FREE service provided by British BirdShop, you not only receive the friendliest, quickest and most efficient mail-order bird-book service, but also help to improve the contents of *BB*, and hold down the subscription price, to everyone's benefit. Thank you for supporting us.