



Reviews

HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE WORLD. VOL. 5. BARN-OWLS TO HUMMINGBIRDS

Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott & Jordi Sargatal.

Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, 1999. 759 pages; 76 colour plates; numerous photographs; box features; 736 species accounts with maps. ISBN 84-87334-25-3. Hardback, £110.00.

In praising earlier volumes of this astonishing tour de force, *HBW* reviewers have practically exhausted the lexicon of superlatives. This volume is of exactly the same very high standard, which can hardly be improved upon. A true handbook, it is a weighty, handsome, magnificently illustrated, authoritative, comprehensive, up-to-date compilation of biological information concerning one-twelfth of the World's birds: the barn-owls, strigid owls, nightjars, swifts, hummingbirds and their bizarre and lesser-known relatives. Each

species account is complete, with a colour map of World range, taxonomic and descriptive notes, a list of subspecies, mini-essays on habitat, foraging, breeding and movements, a responsible statement on status and conservation, and an ample bibliography. All species and many subspecies are portrayed in the delightful and informative plates, by 19 renowned artists who have somehow been persuaded to paint in similar styles.

The orders embrace ten families, each starting with a lengthy and scholarly but easy-to-read essay, generously illustrated with

new and stunning colour photographs, with well-researched discussion of systematics, morphology, habitat, habits, voice, food and feeding, breeding, movements, relationship with Man, and status and conservation. Some essays summarise what follows in the species accounts, and others go much farther: the hummingbird and owl family essays amount to 175 pages. You will be enthralled to read them and delighted by the photographs depicting the weird and wonderful lives of oilbirds, frogmouths, potoos, owl-nightjars and tree-swifts (to titillate you with some of the less familiar family names). Wonderful birds!

Pervading the entire work is the conservation message, so ably spelled out by Nigel Collar in his 16-page Foreword to this volume, which should be compulsory reading for all of the World's politicians, developers and consumers - i.e. all of us - for it tells what will be the shape of life on Earth before we have moved very far into this new millennium.

C. H. Fry



A FIELD GUIDE TO THE RAPTORS OF EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

By William S. Clark, with illustrations by N. John Schmitt.

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999. 371 pages; 48 colour plates and 193 colour photographs. ISBN 0-19-854661-0. Paperback, £25.00.

This field guide covers all Western Palearctic diurnal raptors, including vagrants: 54 species in total. The bulk of the book is taken up with 48 high-quality plates and a separate section of species accounts averaging four to five pages per species. The distribution maps are clear and up to date and

descriptions of plumage are reasonably thorough, but little space is devoted to flight characteristics, despite their importance in the identification of many raptors. An appendix includes three to seven photographs of each species, most taken by the author, and not all of the highest quality.

Whilst this is undoubtedly an attractive and well-produced book, it is unclear at whom it is aimed. For those without a special interest in raptors, both the *Collins Bird Guide* (1999) and *The Handbook of Bird Identification* (1998) cover most West Palearctic species well and include illustrations that, to my eye, are as good as, if not better than, those in this volume. For raptor enthusiasts looking for more detailed information, Dick Forsman's *The Raptors of Europe and the Middle East* (1999) has a more comprehensive text and a far superior collection of photographs.

Ian Carter

BIRDLIFE IN OMAN

By Hanne Eriksen & Jens Eriksen.
Al Roya Publishing, Muscat, 1999.
99 pages; map; over 150 coloured
plates. Hardback, £19.95.

should be enough to prompt anybody interested in bird photography and birds of the Middle East to rush to obtain this attractive book.

As well as a really breathtaking portfolio of truly outstanding photographs, there is a brief text on all the regions of Oman and their habitats. A map shows how to get around this large and relatively undiscovered country. It is, however, the photographs that make it almost impossible to put the book down. It is hard to pick out favourites, but the Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* attempting to devour an Arabian Toad *Bufo arabicus* (cf. *Brit. Birds* 91: plate 74) is stunning. Others depict rarely photographed species such as Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, Collared Kingfisher *Todirbampus chloris* and Sooty Gull *Larus bemprichii*. Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola* is still not on my list, so its stunning image reminds me to get back to the Middle East soon.



The United Arab Emirates, and even Yemen, have long been popular with birders from Europe, but I can recommend Oman as an extension to those countries. Ecotourism is being encouraged, and access and facilities are excellent. There are many bird secrets still to be unlocked, and, should you go, you will find this wonderful book an ideal companion.

Derek Moore

To anyone who follows the coveted *British Birds* Bird Photograph of the Year award, the Eriksens will be no strangers. They have won four times in the last decade. This

**ROTHIEMURCHUS:
NATURE AND PEOPLE ON
A HIGHLAND ESTATE
1500-2000**

Edited by T. Chris Smout
& Robert A. Lambert.
Scottish Cultural Press,
Dalkeith, 1999. 150 pages;
black-and-white
photographs and line-
drawings.
ISBN 1-84017-033-6.
Paperback, £9.99.

This book presents a series of papers that describe, in piecemeal fashion, the human and natural history of the famous Rothiemurchus estate. Of most interest are perhaps the accounts of the long-term management of the estate's woodlands and their remaining biodiversity. Broader issues of tourism and land ownership are also tackled.

Martin Collinson

ALSO RECEIVED

*The Origin and
Evolution of Birds*

By Alan Feduccia. (Yale University Press, London. 466 pages. ISBN 0-300-07861-7. Hardback £45.00, Paperback £17.95) (First edition reviewed *Brit. Birds* 90: 251.)

**WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS
IN SWITZERLAND**

By Marco Sacchi, Peter Ruegg & Jacques Laesser;
translated by
Michael Wilson.
A & C Black, London, 1999.
192 pages; 79 black-and-
white photographs
and maps.
ISBN 0-7136-5183-0.
Paperback, £14.99.

This guide covers 45 sites with, for each one, a brief general introduction, followed by information under a number of headings: Recommended routes (walks of up to 15 km), Calendar, Useful tips, Access, Accommoda-

tion, Site protection, Disabled access, and Nearby sites. The site accounts are enhanced by clear maps and some excellent black-and-white habitat photographs. A factor in the authors' choice of sites was their accessibility by public transport (Switzerland has 'the densest and most efficient public transport system in the world'). Although such guides are not designed to be read from cover to cover, I still found the repetition for virtually every site of the problems of disturbance rather patronising. For anyone unfamiliar with the country, the lack of a site index is regrettable, though there is a useful checklist of the birds of Switzerland.

Not one of the best of its genre, this book may not appeal

much to those birders used to doing their own research when planning a trip. It would, however, be useful for someone with a more general interest who is visiting Switzerland.

Ian Dawson



ATLAS DAS AVES
INVERNANTES DO
BAIXO ALENTEJO

By Goncalo L. Elias, Luis M. Reino, Tiago Silva, Ricardo Tome & Pedro Gerales.
Sociedade Portuguesa Para o Estudo das Aves, Lisbon, 1999.
416 pages; 173 illustrations;
173 maps; numerous tables
and graphs.
Paperback, £28.99.

This wintering bird atlas covers approximately one-sixth of Portugal: the horizontal band immediately north of the Algarve and south of Estremadura and the Alto Alentejo. This region is characterised by a low density of human population (17 per km²), but a diversity of habitats, with coastal lagoons, scattered lakes, thickets with strawberry trees and oleander, cork-oak groves and forests, sandy heaths and dunes with pines, olive planta-

tions, vineyards, almond orchards, and rice fields.

This is a standard-format distribution atlas, but, for the average *British Birds* reader, this one stands out, since the Portuguese text is complemented by extensive and excellent English translations (condensed to about one-third of the length of the original, but providing everything which an English-speaking reader would need).

Each species receives double-page spread treatment, the attractive maps (with blue dots) occupying one-third of a page, a black-and-white illustration another one-third, with a page of Portuguese text, and one-third of a page of English translations.

The British visitor would surely appreciate Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis*, Wood Larks *Lullula arborea*, Zitting Cisticolas *Cisticola juncidis* and Sardinian Warblers *Sylvia melanocephala* in almost every square,

and a good scattering of Black-shouldered Kites *Elanus caeruleus*, Little Bustards *Tetrax tetrax* and Calandra Larks *Melanocorypha calandra*.

An example of the interest that this atlas would provide for British readers can be shown by a quote: 'The Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus brehmii* is a common breeder throughout Portugal showing an apparent preference for the western and southern parts of the country. During the winter the species commonly detected is the Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*. ... Sadly the fate awaiting many Common Chiffchaffs migrating to southern Portugal is to be trapped for human consumption, together with countless thousands of other songbirds. The impact of such mortality on the status of breeding populations is currently unknown.'

J. T. R. Sbarrock

SCOTLAND'S NATURE IN
TRUST: THE NATIONAL
TRUST FOR SCOTLAND
AND ITS WILDLIFE AND
CROFTING MANAGEMENT

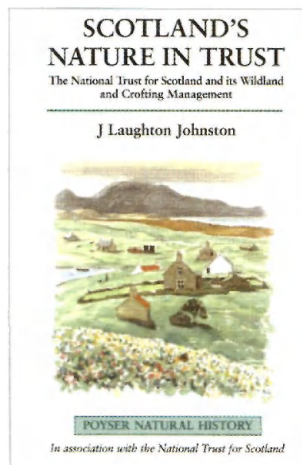
By J. Laughton Johnston.
T. & A. D. Poyser Ltd,
London, 1999. 266 pages;
11 maps; 70 colour
photographs and numerous
black-and-white
illustrations.
ISBN 0-85661-122-0.
Hardback, £27.95.

In his preface, the author notes that 'The average Scottish citizen probably perceives the [National Trust for Scotland] as a rather old-fashioned body influenced by landowning interests and supported by middle-class people, which looks after Victorian and older grand estate houses, their gardens and estates.' This is certainly true, so it is with some surprise that we learn that the NTS

owns twice as much land in Scotland as does the RSPB, including 31,000 ha of SSSIs. This book attempts both to showcase and to criticise aspects of the Trust's holistic approach to land management in some of Scotland's most valuable wildlife areas, and does so successfully (albeit in a conversational style liberally punctuated with excla-

mation marks, which might not appeal to every reader). The colour photographs are splendid, and the illustrations by John Busby are, of course, delightful, although some of them have been clumsily reproduced. This is an honest and competent appraisal of some aspects of the Trust's work, but I am not sure who 'needs' this book. It is full of interesting information, and is certainly worth reading, but my advice is to give it a thorough perusal in the bookshop before deciding whether to buy.

Martin Collinson



ENGLISH COUNTRY DAWN

New World Music, Suffolk,
1999. 56 minutes.
7677-1-50232-2-8 CD.

Evocative sounds, in the same series as *Irish Birdsong* (reviewed: *Brit. Birds* 93:103).

J. T. R. Sbarrock