



Reviews

PIGEONS AND DOVES

By David Gibbs, Eustace Barnes & John Cox.

Pica Press, Sussex, 2001.

615 pages; 76 colour plates;

314 species illustrated in colour; 309 maps.

ISBN 1-873403-60-7.

Hardback, £38.00.

Everyone is familiar with pigeons and doves; indeed, one species (Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*, as it is named in the book) occurs in a wild or feral state across vast tracts of every continent except Antarctica. Unfortunately, nobody can claim familiarity with all of the 319 species covered. Not only are half of them confined to islands, but many are threatened, several are critically endangered, and at least 11 are extinct, including the Dodo *Raphus cucullatus* and Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius*.

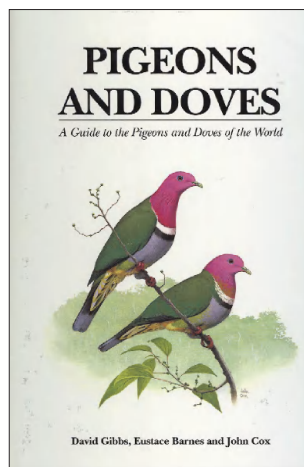
Pigeons and Doves contains sections entitled Contents, Acknowledgements, Introduction, Scope and Layout of the Book, Topography, Bibliography, and Index, but it is the Colour Plates and the Systematic Section, 92% of the pages, that will be the most frequently consulted.

The 76 full-page colour plates are sure to attract more than the odd 'coo' of appreciation. They are all of a high standard, while a number of them are quite superb; habitat backdrops add perspective and atmosphere to many and enhance their eye-catching appeal. On average, each one covers four species and contains eight large, boldly painted images of birds at rest, and five or six smaller images of flying birds. Each bird is coded, and is captioned on a facing page with its age and, where relevant, its sex and with comments on the species' range, structure and plumage.

The Systematic Section contains the species accounts, each

one being treated under the headings Identification, Voice, Habits, Habitat, Status and Distribution, Description, Measurements, Geographical Variation, and References, and including a distribution map. Calls and, where relevant, differences from similar species and dissimilarities between races have received particularly detailed treatment, while the comments on population and status, and the single paragraphs dealing with movements, food, display and breeding are both interesting and informative.

In common with most books, *Pigeons and Doves* is not free from errors, but it was disappointing to discover quite so many so easily. Presumed typographical mistakes are evident in the list of contents, within the page references for both plates and species accounts, and in the captions to the plates, where one of the codes is incorrect and there are references to maps that do not exist. Spot-checks on the maps themselves revealed ranges that are too extensive for Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* in the British Isles, and too restricted for Laughing Dove *S. senegalensis* in Morocco and, more glaringly, Israel. The least excusable error, however, concerns the references which end each species account. Of an impressive 56 references for White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica*, for example, only four are listed in the Bibliography section; many other species also have num-



erous untraceable references.

So, as the book contains a not insignificant number of errors, and is quite expensive for its type, should you buy a copy? Well, if you own the only other illustrated work which covers all of the pigeons and doves, volume 4 of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, you probably will not wish to. Otherwise, you really should give it serious consideration, since the group includes several charismatic species, many threatened ones, and even more with a very limited distribution. Furthermore, the book's text is authoritative, particularly so when dealing with identification and distribution; and, above all, its splendid colour illustrations are both accurate and attractive.

Peter Lansdown

SHORT REVIEW

Collins Bird Guide

By Lars Svensson & Peter J. Grant; illustrated by Killian Mullarney & Dan Zetterström; translated by David Christie.

(HarperCollins, London, 2000. 400 pages; 3,500 paintings; about 700 distribution maps. ISBN 0-00-710082-5. Hardback, £29.99.)

Now republished in a larger format, so that the illustrations may be properly appreciated, this superb field guide (reviewed in *Brit. Birds* 92: 432-433) becomes even better. The opportunity has been taken to correct one or two minor errors in the original text, which otherwise appears unchanged compared with the original. Many birdwatchers will doubtless wish to purchase this handsome larger-format edition to enjoy at home.

Richard Chandler

BIRD CENSUS TECHNIQUES

By Colin J. Bibby, Neil D. Burgess, David A. Hill & Simon H. Mustoe. 2nd edition. Academic Press, London, 2000.
302 pages; black-and-white illustrations.
ISBN 0-12-095831-7.
Hardback, £35.00.

The first edition of this book, published in 1992, provided a comprehensive guide to counting and mapping birds and their habitats, and became something of a 'bible' for bird-surveyors. As in the original, the text of the revised version deals first with how to select the most appropriate census method, which is a crucial starting point given the bewildering range of methods available. Separate chap-

ters are allotted to the three main methods of assessing bird numbers and distributions, namely, territory-mapping, line transects, and point counts. Subsequent chapters focus on ways of counting species for which these methods are inappropriate (e.g. rare, nocturnal, colonial, and migrating species), and on catching and marking birds. The reader is carefully guided from the practicalities of the field methods through to the analysis and interpretation of results, and the techniques are usefully illustrated with a few, well-chosen, examples. The last two chapters cover methods for distribution studies (including atlas work) and measuring bird habitats.

There are three key improvements in this second edition. The first, and the most obvious, is a valuable new chapter entitled 'Relative measures for bird com-

munities in habitats with high species richness'. This addresses the particular problems of surveying birds in tropical habitats where high, dense canopies often support large numbers of species, many of which occur at low densities. The second is an extensive revision of the sections covering distance sampling, a method of analysis that allows density estimates to be generated from census data. The third is the size of the reference list, which is almost twice the size of that in the first edition. Overall, the second edition is an important and substantial update of an extremely valuable book. It is a 'must' for any bird-surveyors, volunteer and professional alike, who do not have the first edition – and probably also for those of you who do have.

Juliet Vickery

BIRDS OF NEPAL

By Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp & Tim Inskipp. Christopher Helm, A & C Black, London, 2000. 288 pages; 110 colour plates.
ISBN 0-7136-5166-0.
Softback, £16.99.

This excellent little field guide follows *Birds of Bhutan* as another spin-off from the same authors' widely acclaimed *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*.

All the species which occur regularly in Nepal are illustrated in 110 beautifully produced colour plates, painted by a range of top artists. The text comprises a concise description of the key identification features in each of the main plumages, voice (although not for all species), altitudinal range, distribution and status. This faces the corresponding plates in an easy-reference format. The book also contains a comprehensive introduction to the key birdwatching sites and habitats.

As with the parent guide, the

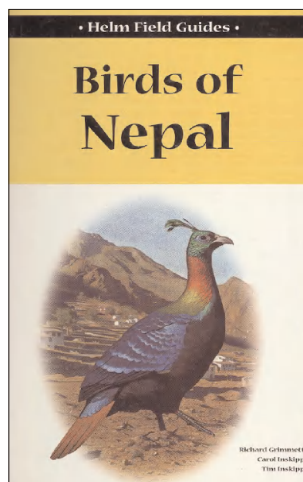
colour plates lie behind the book's appeal. By and large, they are superb. Presumably, lack of space dictated the omission of some variation on the postures illustrated – for example, it would have been nice to have seen flight illustrations of the high-altitude pheasants (Phasianidae), given that this is how they are typically seen. However, it is only when the plates are compared directly with those in the previous key reference, Ali &

Ripley's *A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, that one can truly appreciate what an advance this new book represents for the visiting birder. This book will significantly enhance your chances of solving some of the traditional identification conundrums, such as the bush warblers *Cettia/Bradypterus* and female rosefinches *Carpodacus*.

Its attractive design and lightweight, compact format are also major benefits. This is a true field guide: simple to refer to at a glance and easy to carry around in the field.

It is good to see that, reflecting the authors' close involvement with bird conservation in Nepal, the book has been produced in collaboration with some of the country's growing band of ornithologists. In pushing back the frontiers of bird identification in Nepal, it will also, it is to be hoped, assist the development of conservation priorities among the country's fascinating and diverse avifauna.

Guy Thompson



BIRDS, MAMMALS &
REPTILES OF THE
GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

By Andy Swash & Rob Still. Pica Press, A & C Black, London, 2000. 168 pages; 53 colour plates; 78 colour distribution maps.
ISBN 1-873403-82-8.
Paperback, £16.95.

In this comprehensive identification guide to all the birds, mammals and reptiles ever recorded in the Galapagos Islands, the latest digital-image technology is used to produce a field guide which, while not unattractive, is a little too kitsch and flashy for me. After a disappointingly short introduction, the individual species accounts follow. Every species is represented by two or more photographs, which are usually of

good quality, and a short text that covers identification, voice and behaviour. The identification section is adequate, but I found the text on behaviour to be much too short for my liking. In particular, I would have preferred to see a more thorough coverage of the endemic species, because, in the main, these are the ones for which visitors come to the islands; and less emphasis on the vagrants, which are well covered elsewhere. The section on reptiles and mammals is good, but surely no Blainville's Beaked Whales *Mesoplodon densirostris* are ever as bright red as in the illustration.

Although this guide fails to convey the magic of these islands, it does give the visitor a good overall picture of all the species of bird, mammal and reptile that occur there.

Mark Van Beirs

GALAPAGOS DIARY:
A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE
ARCHIPELAGO'S BIRDLIFE

By Hermann Heinzel & Barnaby Hall. Christopher Helm, A & C Black, London, 2000. 272 pages; 640 colour photos; illustrations; maps.
ISBN 0-7136-5434-1.
Paperback, £16.99.

This delightful book was produced after a single, prolonged visit to the islands and consists of two parts. The first half comprises a tour through this spectacular archipelago in which a thorough description is given of all the different islands with their different habitats and wildlife, with special emphasis on the unique birdlife and its strange

ecological adaptations. The birds are treated as part of an ecosystem, and this makes the reader understand what the Galapagos are all about. The text is excellent, and enhanced by many lovely drawings and fine photographs. The second part is the real field guide, in which every bird species that occurs regularly is enthusiastically described in great detail, while many alluring sketches and paintings skilfully illustrate the distinctive identification and behavioural features of each species.

This book is a personal account of the author's visit, and it really manages to convey that special magic feeling that overwhelms every visitor to these enchanted islands.

Mark Van Beirs

SHORT REVIEWS

*Nature Contested:
environmental history in
Scotland and northern
England since 1600*

By T. C. Smout. (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2000. 210 pages; black-and-white photographs. Hardback: ISBN 0-7486-1410-9; price £45.00. Paperback: ISBN 0-7486-1411-7; price £14.99.)

In essence, this book describes the tension that has existed for the last 400 years between those who wish to utilise the land for economic gain and those who wish to enjoy the environment, its landscapes and its wildlife.

Successive chapters consider woodland, soil, water and hill-land, and bring us up to the present day, when much of our existing countryside has been defaced and yet large estates and agriculture face financial ruin. It provides a worthy read for anyone who has more than a passing interest in the future shape of, and sustainable use of, our countryside.

Paul Harvey

The Charm of Birds

By Sir Edward Grey. (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2001. 296 pages; black-and-white illustrations.
ISBN 0-575-07058-7.
Hardback, 18.99.)

Sir Edward Grey - Viscount Grey of Faldo - is perhaps best remembered as the longest-serving Foreign Secretary of the twentieth century. Grey also had a passion for ornithology, and indeed conservation and the wider countryside, and one of the most important and prolific bodies for scientific field ornithology in Europe bears his name, the Edward Grey Institute at Oxford University.

First published in 1927, *The Charm of Birds* was an immediate popular success, but has been unavailable for many years. It deals mostly, but not exclusively, with birdsong, and contains a great deal of careful observation, sensitively conveyed to the reader. This new edition is an attractive re-issue, and provides a very pleasant bed-time read.

RR