



REVIEWS

The Birdwatcher's Handbook: a guide to the natural history of the birds of Britain and Europe.

By Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, Darryl Wheye & Stuart L. Pimm.

Illustrated by Shahid Naeem.

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994. 660 pages; 27 line-drawings. ISBN 0-19-858407-5. Flexicovers £12.95.

This book follows the same formula as one by the same team of authors covering the birds of North America (*The Birder's Handbook*, 1988). Being a regular user of the American volume, I came to the review book favourably disposed.

It is really two books in one: tabulated entries on even-numbered pages to the breeding biology of 516 Western Palearctic breeding species, two per page (though excluding the birds of the Atlantic islands); and 170 short, one- or two-page, essays on a wide range of birdy topics, on the odd-numbered pages. The restriction to breeding birds means that you will look in vain for entries concerning such familiar species as Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea* or Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*. Most recent splits and some introductions also fail to make it.

For each species, page references are given to *BWP* and to 'the standard field identification guides', though these include neither the Jonsson nor Hamlyn/Country Life guides, which have arguably the best illustrations and the best text, respectively.

Pictorial symbols ('icons') are used to convey information on breeding and feeding ecology, but I remain unconvinced of the advantage of such symbols over a few carefully chosen words.

Birds of Texas: a field guide.

By John H. Rappole & Gene W. Blacklock.

Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1994. 362 pages; over 600 colour plates; 622 distribution maps; numerous line-drawings. ISBN 0-89096-544-7, hardback US\$39.95; ISBN 0-89096-545-5, paperback US\$14.95.

Not a field guide, but useful for anybody planning a visit to the wonderful state of Texas. As an aid to identification, it adds nothing to the excellent standard field guides which already include those species exclusive to Texas. The nine sets of line-illustrations

Both Collins *New Generation Guide* and Phil Hollom's *Popular Handbook* cover the same ground more readably; and they are well illustrated. (The illustrations here are thankfully few, as they are quite dreadful.)

The majority of the essays are taken from the American volume, though adapted to use European bird examples. The transatlantic origin of the authors shows through time and again, whether in the lack of up-to-date information, use of American expressions or spellings which have been missed by the publishers, or curious statements, which would not have been made by observers thoroughly familiar with bird-life on this side of the Atlantic.

I disliked the repeated disparaging references to that fascinating species the Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* as 'garbage bird' and 'the weedy Starling', among others. And the statement 'breeds only sporadically in Ireland' is simply wrong: the *New Breeding Atlas* gives an estimated 360,000 territories. Presumably Iceland is meant.

In summary, this book really adds nothing new, and the mistakes I did find in a not very thorough browse do not inspire confidence. There are some interesting essays. But, if you already have a basic bird library, don't bother.

Ian Dawson

are not over-helpful, but I am a 'sucker' for colour photographs and this book has around 600, some of which are excellent; it even includes four extinct or endangered species, though whether from life or museum specimens is not clear.

The book's strength is its distribution maps, with frequency of occurrence for every species shown within each of the 250 counties of Texas. One can look at the map to gauge likelihood, then refer to the text alongside for seasonal details. The abundance of at least a couple of species (and presumably more) appears to be overstated (e.g. Rock Wren

Salpinctes obsoletus common from the Edwards Plateau to Starr County, and Canada Warbler *Wilsonia canadensis* a common spring migrant). Of interest: the map naming the counties on page six has the smallest print I have ever seen in a serious book.

David Holman

The Human Nature of Birds: a scientific discovery with startling implications.

By Theodore Xenophon Barber.

Penguin Books, New York, 1994. 226 pages; 12 colour plates. ISBN 0-14-023494-2. Paperback US\$10.95.

This is a book for the student of the history and philosophy of bird behaviour who is knowledgeable enough to cope with it, but not, I think, for the general reader. Although there is much to interest everybody—not least the accounts of the remarkable learning abilities of certain birds in laboratory conditions (including 'Alex', the famous Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus*)—it is badly flawed in its basic premise, that, in the official scientific view, birds are only 'instinctual automata' lacking consciousness and intelligence. It is this idea that Dr Barber sets out to disprove, drawing upon a carefully selected body of examples; in attempting this, he greatly over-

states his case (as the title of the book indicates). Although many American animal psychologists may still have the primitive understanding of the nature of bird behaviour that Dr Barber complains about, modern zoologists and behavioural ecologists who have studied these animals in the field certainly have not, even if their accounts have been more cautious than his because of their wish to avoid anthropomorphism. So, Dr Barber's fight is one which has already largely been won by others. Few, however, would disagree with him that birds should be treated with more humanity by everybody.

K. E. L. Simmons

A Birder's Guide to Churchill.

By Bonnie Chartier.

3rd edn. American Birding Association, Colorado Springs, 1994. 132 pages; 11 colour plates; 12 black-and-white plates; 21 line-drawings; 16 maps. ISBN 1-878788-07-8. \$14.95.

Churchill is a small, isolated town in Manitoba, Canada, on the southwestern shore of Hudson Bay, and is accessible only by rail or air. For nearly six months of the year, it is engulfed by the Arctic winter, and for part of this season it rejoices in the title 'Polar Bear Capital of the World'. Its location combines sea coast, tundra and coniferous forest and provides a stunning selection of birds which reflect all three ecosystems. You name it—Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica*, Ross's Goose *Anser rossii*, Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*, Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*, Stilt Sandpiper *Micropalama himantopus*, Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*, Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula*, Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*, even small numbers of Ross's Gulls *Rhodostethia rosea*—

everything you could hope for in the Canadian Arctic is here. Equally, everything you need to know about the area's birds and the logistics of travel, accommodation, local weather and so on are to be found in this slim volume.

This is a model bird-finding site-guide. The maps, photographs (of habitats and locations) and directions are superb, and the book includes much else besides: from appendices on all the flora and fauna to address lists of restaurants and taxi firms. Throughout, there is imaginative use of tables and bar-graphs. This is unquestionably the definitive guide to birding in this magnificent area.

Anthony McGeehan

Natural History. Personal Development. Poetry & Drama. This definitive guide to the birds of prey in Europe is a detailed exploration of the habitat, feeding, and breeding of each of the nine raptor families in Europe, which include vultures, kites, harriers, hawks, buzzards, eagles, falcons, owls, and shrikes. He is also the author of *Birdwatcher's Pocket Guide* (1 85732 80 3), *The Complete Guide to the Birdlife of Britain and Europe* (1 85732 795 0), and *The Pocket Book to Coastal Birds in Britain and Europe* (1 84538 073 0) (all Mitchell Beazley) For 10 years he was a member and Chairman of the British Birds Rarities Committee that scrutinizes reports of rare birds in Britain. show more. Rating details. 1 rating. 3 out of 5 stars. 5 0% (0). 4 0% (0). item 2 AA Publishing, *Illustrated Guide to Birds of Britain & Europe* (British Trust for -AA Publishing, *Illustrated Guide to Birds of Britain & Europe* (British Trust for. £2.89. Free postage. item 3 AA Publishing, *Illustrated Guide to Birds of Britain & Europe* (British Trust for -AA Publishing, *Illustrated Guide to Birds of Britain & Europe* (British Trust for. £2.89. Free postage. It gives me the actual pictures, paintings and all the information I wanted to allow me to identify all the birds we have visiting our bird feeders. A great present for anyone who is interested in identifying birds in the UK and that migrate here and abroad. Excellent. Best-selling in Environment, Nature & Earth. See all. Current slide {CURRENT_SLIDE} of {TOTAL_SLIDES}- Best-selling in Environment, Nature & Earth. No other book provides such a simple, concise guide to the essential features of bird recognition, enabling precise identification based on comparisons with other species and on distinctive field marks. The Fifth Edition has been completely reconstructed. Roger Tory Pat For nearly 40 years, the Paterson Guide has been the standard field guide to British and European birds. I bought this for a recent trip to Europe. The book is adequate. The pictures are accurate but the maps and some of the distribution in seem to need updating. There is one Czechoslovakia, though the Velvet Divorce was 20 years ago. Several species that were rather common where I went (Berlin, Prague, Vienna, and Munich) appear to be far removed from those locales according to the maps.

The Birdwatcher's Handbook: A Guide to the Natural History of the Birds of Britain and Europe. Article. Jan 1994. After an introductory note on how to use the guide and pointers on observing and recording bird biology, information is provided on 516 species which regularly breed in Europe and adjacent parts of the Middle East and North Africa. For each species the following details are presented in symbol form: nest location; nest type; who builds the nest; breeding system (monogamy, polygyny, polyandry and cooperative breeder); eggs, clutch size and broods; incubating sex; length of incubation; stage of development at hatching; who tends the young; time from hatching to fledging; diet; foraging technique

Photographic Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe. | By Hakan Delin & Lars Svensson | Bounty Books | 2004 | Paperback | 288 pages, 1300 col photos, 163 illus, 465 maps | ISBN: 9780753706893 Buy this book from NHBS.com.

RSPB British Birds of Prey. Paintings; 290+ species - The eGuide to British Birds is an interactive companion to The RSPB Handbook of British Birds - the ideal reference for birdwatchers of all levels of interest and experience. This application has specific features that will enhance your birding experience.

iBird UK Pro Guide to Birds. Natural History Museum. Museum. The Museum's avian skin collection is the second largest of its kind in the world, with almost 750,000 specimens representing about 95 per cent of the world's bird species.