

Book reviews

Edited by P. Dann

OSPREYS: A NATURAL AND UNNATURAL HISTORY

by Alan F. Poole

1989. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, USA. Pp xviii + 246, many tables, graphs, b&w photos 50, line drawings 17, 252 x 192 mm. \$69.

Poole, in his preface to this book, states '... anyone hoping to learn about Ospreys has been forced, so far, to consult a multitude of different sources, most of them scholarly, narrowly focussed, and out of date. This book aims to remedy that situation.' I believe that he has admirably achieved his stated aim. In drawing together information from all parts of the world the gaps in the knowledge of Ospreys, even of basic population and distributional data, have been clearly identified. A fact that regularly arises as one reads through this book is that we know virtually nothing about the Australasian race *Pandion haliaetus cristatus*.

Obvious differences in this race from those extensively studied overseas, such as the non-migratory behaviour and morphological differences of both adults and young birds, mean that all the findings of overseas research may not directly apply to Australasian birds.

This paucity of information on local birds has been redressed to some extent in recent years with my surveys for the New South Wales National Parks & Wildlife Service and by work of other researchers in Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. Nevertheless much basic biological information is still unknown.

The eleven chapters of this book cover all the major aspects of Osprey biology including phylogeny and classification, status and distribution, migration and wintering ecology, diet and foraging ecology, nest sites and breeding behaviour, breeding rates, population regulation, threats and management.

The text is easily read, despite its scientific nature and is reinforced with numerous superb maps and graphs. The 50 or so black and white photographs illustrate the various topics being discussed and the line drawings that introduce each chapter give a pictorial summary of the topic. Of historical interest are the superb black and white photographs taken in the first decade of this century and now housed in the Archives of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences. They depict interesting nest sites such as fence posts and the top of a schoolhouse belfry. A photograph of a hunting Osprey is of very high quality considering the primitive equipment available at that time. The bird had been lured into camera distance by the use of a carved and

painted wooden goldfish! The numerous graphs are all relevant to the topic being discussed and I have found two in particular to be of specific use to my research. One depicts the mean wing length of male and female Ospreys belonging to the four recognised subspecies. The other shows how the four subspecies may be separated on breast and crown markings.

Details of how to build and site an Osprey nesting platform are given although it is stated that no strict design requirements are necessary. Nevertheless the specific details included would make it much easier for readers to design and construct an artificial tower.

I can really find nothing to criticise about the content or presentation of this monograph. This would be, in part, due to the non-contentious nature of the content where the author discusses facts rather than introducing concepts and hypotheses. The facts have been gathered from a multitude of sources and these are all adequately acknowledged within the text.

This book is likely to stimulate more research, particularly in areas previously neglected, and has already assisted me in my work. I therefore commend it to everyone interested in raptors and for people and organisations working on, or particularly interested in, Ospreys, it is a must.

Greg P. Clancy

THE WHITE EGRET

by Shingi Itoh

1989. Blandford Press, London. Pp. 168, colour plates 195, 300 x 220 mm. \$45.

This book is a pictorial feast of egret beauty with 195 colour plates. There are close-up head portraits and distant shots against the sunset, sharp-focus studies and soft-focus atmospheric effects, frozen motion and blurred semi-abstracts, egrets in spring, summer, autumn and winter, egrets in soft morning, hard day-time, soft evening, and sunset lighting, egrets flying, egrets feeding, egrets courting, egrets in almost every phase of activity.

Shingi Itoh was first inspired by egrets as a boy on Amami Island in Japan. Now in his sixties, he is the director of a Japanese hospital and has published in the area of medicine and health, but his passion is the study of egrets. In the preface, he claims to have taken more than 100 000 photographs, and felt 'deeply the frustration of being an amateur photographer. The task of cap-

turing the true beauty of the lustrous, snowwhite egret on film has been completely beyond my capacity...'.

This statement is modest and self-effacing in the extreme. His photography is of top professional quality and his photographic chronicle is an intimate revelation of the secrets of egret life. Not only are the pictures of outstanding technical quality in focus, exposure, lighting and composition, but demonstrate a remarkable artistic quality.

Having studied and photographed the egrets at Seaham and Shortland for ten years, I felt a special fascination as I turned the pages, and marvelled at each pictorial message on egret behaviour. I was particularly interested in the portraits of the Intermediate Egrets in courting finery. The Japanese Intermediate has a black beak, yellow soft facial parts and red eye in the peak of courting condition, in contrast to the Australian race's red beak and green face. In 1985, I had glimpsed and photographed a black-beaked, yellow-faced, red-eyed egret in the Shortland colony which I was convinced had the stamp of 'Intermediate' all over it. I am now convinced that the bird was in fact one of the Asian Intermediate race.

There are a few pages of descriptive text interspersed through the photo gallery which deal in a general but accurate way with daily life and seasonal behaviour of the birds. Preening, vocalisation, foraging, fighting, flocking, courtship, nesting and chick care behaviour are all touched on. Because of the brevity of description, many interesting aspects of egret life are glossed over, but this in no way detracts from the overall impact of the book. The photographs speak so powerfully for themselves.

It is a book worthy of gracing the bookshelves or coffee table of the amateur, who just loves birds for their own sake, or the professional with a deep and technical knowledge of the species.

Max Maddock

POPULATION TRENDS IN BRITISH BREEDING BIRDS

by John H. Marchant, Robert Hudson, Steve P. Carter and Phil Whittington

1990. *British Trust for Ornithology, Tring*. Pp. xii + 300, numerous graphs, tables and vignettes, maps 3, 148 x 210 mm. £12.

Since 1961 the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has

organised the Common Bird Census (CBC). Its Water-bird Survey (WBS) commenced in 1974 and censused the avifauna found on waterways. The aim of these programs was to count repetitively British birds and provide data against which temporal changes in abundance could be measured. This book discusses the population trends from these data for 164 species over almost three decades.

The four sections of the book detail the monitoring schemes, indexing population levels, overall influences on bird numbers and population trends.

The first chapter introduces the CBC and WBS monitoring schemes. There is a brief justification of these programs with an emphasis on the history of the CBC and WBS and the relationship between the BTO and the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC). The methods used by the survey programmes are sufficiently detailed to allow useful comparison with other methods such as that used for the RAOU Australian Bird Count project (Ambrose 1989). It is noteworthy that the BTO, with support from the NCC, is currently establishing an Integrated Population Monitoring program that will combine data from CBC and WBS, the Nest Record Scheme and the Ringing Scheme. This will enable population trends (from the CBC and WBS) to be related to annual productivity (from the Nest Record Scheme) with mortality data (from the ringing scheme). This may show a future direction for a cooperative venture between the RAOU and Australian Bird and Bat Banding Schemes.

A chapter on how the population levels were indexed provides a detailed account of the approach taken by the BTO in analysing the data. The limitations of the data are discussed with acknowledgement of the biases created by species' differences, observer and analyst effects. As a summary to the chapter there is a useful list on the strengths and weaknesses of the CBC and WBS population indices. This is essential reading before one attempts to understand the population trends of the species discussed.

Chapter 3 attempts to identify the overall relationship between species abundance and factors such as climate (both in England and western Sahel) and habitat change. Information is presented that identifies the effect of changes in the British countryside, forestry and farming practices, on species abundance.

The final, and largest, section of the book concerns the population trends of 164 species. Included are details on species for which there was some information worthy of publication from either the CBC or WBS

schemes (possibly because these species were easier to survey). Unfortunately, a few very common and familiar species (e.g. Swift, Feral Pigeon) did not qualify for any detailed analysis. To remedy the omissions all terrestrial and freshwater species with British breeding populations of at least 50 pairs have been included. However, the discussion for 59 species is limited to a few paragraphs.

For the majority of species the monograph provides the present population trend, percentage of survey plots occupied in 1968/1978/1988, latest estimate of breeding population, regional density ranking, a graph showing the population index trend (from CBC and WBS where appropriate) and a well referenced text detailing the population changes and suspected reasons for these fluctuations. Although limited for space this information provides a comprehensive coverage of the literature on the population dynamics of each species. Regional variations and trends from other parts of Europe are included. For some species the CBC index is available for woodland and farmland although between habitat comparisons are not valid.

There is an extensive list of references and five appendices. These appendices acknowledge the contributors to the CBC and WBS, detail the longest running CBC and WBS plots, summarise details of the plots used in index calculations and list the current abundance of British breeding birds. This final appendix dramatically identifies the need for current data on the influence of land management practices on bird abundance. Some 72 species listed for the British Isles have less than 500 breeding pairs. It must be of concern to all ornithologists that for a well-known species such as the Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* there are only 425 pairs left in Britain.

A problem with this excellent reference book is that it attempts to mix presentation styles. The earlier chapters are written as a review of methods, analyses and population trends. However, for the majority of the monograph, species are presented in a similar order to a field guide (such as Peterson *et al.* 1974). By treating

species in taxonomic order there is a difficulty in comprehending possible overall trends for species of similar habitats. For many readers a summary of all species with similar fluctuations and the possible reasons for population change would provide a useful addition.

The chapter on the major influences on bird numbers could have been extended and strengthened by using information from the population trends section of the text. As each species was mentioned the inclusion of the page number to refer to later in this text would assist in locating more information and prevent unnecessary use of the index.

The vignettes, although having artistic merit, are less important for the purpose of this monograph compared to information such as a species distribution map. Such a map could include distribution changes since 1961. However, the costs may have been prohibitive. Minor errors such as the reference to a non-existent Appendix 6 (p. 6) could have been avoided.

I can strongly recommend this book as a reference to the population status and fluctuations of British breeding birds since 1961 for a selected number of species. It clearly demonstrates the wildlife conservation value of systematically collecting meaningful data using a veritable army of volunteers. This book is the justification of the CBC and WBS programs. It is a useful overview of the problems associated with monitoring and analysing bird abundance data and some of the factors known to affect bird populations. Therefore it provides useful reading for anyone involved in bird survey (e.g. Australian Bird Count) and promotes the need, justification and long term aims of any such programs.

References

- Ambrose, S. 1989. RAOU Newsletter No. 80, 1-2.
Peterson, R., Mountford, G. & Hollom, P.A.D. 1974. A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe, 3rd edn. Collins, London.

Barry Kentish

Publications recently received

Edited by P. Dann

ORNITHOLOGY FOR AFRICA: A TEXT FOR USERS ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT*

by Gordon Lindsay Maclean

1990. University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg. Pp. 270, colour photos 144, many figures and b&w drawings, 244 x 172 mm. n.p.g.

AVIAN FORAGING: THEORY, METHODOLOGY AND APPLICATIONS*

edited by Michael L. Morrison, C. John Ralph, Jared Verner and Joseph R. Jehl, Jr.

1990. Studies in Avian Biology No. 13. Cooper Ornithological Society, Los Angeles. Pp. 513, many figures and maps, 175 x 253 mm. US\$29.50 (includes postage).

AUKS AT SEA*

edited by Spencer G. Sealy

1990. Studies in Avian Biology No. 14. Cooper Ornithological Society, Los Angeles. Pp. 180, many figures and maps. 175 x 253 mm. US\$16 (includes postage).

THE BIRDS OF THE PHILIPPINES: AN ANNOTATED CHECK-LIST*

by Edward C. Dickinson, Robert S. Kennedy and Kenneth C. Parkes

1990. B.O.U. Check-list No. 12. British Ornithologists Union, Tring. Pp. 507, colour photos 7, maps 14, 250 x 160 mm. \$39 (includes postage and handling by surface mail).

SEABIRD STATUS AND CONSERVATION: A SUPPLEMENT*

edited by J.P. Croxall

1991. ICBP Technical Publication No. 11. ICBP, Cambridge. Pp. 308, many maps, 215 x 137 mm. \$17.50.

CONSERVING MIGRATORY BIRDS*

edited by T. Salathe

1991. ICBP Technical Publication No. 12. ICBP, Cambridge. Pp. 393, many maps and b&w photos, 215 x 137 mm. \$19.50.

NESTLING MORTALITY OF GRANIVOROUS BIRDS DUE TO MICRO ORGANISMS AND TOXIC SUBSTANCES

edited by J. Pinowski, B.P. Kavanagh and W. Gorski

1991. Polish Academy of Sciences. Institute of Ecology, Department of Vertebrate Ecology, Pedagogic University (Slupsk), Department of Zoology, International Association for Ecology; Working Group on Granivorous Birds, Polish Scientific Publishers PWN, Warszawa. Pp. 204, 238 x 168 mm. US\$40. Available only from the Library, Institute of Ecology, PAS. Dziekanow Lesny, 05-092 Lomianki, Poland.

MOLT OF THE GENUS SPIZELLA (PASSERIFORMES, EMBERIZIDAE) IN RELATION TO ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AFFECTING PLUMAGE WEAR

by Ernest J. Willoughby

1991. Proceedings of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology Volume 4, Number 4. Western Foundation for Vertebrate Zoology, Los Angeles. Pp. 286, 172 x 253 mm. US\$5.

A BIRDWATCHERS' GUIDE TO SEYCHELLES**

by Adrian Skerrett and Ian Bullock

1992. Prion, Perry. Pp. 71, maps 8, line drawings 17, 169 x 243 mm. \$8.75.

SPERM COMPETITION IN BIRDS: EVOLUTIONARY CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES*

by T.R. Birkhead and A.P. Moller

1992. Academic Press, London. Pp. 282, b&w photos 21, many figures and b&w drawings, 167 x 242 mm. \$19.50.

*To be reviewed in *Emu* **To be reviewed in *Wingspan*