

# Book reviews

Edited by P. Dann

## BIRDS AND FORESTRY

by Mark Avery and Roderick Leslie

1990. T. & A.D. Poyser Ltd, London. Pp. 299, many b&w photos, line drawings and maps, 240 x 160 mm. \$66.

This book deals with the interactions between forestry and bird conservation in a small group of islands (UK) in the Western Palaearctic. The main issue there is conversion of open moorland to forest plantations, mostly of exotic conifers, by the public Forestry Commission and by private owners aided until recently by large tax incentives. This is quite different from the global problems of forest destruction (for agriculture or plantations) and intensive logging of old-growth forests. The contrast is particularly ironic as most of the British moorlands — romantic and uplifting as they are — are artificial products of 4000 years of forest depletion through overgrazing, settlement, logging and burning.

Nevertheless, this is an excellent book. The two authors (from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the UK Forestry Commission) have combined a careful assessment of scientific research with an obvious love of the countryside (forest and moorland, animals and plants) and an understanding of the social, political and economic forces at work. The first four chapters deal with conservation principles and forest management issues, many of which have global relevance (especially Chapter 4 on Conservation Management). The next four chapters deal with the moorland afforestation issue, including an account of money and power in the Uplands. It is suggested that conservation interests will gain increasing ascendancy, and a better process is needed for making land-use decisions. (Victoria's Land Conservation Council to the rescue, perhaps?). A final chapter on the future strikes an optimistic note that the various interest groups may achieve a greater unity of purpose and work together to see the land as something more than just a production unit; we hope so.

Along the way, many stimulating points are made, and many curious parallels, contrasts and messages can be drawn for us in Australasia. Deer cause similar problems with browsing young regeneration as wallabies and kangaroos do here. Foxes can be a menace even in countries where they are native; nesting colonies of Black-headed Gulls were eliminated from the island county of Anglesey when Red Foxes colonised 'across

the Strait' (p. 69). Hollow trees may be even more of a limiting factor than they are here; woodpeckers cannot make up for centuries of logging large trees, with inadequate regeneration. Some hollow-nesting birds (e.g. Tawny Owl and Coal Tit) can nest successfully on the ground at bases of trees when hollows are absent (p. 122), though no figures or references are given for their success rates. Nest-boxes have been used widely to supplement natural hollows, and have been instrumental in encouraging national recolonisation by a migratory duck, the Goldeneye (p. 123). Mammals have also benefited, including Red Squirrels and Pine Martens. The Marten has recovered from the brink of extinction and now preys on Goldeneye in boxes; we are not told whether the boxes assisted the Marten's recovery.

The special values of old forest are recognised, even though there is very little left in the country. Studies by F.A. Currie & R. Bamford (1982, *Quart. J. For.* 76: 153-160) and C.J. Bibby *et al.* (1989, *Biol. Conserv.* 49: 17-29), have shown that patches of old forest or broad-leaved species among conifers can be valuable even when they are very small (pp. 112-120); the further suggestion is made that their value may be greatest when they are dispersed among plantations, rather than consolidated in a block. It is refreshing to read of these studies without reference to the vast literature on 'island biogeographic theory', but it would have helped to mention that there are many overseas studies showing the value of small patches, and that the relative merits of dispersal or consolidation vary greatly between different situations. The advantages of a mixture of silvicultural systems — including clearfelling (p. 115) — would be echoed wherever these questions have been addressed.

Sometimes I was amused by the un-Australian scale, as with the 'fairly large tree' depicted on p. 81, or the horror expressed about the fires of 1976 that burned 2191 ha of forest! The £100 million budget sounds a lot for managing a million hectares of public forest (p. 94) as this exceeds the entire budget for conservation and forestry in one Australian state with six million hectares of public forest. Often I was impressed with the completeness of information (e.g. exact numbers of breeding Goldeneye in the country) and such detail helps make this book worth much more than its geographical coverage would suggest. Perhaps I should even forgive the global impression of the title.

Richard Loyn