

## Recent ornithological publications

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BACKHOUSE, F. **Woodpeckers of North America**. 232 pages, including more than 70 colour photographs. Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada: Firefly Books Ltd, 2005. Hardback, \$39.95, ISBN 1554070465.

This book deals with the Nearctic members of the family Picidae, those living in North America and the northern part of Mexico, south to the Tropic of Cancer. Some may prefer that all of Mexico were included, but that would have taken us into the realm of the Neotropics. As it is, we do get to read about two members of the genus *Piculus*, an essentially Neotropical group with predominantly bronze-green plumage (a colour not otherwise found among Nearctic picids), and three *Campephilus* woodpeckers, although at least one and probably two of the latter are now extinct.

After a very brief introduction, devoted mainly to her (convincing) reasoning for the choice of boundaries, the author presents seven general chapters under the following

respective headings: What is a woodpecker?; Anatomy; Communication; Nesting; Reproduction and mortality; Feeding habits; Relationships with other species; and Woodpeckers and humans. These are followed by profiles of each species, and the book is completed with a glossary, a bibliography, an index and a list of photograph credits.

These general chapters are all good and reliable. The one entitled 'Woodpeckers and humans' is especially interesting. It covers a wide range of topics, from early exploitation of woodpeckers by Native American tribes, who used parts of the birds for ornamentation, potions and other purposes, and the subsequent hunting of woodpeckers, both for food and for commercial profit, by European settlers, to the perceived nuisance status of some species in modern times because of the damage which they inflict on utility poles, houses, orchards and other human interests and, conversely, the problems posed by humans in terms of habitat destruction and fragmentation, and inappropriate management of forests and other habitats. Large colour

photographs are interspersed among the pages of these chapters. In addition, there are some excellent and thought-provoking paragraphs on conservation. For example, ecosystem-based forest management is explained and promoted, although Backhouse considers that large-scale implementation of this system, though proven to be viable in small demonstration experiments, is still a long way off, as current commercial pressures are just too great. Sadly, I have to agree with her.

The section 'Species profiles', accounting for about 120 of the book's pages, deals individually with 28 species in seven genera. Among these are two *Piculus* species, the Lineated Woodpecker *Dryocopus lineatus* and the Pale-billed Woodpecker *Campephilus guatemalensis*, all included on the strength of their occurrence in Mexico. Another Mexican endemic, the Imperial Woodpecker *C. imperialis*, is included, as also is the Ivory-billed Woodpecker *C. principalis*, although the chances of seeing either of these magnificent creatures nowadays are remote (see review of Gallagher and Jackson in this issue).

Each of these profiles begins with a general introduction characterizing the species in question, and the rest of the account is divided under nine self-explanatory subheadings: Identification; Distribution; Habitat; Voice; Drumming and tapping; Feeding; Breeding; Migration; and Conservation. With the exception of the Imperial and Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, which are illustrated with colour paintings, each species text is accompanied by a distribution map and by a photograph depicting, in most cases, the adult male.

Some nice anecdotal information is included here, for example the report of a young Arizona Woodpecker *Picoides arizonae* landing on and rapping first at the hind leg, then at one of the forelegs, of a horse being watered at a well. This and some other anecdotal pieces will probably be familiar to most woodpecker enthusiasts from Bent's celebrated and ground-breaking *Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers* (1939). For the non-specialist, such information could well serve to awaken interest in this avian family. It is probably unfair to compare the two books, but Backhouse provides far less-detailed species accounts than does Bent, although her texts are still full of interesting data and are nicely written; on the other hand, Bent did not include the Mexican species, and his more formal style is perhaps less suited to a non-specialist modern readership.

Unfortunately, throughout this book, the term 'rectrices' appears as 'retrices', and this spelling error is repeated in the Glossary. Otherwise, the text contains a few lesser irritations, but it is generally accurate and presented in such a way that it certainly holds the reader's interest.

The photographs are good or very good, and some are quite exquisite. I particularly liked the shot of a female Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus* clinging to one side of a conifer while on the opposite side, a metre or so away,

clings a huge American Black Bear *Ursus americanus*. Most, however, are portraits of woodpeckers, and I was disappointed not to find any illustrations of habitats (the region offers numerous opportunities for such pictures).

In summary, Frances Backhouse has provided us with a well-produced and attractive tome on North America's picids, and one that is well worth reading. Her style of writing is fairly intimate and informal, while at the same time her text is scientifically well grounded. There appears not to be any new information here but, rather, a succinct summary of what is known of the more important aspects of the lives of these intriguing birds. This incorporates many snippets that the average reader would, I am sure, find both interesting and surprising. For that reason alone, this book can be recommended.

David A. Christie

BELETSKY, L. **Costa Rica. (Travellers' Wildlife Guides.)** 414 pages, 80 colour plates, 19 colour photographs, 33 black-and-white drawings, maps, 7 tables. Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2005. Paperback \$27.95, ISBN 1566565291.

ROBINSON, H. **Costa Rica: An Ecotraveller's Guide.** 298 pages, maps, numerous colour photographs. Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2006. Paperback \$23.95, ISBN 566566177 and 9781566566179.

Costa Rica is a small Neotropical country with a highly regarded system of national parks and reserves developed to conserve its incredible biodiversity. These two guides use different approaches to help the environmentally aware traveller to explore and discover some of the country's natural riches.

Robinson takes the reader around the best places to view wildlife, describing each region's most characteristic or charismatic organisms and suggesting a number of activities and accommodations suited to the 'ecotraveller'. Directions and contact numbers are provided in the main text, and further information can be found in the 'Resources' section at the back. This also includes suggestions for making the trip more environmentally friendly, while a short section on first aid provides tips on avoiding tropical ailments and on keeping safe (curiously, 'Spanish' is included under the 'First Aid' heading!). The layout of the book is attractive and includes lavish colour photography and a few simple regional maps. The text is lively and descriptive. Carefully selected facts are presented in boxes on the outer edge of each double-page spread, often focusing on a particular interaction that takes place between the forest's organisms or an intriguing aspect of an organism's biology. This ecotravel guide will appeal to a broad audience of would-be explorers and wildlife enthusiasts of all ages.

In a revised edition of his 'Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guide' to Costa Rica of 1998 (see *Ibis* 141: 688–689), Beletsky

shifts the main focus from ecotravel towards the identification of wildlife, his aim being to present the most commonly encountered birds, mammals and herpetofauna within a single volume rather than attempt to describe this diversity comprehensively. General information is provided on the natural history of each group and the best sites to observe it, although little detail is given on individual species. The content is accurately but informally written, and technical language is either avoided or explained. The colour plates, located together at the back of the book and each with descriptions and habitat information opposite, offer high-quality illustrations of 214 of the 830 bird species, 50 of the 203 mammals, 33 amphibians and 47 reptiles. The book also includes a number of introductory chapters on ecotourism, ecology, conservation and the national park system, drawings of common plant species, as well as contact details for parks and relevant organizations.

These are two excellent books, which could be used individually or as companions. In their different yet complementary ways, they offer the traveller a magnificent glimpse of Costa Rica's natural environment and the diversity of life it holds.

**Davina Hill**

**FRAY, R. *Where to Watch Birds in the East Midlands. 2nd edition.* 320 pages, numerous maps and line-drawings. London: Christopher Helm, 2006. Paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9780713675306. Contact (distribution service): 01256 302699; website: www.acblack.com**

Although it follows the familiar format by covering each site with sections on habitat, species, timing, access and calendar, this freshly written second edition incorporates several improvements over the first edition of the book (Catley 1996). Of the 79 sites described, 20 are new, and all the maps have been updated and improved with added detail. The counties (Derbyshire, Leicestershire including Rutland, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire) and sites are now listed alphabetically, with much fuller coverage of the four inland counties.

The author knows Leicestershire well and has researched the other counties thoroughly by using a combination of published material and local contacts. Changes in habitat and consequent changes in status at each site are taken into account, and statistics based on WeBS (The Wetland Bird Survey) and other data have been updated. Entries for the areas I visit most frequently are informative, accurate, and give a realistic picture of what is likely to be seen.

Given that there has not been a bird report for Lincolnshire since the first edition, some of the material included may turn out to have greater historical importance than normally expected from a work of this kind. Nonetheless, some sites not included (e.g. the Market Deeping area in

Lincolnshire) are as important and productive as some of those described: more experienced or pioneering birders are encouraged to explore and make new discoveries elsewhere.

**Andrew H.J. Harrop**

**GALLAGHER, T. *The Grail Bird: Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.* 272 pages, 8 pages of colour and monochrome images. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. Hardback, £13.00, ISBN 0618456937.**

**JACKSON, J.A. *In Search of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.* 322 pages, 8 pages of colour images, 37 monochrome figures and 2 maps. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. Paperback, £8.00, ISBN 1588341321.**

The Ivory-billed Woodpecker *Campephilus principalis* has for decades headed the list of the world's most sought-after vanished birds. With no generally accepted reports in continental North America since the 1940s, the possibility of its survival seemed extremely remote. News of its rediscovery in the Big Woods region of eastern Arkansas was released in April 2005 (Fitzpatrick, J.W. *et al.* 2005. *Science* 308: 1460–1462), to the amazement of the ornithological community, but for many the sense of awestruck jubilation was short-lived. The validity of evidence was questioned, and the ensuing debate between 'believers' and 'sceptics' has developed into one of the most polarizing controversies in modern ornithology. The stand-off has a significance beyond ornithology as it lays bare some fundamental themes, including the nature of proof in science, and the role of science in conservation.

At the heart of the controversy are two authors, both veteran ivorybill sleuths. They deal with the same story, although their conclusions could hardly be more different. One asserts that the evidence amassed in Arkansas, and published in the journal *Science*, is enough to clinch the identification once and for all; the other holds that this evidence amounts to an indication that the species persists, but not to proof.

First there is *The Grail Bird*, Tim Gallagher's entertaining, upbeat, folksy account of the rediscovery. Early chapters deal with ivorybill history, based on fairly extensive background research. Thereafter, the plot meanders through a series of failed surveys and undocumented sightings towards the unveiling of glorious, full-frame proof of ivorybills, but alas, this 'proof' turns out to be a few seconds of grainy footage – the famous video. To anyone who has studied it, the anticlimax is breathtaking, especially as the evidence can be interpreted in conflicting ways (Sibley, D.A. *et al.* 2006. *Science* 311: 1555; Jackson, J.A. 2006. *Auk* 123: 1–15). Nonetheless, the author writes with stirring conviction about his own sighting at Bayou de View, and his sincerity is never in doubt. No reference list is given for sources, but an index is provided.

Then there is *In search of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker*, Jerome Jackson's account of painstaking research, near misses and possibilities. Herein lies virtually everything known about the species, presented in a well-organized format, with an index and a comprehensive reference list for each chapter. The narrative is generally terse, scholarly, occasionally wry, but always very clear. It gives a fascinating insight into the history of this bird, from the first reports to a detailed review of status, past and present. We learn of its totemic significance in Native American culture, and its previous abundance in some southern swamps and hardwood forests. According to Jackson, the logging of those forests removed most surviving ivorybill populations, and the market demand for rare skins did the rest. He provides an account of the heartbreaking struggle to save the Singer Tract, where the last fully documented population of ivorybills bred until the 1940s. He also writes about searches in Cuba, where old-growth forests have all but disappeared, and his own claim to have seen an ivorybill is not exactly watertight ('All I really saw was a large bird'). We are left with no hope of the survival of the Cuban race, which seems likely to have been a species-level taxon (Fleischer, R.C. 2006. *Biology Letters* 2: 466–469), and little room for optimism on the mainland.

Both books deal with the contributions of early American ornithologists, although Jackson's coverage is more comprehensive. In tandem, they provide two renditions of early anecdotes (including the destruction of Alexander Wilson's hotel room by an ivorybill), and two viewings of famous images (including a photograph of William Brewster and Frank Chapman during their trip along the Suwanee River, Florida, in 1890, one holding a freshly killed ivorybill, the other a shotgun). Both authors describe Arthur Allen's sightings in the 1920s and 1930s, and catalogue the subsequent trickle of unconfirmed sightings, several of which are difficult to discount. The possibility of survival is kept very much alive, but here the similarity ends.

First published in 2004, the hastily reprinted 2006 edition of Jackson's book contains an epilogue explaining his misgivings about the Arkansas announcement, and his fears that we have taken a step towards what he calls 'faith-based ornithology'. The crux of his argument is that Gallagher, and his numerous co-authors in *Science*, failed to refute the null hypothesis that all recent sightings involved Pileated Woodpeckers *Dryocopus pileatus*, especially as 'extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof'. This epithet, attributed to Carl Sagan, has become a mantra for the sceptics. Re-reading Gallagher's account and reviewing the video almost two years after the initial media frenzy, the inadequacy of documentation is glaring. Images and sounds collected in Arkansas might involve ivorybills, but no piece of evidence appears to be conclusive.

The announcement of the rediscovery was seized upon as a rare piece of good news during a gloomy period. It

set major political wheels in motion, raised millions of dollars for ivorybill conservation, and aroused a national feeling of goodwill – America rejoiced at the spirit of survival against all odds (Dalton, R. 2005. *Nature* 437: 188–190). Unsurprisingly, scepticism has met with popular and institutional resistance, even though bringing this species back from the dead in the 21st century would be nothing short of miraculous.

The ivorybill long ago achieved mythic status beyond all other birds, at least in the US, but events of the last two years have added new dimensions to its fame. It is an icon, which could forever symbolize the wasteful destruction of the American wilderness, or its successful regeneration. It could stand as a tragic and cautionary reminder of nature's fragility in the face of human greed, or a living catalyst for reconciliation between mankind and environment. The story hangs in the balance. Both books reviewed here provide a timely insight into its significance and, given their different styles and conclusions, they are best read in counterpoint with critical faculties intact.

Well founded or not, the claimed sightings have re-kindled vital search efforts in key locations, including the Choctawhatchee River basin in the Florida panhandle, where recent inconclusive encounters have been reported (Hill, G.E. *et al.* 2006. *Avian Conservation & Ecology* 1(3): Art. 2; published online: [www.ace-eco.org/vol1/iss3/art2/](http://www.ace-eco.org/vol1/iss3/art2/)). Indisputable proof may flood the Internet tomorrow, vindicating the conservation effort and triggering widespread celebration. If it is not forthcoming, we should remember that the world is full of threatened species, many of which – if we postpone our efforts to save them – will slip, like the ivorybill, towards extinction.

Joseph A. Tobias

GILL, F. & WRIGHT, M., on behalf of the International Ornithological Congress. **Birds of the World: Recommended English Names.** 272 pages, CD. London: Christopher Helm (A&C Black), 2006. Paperback, £19.99, ISBN 9780713679045. Contact (distribution service): 01256 302699; website: [www.acblack.com](http://www.acblack.com)

Back in 1990, the International Ornithological Congress 'saw the need for better standardized vernacular names' and initiated the process leading to this putatively definitive list of English names for all living birds. They are far from 'vernacular', but that is another issue. As the Introduction explains, several prominent ornithologists declined to participate, considering the project a waste of time, impossible or inappropriate. Thus, first Burt Monroe, then Frank Gill, convened committees of those who *were* in favour, hence the result comes from a partisan subset of English-speaking ornithologists. In the absence of consensus, it seems appropriate for a reviewer to look at the book not only on its own terms, but also at whether the project actually benefits ornithology at all.

As any well-read Holarctic birder knows, some names for widespread species differ unrecognizably on either side of the Atlantic, North American 'loons', 'jaegers' or 'murrees' sounding foreign to Britons used to 'divers', 'skuas' and 'guillemots'. Traditions diverge when populations are isolated, and since we are nowadays enjoined to respect multicultural diversity, should we not also respect the variation within the 'English' cultural radiation? English is widely used in India and, responding in 2002 to the IOC initiative, the Bombay Natural History Society published a list of English names in the Indian tradition (Manakadan & Pittie (2002) *Newsl. for Birdwatchers* 42(3): i–viii, 1–36), asking:

Who does the standardized, worldwide list of English bird names benefit? ... It is definitely useful to the globetrotting birdwatcher ... [who] ... prefers books with standardized bird names ... but ... there is already a fine system in place to do just that, the Linnaean system of nomenclature. Change that benefits everybody is good. But change for the sake of change is another thing. The globalization of bird names impoverishes the unique culture, history, character and literature, the very fabric, of a nation's ornithological history. Indian English names of birds are as cherished by us as are American English names by the Americans and UK English names by the British.

Despite the appeal to local tradition, the Indian list had already lost such gems as Pharaoh's Chicken (*Neophron percnopterus*, Egyptian Vulture) and Paddy Bird (*Ardeola grayi*, Indian Pond Heron) that graced Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* (1941). Although published well before the end-2004 deadline, the BNHS list was apparently ignored by the IOC project (whose Oriental subcommittee contained no Asians), and escapes mention in their meagre bibliography. The Indians tried, and failed, to get their voice heard.

Mentioned in the Introduction, and echoed by the Indians, is the major objection that nomenclatural uniformity is supposed to be vested in the scientific ('Latin') names as codified by Linnaeus in 1758. So why replicate this in English? Given that English is now the international scientific *lingua franca*, there is a case for a set of names recognized by all English-speaking ornithologists, not least because they are often in practice more stable than the Latin ones, but that is no reason to abolish local variations. However, the IOC list is clearly designed to do just that, as the authors urge birders, editors, government agencies and conservation organizations to comply with the 'International English Name'. Authors are already under pressure to conform, as I know from personal experience.

Additionally, bird names based on geography risk change with the political wind. We have been spared the 'Zaire Peafowl', and 'Fernando Po' survives (no 'Bioko' birds),

but New Hebridean birds are now named for Vanuatu, and numerous Singhalese endemics have mutated from 'Ceylon X' to 'Sri-Lanka X' (interestingly, the Indian list stuck to 'Ceylon'). But partition looms, suggesting we may need 'Ceylon' again for the island itself, independent of the included states. A stable set of geographical names irrespective of political changes would benefit all disciplines, and I would urge scientific and geographical bodies to look into this.

Back to the book, and the practical question of how well the Committee tackled the task they set themselves. Did they follow their own criteria, as set out in the Introduction? Firstly, most names are in fact uncontroversial, and have been stable for generations – a sample of seven small families suggests about 15% of IOC names differ from those in Michael Walters's fairly conservative British-based *Complete Birds of the World* (1980). For the rival British and North American names, the committee allocated one way or the other, tending to the American version. The stated policy was for genera or species-groups to have names of English extraction, with local names in other languages (e.g. Hawaiian) as a second string, normally qualified by an adjective; established and unambiguous single-word names were acceptable, however. They preferred unique names for genera, but allowed some long-established 'genera' to be used for disparate groups, e.g. 'robin', 'sparrow', 'finch' and 'vulture'. Thus, some venerable 'incorrect' names such as Java Sparrow, Zebra Finch and Willie Wagtail survive, while others do not. Amongst the casualties is Peking Robin, which cedes to 'Red-billed Leiothrix' (*Leiothrix lutea*), a name that breaches both their declared brevity norm and more importantly that of etymology, 'leiothrix' being neither English nor ethnic. Furthermore, it has been upgraded to 'genus', and its only congener, the Silver-eared Mesia *L. argentauris*, also becomes a 'Leiothrix'. Not only is 'robin' an accepted multigenus term, but 'inaccurate' geographical terms are explicitly permitted where established – no change in Dartford Warbler or Philadelphia Vireo (examples cited in the Introduction) – so Peking Robin should have won on all counts! Yet this illustrates another bias: many long-standing names (such as Zebra Finch or Peking Robin) have their origins in aviculture, a strand of ornithology unrepresented on the IOC committee, hence many well-known names (Spice Finch, Leadbeater's Cockatoo, Abyssinian Lovebird) have vanished, though 'Abyssinia' survives, surprisingly, in the name of a white-eye (Zosteropidae). Some entirely new names have been invented: 'Angel Tern' (for *Gygis alba*) is discussed in the Introduction, ceding Fairy Tern to *Sterna nereis*, the familiar alternative, White Tern, eschewed as, apparently, too naff ('truly bland'); but there are also others, e.g. 'King Quail' for Painted/Blue-breasted Quail *Coturnix chinensis*. Worse, Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* becomes 'Sooty Noddy' – a recipe for confusion, as these noddies feed and breed widely together with Sooty Terns *Sterna fuscata*. The nadir

here is 'Madeiracrest' (*Regulus madeirae*). Are we to expect 'eurocreepers', 'spainpeckers' or 'floridabills' in the IOC's next outing?

As language and culture evolves, names change organically. In Britain, during my lifetime, the attractive Scottish 'Bonxie' has become the birders' name of choice for *Stercorarius skua*, but the IOC have retained the obsolescent 'Great Skua'. The endangered *Psittacula eques* has been called 'Echo Parakeet' (from its junior synonym *P. echo*) in conservation circles since the 1970s, but the IOC have 'Mauritius Parakeet'. 'Echo' is more evocative and felicitous, so why entrench the pedantic alternative? The familiar 'Madagascar Fody' *Foudia madagascariensis* becomes ambiguously 'Red Fody' (most male fodies are red), when they could have adopted the widely used French/creole name, and used 'Cardinal Fody'. On the (grammatically) bright side, the IOC have preserved, against the trend, possessive apostrophes for birds named after people: 'Spix Macaw' loses to 'Spix's Macaw'. There are arcane rules on whether compound names should be merged, hyphenated or kept as two words, which have somehow led to 'stonechat' becoming 'stone chat', while treecreepers and woodpeckers retain single-word status, and 'cuckoo-shrike' loses its hyphen. Deciding not to make taxonomic changes for this list, they chose to (largely) follow the revised *Howard & Moore* (Dickinson 2003), whose unique sequence, i.e. Joel Cracraft's variant of Sibley-Monroe, they also adopt. Stable sequences are as desirable as stable names and perhaps best fixed independent of phylogenetic advances? Another job for the IOC?

Accepting that their list is a work in progress, Gill and Wright expect feedback from the birding community worldwide. I suspect that general agreement is most likely if the list serves as a vehicle of international communication rather than a *diktat*, and if local names are encouraged alongside the IOC's ones. Thus, in Britain we would have 'Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger)' for *Stercorarius parasiticus*, in North America 'Oldsquaw (Long-tailed Duck)' for *Clangula hyemalis*, in Australasia 'Gray's Greybird (Black-tipped Cicadabird)' for *Coracina schisticeps* and in India 'Brainfever Bird (Common Hawk Cuckoo)' for *Hierococcyx varius*. The IOC list will need regular review to accommodate taxonomic changes and user feedback.

I would encourage all English-speaking birders, amateur and professional, to engage with what is happening here. The rationale (the book's Introduction) can be downloaded free from the website of Princeton University Press (the book's publisher in North America), though naturally you have to pay to get the list itself. This comes with a CD-Rom of all the world's birds in an Excel file, which, however one sees the names, is a useful resource – once downloaded it can be searched, cut-and-pasted, subdivided, names changed, etc. – build your own checklists the easy way!

**Anthony Cheke**

HENNACHE, A. & OTTAVIANI, M. **Monographie des Faisans. Volumes 1–2.** 357 and 492 pages, numerous colour photographs, maps, diagrams and tables. Clères, France: Edition W.P.A. France, 2005; 2006. Paperback, £62.00 plus 15% p.&p. from World Pheasant Association HQ, Fordingbridge, SP6 1JF, UK, website: [www.pheasant.org.uk](http://www.pheasant.org.uk). ISBN 2951246714 and 2951246722. Contact email for Parc Zoologique de Clères: [zoo.cleres@cg76.fr](mailto:zoo.cleres@cg76.fr)

These two weighty and beautifully produced volumes in French with full colour illustrations throughout cover in fully referenced detail the 45 true pheasant species, including the peafowl (*Pavo*, *Afropavo*) and the four *Gallus*. Preceding the species accounts are two important reviews. The first is a 33-page summary about the phylogenetic relationships and the techniques of DNA analysis written by Ettore Randi of the Istituto Nazionale per la Fauna Selvatica, Italy. The second, 66 pages, outlines the authors' advanced views on the rationale of conservation breeding, the plight of many pheasant species, the interrelation of *in situ* and *ex situ* strategies, and the roles of the statutory and private regulatory authorities, including the IUCN/WPA Pheasant Specialist group. This section ends by dealing with many of the practicalities of conserving pheasants *ex situ*, including the certification required to meet various legal requirements.

Essentially the same approach is followed for each species: nomenclature, including the name in five languages; description, with several beautiful photographs, including nests, eggs and chicks as well as adults of both sexes; distribution, with very clearly coloured maps; habitat (again superb illustrations); food, behaviour (more photos) and breeding; ecology; status; conservation and, finally, an extremely useful summary of the size and status of the captive populations, and all of this fully up to date (2005). A few of the accounts are depressing: for example, the captive population of Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii* is predicted to become extinct in 2015, but the huge international effort to conserve the majority of pheasants appears to be paying off. In contrast to some other Galliformes (particularly the hard-pressed Cracidae of South America), only Edwards's Pheasant *Lophura edwardsi* and the Bornean Peacock-Pheasant *Polyplectron (malacense) schleiermacheri* are regarded as Endangered. The Vo Quy's or Vietnamese Pheasant *Lophura edwardsi hatinhensis* is held to be a subspecies of Edwards's Pheasant: Hennache's own research suggests that it may have arisen through close inbreeding in fragments of forest that remained in central Vietnam after the War. Hennache also led the team that established the Imperial Pheasant '*Lophura imperialis*' as a rare hybrid between *Lophura edwardsi* and *L. nycthemera* (Silver Pheasant) and the subsequent delisting by BirdLife International in 2004. The Endangered *Lophura* of Vietnam are thus reduced from three to one. There is a double link back to the discovery of the Imperial Pheasant in Vietnam. The late Jean Delacour, owner of the magnificent Château

at Clères, where Hennache is based, was the discoverer of the bird and also the author of the book, *The Pheasants of the World*, published in 1951 (for review, see *Ibis* 94: 176), that directly led to the present volumes.

Volume 2 contains a 141-page section on pathology contributed by Yannick Roman and Julie Lévrier. This is a very well-illustrated and detailed account of all the pathogens and parasites likely to be found in pheasants, expertly describing the epidemiology, pathogenicity, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment. Some of the photographs may be nauseous, a graphic infestation of the highly pathogenic *Heterakis isolonche*, for example, but this section in particular needs translating into English as soon as possible; there is nothing like it. A minor quibble is that the distribution map of the Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* does not include Java.

In summary, this is an excellent work that really deserves translation. *The Pheasants of the World* by Jean Delacour (see above) led to a revised edition in French (based on the 1977 revised 2nd edition of Delacour's work) appearing in 1983, so I hope the translation process can be reversed and with more speed. At the time of writing, preliminary discussions are taking place with that aim. In the meantime, those who do not read French should buy the volumes anyway, and treasure them and their unique illustrations.

#### G.R. (Dick) Potts

HILL, G.E. & MCGRAW, K.J. (eds) **Bird Coloration. Volume 1: Mechanisms and Measurements. 589 pages, 32 colour plates. Volume 2: Function and Evolution. 477 pages, 32 plates, all but one in colour. Numerous black-and-white figures, tables and information boxes in both volumes. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006. Hardback, each volume \$95.00, £59.95, ISBN 0674018931 and 0674021762.**

Perhaps one of the most striking features of birds is their tremendous variety of plumage colours and the sexual dimorphism exhibited by many species, their vivid colours being so beautifully prominent in behavioural displays during mate-choice. No one can doubt the obvious significance of these spectacles, presumably as impressive to birds as they are to the human observer. These magnificent displays lead to a number of fascinating questions, covering a very broad range of avian biology, that can be asked not only by ornithologists, but also by physiologists, biochemists, geneticists, evolutionary biologists and visual ecologists, to name but a few.

This extensive two-volume work attempts to satisfy all of these potential readers, and the editors have, I believe, succeeded admirably. They have collected together a group of internationally recognized experts who have produced detailed, extensive and, most importantly, up-to-date reviews of their specific subject areas. The two volumes

separate the mechanisms underlying pigmentation and the precise measurement of plumage colours from the functional and evolutionary aspects of avian coloration. These books are aimed at the serious researcher and are not for the faint-hearted.

The very first chapter addresses the fundamental question that I suspect is often forgotten by many investigators. What do birds actually see or, more precisely, what do they perceive? Is the avian visual world identical to ours? Although it has been known at least since the 1970s that many birds have an extended visual range into the near ultraviolet and, more recently, that all diurnal birds are probably tetrachromatic, there is still a natural tendency to think of avian coloration anthropomorphically. To overcome this, it is necessary to have a detailed understanding of the basis of plumage colours, both pigmented and structural, and to be able to measure the spectral characteristics of the plumage. Much of the remainder of the first volume covers these areas in great depth and considers all of the aspects of carotenoids, melanins and other pigments, along with structural colours, looking at dietary and metabolic features, and at the hormonal, genetic and environmental control of expression.

The second volume moves on to function and evolution. The functional section is perhaps somewhat less satisfactory than the first volume since there is some repetition and duplication of ideas concerning colour displays and sexual dimorphism, although this may be inevitable when covering such complex hypotheses. In avian behaviour, it is not only the colours of plumage that are visually important, but also posture and movement, accompanied in many instances by complex song. The final short section on evolution includes an interesting discussion that attempts to reconstruct the state of coloration in ancestral avian species.

The volumes are beautifully illustrated and some of the more complex topics are explained in boxes within each chapter. There are also many useful lengthy tables, summarizing much of the published data, as well as full species and subject indexes. In summary, this is an excellent collection of review chapters that will become an established reference work for many years to come. I would expect to see it on the shelves of every investigator with an interest in any aspect of bird coloration.

#### J.K. Bowmaker

HOCKEY, P.A.R., DEAN, W.R.J. & RYAN, P.G. (eds) **Roberts – Birds of Southern Africa. VIIIth edition. 1296 pages, 80 colour plates, many maps. Cape Town: The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Club Fund, 2005. Hardback, ZAR 795.00, ISBN 0620340533.**

What strikes you first about the new *Roberts* is its size – it is very big and very heavy (5.5 kg). It contains nearly 1300 pages, with a page size larger than A4. One consequence of this size is that the book has to be laid on a flat surface

to be consulted, its weight being too great for it to be held comfortably for any length of time.

This edition also differs in other ways from its predecessors (see *Ibis* 136: 504–505 for a review of the sixth edition). These differences include the species sequence, which here reflects current phylogenetic thinking (explained in the Introduction), and the 'Roberts numbers' used in the previous edition are given in the species-account headers. In many cases, too, the English vernacular names have been changed (also listed clearly in the Introduction); however, apart from scientific binomials, names in all other languages, including Afrikaans, are omitted from this edition. As letters pages in journals and web discussion forums testify, these departures have not gone unremarked by others ...

The bulk of the book is taken up by the vastly expanded species accounts, which range from half a page to about one and a half pages, reflecting the considerable amount of information now available for many species. The accounts are divided into some 14 sections, labelled Identification, Voice (no sonagrams, however, unlike the two previous editions), Distribution, Population and demography (replacing 'Status' of the earlier editions), Movements and migrations, Habitat, General habits, Foraging and food, Breeding, Conservation (a very welcome innovation), Moulting, Geographical variation (subspecies have made an equally welcome return, after having been dropped since the fourth edition), Measurements (subspecies specified) and References.

Ah, the references. They are very extensive and, importantly, thanks to superscripted numbers, facts given in the accounts can be traced to the primary literature. But what a frustrating means of doing so! The reference section at the end of each species account lists the author's name and date (only) against the numbers used in the text. So far, so simple. One then has to go to the book's index and look up the species name to find the page number for the reference list. As the references take up over 130 pages (more than 10% of the book), taking a guess and leafing through isn't really an option. Why not also put the page number on which the references are found at the end of the species account? That the references occupy so much space partly reflects the sheer number of them included (135 in the African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro* account is among the most extensive), but it is also a consequence of the amount of duplication, as a result of each species being referenced separately. Thus, many key references occur repeatedly – *The atlas of southern African birds* (Harrison, J.A. *et al.* 1997), for example, must appear in full over 900 times. Integration would have saved a considerable amount of space.

The size of the book certainly benefits the distribution maps which accompany the species accounts, and which are updated from *The atlas of southern African birds*; they are clear, use shades of grey to indicate increasing abundance and, in another significant and welcome innovation,

for polytypic species, distinguish between races. They lack coordinates, however. The plates are all new and very much handbook, as opposed to field guide, in style; the intent here is evidently for impact, not as a means of bird identification. Thus, often only one individual is shown, and this, for families such as weavers (Ploceidae), means an adult male in breeding plumage; so, for the most part, no juveniles, no non-breeding plumages, few females and no attempt to illustrate subspecific variation. They are the work of a team of seven artists and therefore a range of styles is on display. Some are very pleasing, others are less successful.

The latest *Roberts* is an immense work in more ways than one. I think the book has some shortcomings, but such is the size of the step change between this and the previous edition, it would have been truly remarkable had there been none. All concerned are to be congratulated on this most impressive and important contribution to southern African ornithology but, as and when the time comes for the eighth edition, may I humbly request that consideration be given to splitting it into two volumes?

#### Lincoln Fishpool

LENTZ, J.E. **Introduction to Birds of the Southern California Coast. (California Natural History Guide Series no. 84.)** *xiii + 316 pages, 120 colour plates (photographs), 17 maps, 20 line-drawings, tables, bar graphs.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006. Paperback, \$19.95, ISBN 0520243218.

This is an excellent introduction and guide to the birds of southern California coastal areas. It features an abundance of fun-to-read and useful natural-history information about the birds and their coastal habitats, along with extensive notes on field identification, photographs of each species, and illustrations of them in their southern California shoreline habitats. Nicely organized and very easy to use, it goes beyond the standard bird-identification and distribution format of most bird guides to provide a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich and diverse avifauna of this region.

The guide begins with a general introduction to the natural history of the area from a bird's-eye view – a Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*, as it migrates north along the coast. It includes descriptions of the geography of the region, its climate and various coastal areas, plus delightful and accurate illustrations of the different habitats and some of their typical birds.

The comprehensive introduction to birds and birding basics includes helpful clues to accurate field identification such as flight patterns, feeding behaviour, field marks and vocalizations. Practical advice on equipment for the beginner, with useful tips on binoculars, spotting scopes and, of course, field guides, rounds out a nice overview to getting started as a birder.

The species accounts are in narrative form, and it's almost like being in the field with Lentz. Notes on each species' behaviour and appearance are combined with fascinating natural-history information – and this is what really sets this guide apart. Lentz takes the birder a step beyond identification and tells us a story about each species – a sort of 'did-you-know?' version of a bird guide. The high-quality photographs capture the major field characteristics of each bird. While photos can be a challenge when identifying species with plumage variations, these are clear and consistent and depict only adult birds. Plumage variations between breeding and non-breeding (if any), and juveniles, are noted in the text.

Lentz has also provided directions to the best birding spots, plus helpful hints such as planning your excursion around peak traffic hours and safety tips on tides. Her thoughtfully assembled reading list includes all the essentials and is comprehensive.

This guide could easily serve as a stand-alone field guide for the novice, or an excellent companion to a more traditional and comprehensive field guide for the more advanced birder wanting information on the natural history of the birds. The author is to be congratulated on an excellent publication.

**Susan K. Lafferty**

**MARZLUFF, J.M. & ANGELL, T. *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*. 384 pages, more than 100 original drawings by T. Angell. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005. Hardback, \$30.00, £18.95, ISBN 0300100760.**

This fine book on corvids has been reviewed widely, and many readers of *Ibis* will have read or heard about it before. I will therefore try to provide a fresh perspective by looking at the book through the eyes of a keen crow field researcher.

The nine chapters are a tour-de-force of corvid biology, but the central theme of the narrative remains the interaction of crows and ravens with humans. The authors argue that, from the evolutionary past to the present day, an unusually intimate association between corvids and humans has driven marked coevolutionary (and cultural) adaptations in both protagonists. This thesis is supported by a wealth of intriguing evidence, scientific as well as anecdotal, and I am sure most readers will be convinced that corvids have indeed played, and still play, a special role in our lives.

John Marzluff is one of the world's leading experts on corvid biology, and he has conducted pioneering field studies on a range of species, including the Common Raven *Corvus corax* and the American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*. Not surprisingly then, decades of first-hand experience with these fascinating birds fill the pages of this book and make it so authentic and enjoyable. The authors share anecdotes, insight and advice that can only come from someone who has spent countless hours in hides, trapping crows, or who has followed large numbers of radiotagged

birds from dawn to dusk to map their daily lives. This book is a wonderful way to learn from experts, and I have rarely seen a text where the researcher's enthusiasm for the study subject is so tangible.

An unusual aspect of this book is its wide audience. At first glance, the presentation suggests that it is mainly aimed at laypeople – birdwatchers, corvid enthusiasts and keen naturalists who wish to learn more about the suburban crows that inspect their dustbins early in the morning. There is no doubt, however, that academics will value this book highly too. It presents a well-balanced mixture of in-depth literature review, useful anecdotes and fresh ideas. Readers without specialized knowledge will appreciate that the text is free from jargon, statistics and tedious referencing, while the professional researcher can find all relevant technical information in detailed footnotes and a comprehensive bibliography. In an appendix, the authors even encourage an active exchange of knowledge amongst their diverse readership, by providing instructions for laypeople on how to record and publish their own observations to make them accessible to academics.

Marzluff and Angell's writing will inspire many new studies, promoting further growth of the topical field of corvid research. The authors elegantly expose gaps in our knowledge of these birds, and offer speculation and hypotheses that cry out for investigation. The book also illustrates how dedicated field research can guide experimental work – a good knowledge of a species' biology and a 'feel' for the birds are clearly the best recipe for identifying the right set of questions to ask.

The drawings by Tony Angell deserve special mention. Angell has a talent for capturing the features that make these birds so special and recognizable – be it a body-posture, the fluffing of feathers, or a head-turn and cocky look. The drawings are beautifully crafted, informative, often humorous and, in combination with the lucid text, they make this book a true page-turner. It is perhaps a trivial criticism, but I did not like the fact that some drawings are shown twice, once in a compound panel and once as a stand-alone; a well-produced book like this can do without such unnecessary duplication.

In summary, this is a highly enjoyable, well-researched, inspiring book that everybody with a keen interest in birds – not just in corvids – should own, and it should surely be obligatory reading for every serious student of corvid biology. It is also excellent value for money, and I am sure it will win crows and ravens many more friends and admirers, fulfilling the authors' ultimate goal. Incidentally, I am writing these lines whilst conducting fieldwork on New Caledonian Crows *Corvus moneduloides* in the South Pacific, and it is comforting to know that even such seasoned field researchers as Marzluff and Angell still find it difficult to trap crows ...

**Christian Rutz**

McCARTHY, E.M. 2006. **Handbook of Avian Hybrids of the World**. 583 pages, 20 figures, 3 appendices. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Hardback, \$89.50, £54.00, ISBN 9780195183238 and 0195183231.

Hybrids have long been a source of fascination and frustration for biologists. Avian hybrids confuse birdwatchers and mystify systematists, but at the same time have provided a rich vein of research opportunities for evolutionary biologists. Darwin was obsessed by hybrids because he felt they held the answer to the origin of species. Others found hybrids repulsive, flying in the face of God's teachings. Botanists were much more sanguine about plant hybrids, which were also much commoner and in cultivation frequently gave rise to entirely new species, and hence were somehow slightly more respectable. Among animals, birds seem to hybridize much more readily than almost any other taxon and natural hybrids have been reported from several thousand interspecific crosses. They are especially frequent in wildfowl (Anatidae) – possibly facilitated by forced copulation and a phallus in males – grouse (Tetraonidae) and American warblers (Parulidae). Since the early 1600s, thousands of avian hybrids have also been created artificially by bird breeders and, as McCarthy shows, cage-bird enthusiasts have successfully crossed no fewer than 50 different species with the domesticated canary (*Serinus domesticus*). Through the use of artificial-insemination technology, poultry biologists have also made a major contribution to the biology of avian hybrids, generating a wealth of data on the outcome of interspecific inseminations that ornithologists would do well to familiarize themselves with.

For anyone interested in hybrids or speciation in birds, McCarthy has produced an extremely useful reference book. Its strength lies in how thoroughly he has created his list of hybrids. Gray's earlier volume, *Bird Hybrids* (1958), was deeply frustrating because it included so many unauthenticated records. While records of hybrids, especially unlikely ones such as that between the Chestnut-capped Blackbird *Agelaius ruficapillus* and the domestic canary, can be very difficult to authenticate, McCarthy has been particularly critical in assessing the evidence. In some of my own research prior to this book, I checked the historical records for just one interspecific cross and was surprised how long it took to track down the references, many of which lay outside the normal ornithological literature. McCarthy has done this for all reported hybrids – a monumental undertaking based on over 5000 references – and the result is a wonderfully comprehensive account. But this is much more than a list. He also provides a detailed summary of whether a particular cross is common or rare, occurs reciprocally, results in fertile eggs, hatched offspring, or sexually mature individuals, and whether these hybrid offspring are fertile. As McCarthy says: 'Almost every topic in the field cries out for additional research'. This scholarly and comprehensive book is essential reading

for biologists interested in the evolution of birds and provides a solid foundation from which to start.

Tim Birkhead

MEBS, T. & SCHMIDT, D. **Die Greifvögel Europas, Nordafrikas und Vorderasiens**. 495 pages, 396 colour and 46 black-and-white illustrations, many colour photographs, egg and feather plates, etc., 79 tables. Stuttgart: Kosmos-Verlag, 2006. Hardback, €49.90, ISBN 9783440095850 and 3440095851.

This very substantial volume (2 kg) is a guide to the 45 raptors breeding in the western Palearctic, so a book for the desk rather than the field. It is a companion to the earlier volume on the owls of Europe by Mebs and Scherzinger (2000; reviewed in *Ibis* 144: 541). The work is broadly in two parts: the first 100 pages are an overview of raptor biology, with chapters on diversity and systematics, physiology, behaviour and reproduction, ecology, habitat, and conservation, while the remainder consists of the species accounts and literature. In the general section, alongside many beautiful colour photographs, there are captivating line-drawings by Winfried Daunicht, one of the finest draughtsmen and bird portraitists working today. A very informative idea is that the raptor systematics used in three current publications (Sibley & Ahlquist 1990, Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994, Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001) are set out alongside each other so that the resulting differences can be seen at a glance. The authors of this publication commissioned Michael Wink to construct a cladogram, and the two species most difficult to place were, not surprisingly, Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* and Dark Chanting Goshawk *Melierax metabates*.

Each species account starts with the name in nine languages, accompanied by an explanation of the scientific name and sometimes also of the common name in any one of these languages (an excellent idea that should really be compulsory in any handbook-type publication), then field characters, voice, distribution, population (usually including a full-page table with data from every western Palearctic country), habitat, breeding density, territorial behaviour, general behaviour, feeding, reproduction, movements, conservation and open questions (another good idea worth emulating). All this is rounded off with a very thorough literature list containing up to 50 titles for well-known species, while there is a general list at the end of the book of 399 works, some of them from 2006. The species accounts are embellished by the Dan Zetterström illustrations from *Collins Bird Guide* by Svensson *et al.* (1999), in other words probably the best currently available, delightful and instructive photographs of birds as well as a selection of feathers, plus a distribution map. The quality of the genuinely informative photographs selected reminds one of those in the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*.

Any raptor expert would learn something from this fine publication, but a beginner would not be at a loss in more technical passages since all specialist terms are explained. The list of colleagues who assisted the authors in the course of preparing the book is a who's who of western Palearctic raptor specialists and a guarantee, if any were needed, of its very high quality.

**Brian Hillcoat**

**Moss, S. A Bird in the Bush. A Social History of Birdwatching.** 375 pages, 8 plates of black-and-white photographs. London: Aurum Press Ltd, 2005. Paperback, £8.99, ISBN 1845130855.

First published in hardback in 2004, this is an entertaining account of modern birdwatching, now, we are told, one of the world's most popular recreational activities, and of its background. Half the book is devoted to the post-war period – with its 'New Naturalists', improved optics, the birth of twitching, growth of the RSPB and worldwide 'birding', catered for by field guides, pagers, tours, birdfairs and television. The earlier chapters outline the background to all this, taking the reader swiftly from Egyptian tomb paintings to Gilbert White, Bewick, Montagu, John Clare and the first moves away from exploitation towards an appreciation of birds for their own sake. The Victorian enthusiasm for collecting skins and eggs is recounted. In time, this gave way to the protection, photography and observation of birds and, finally, to organized surveys, the BTO and *The Handbook*. Hudson, Witherby, Jourdain, Tucker and Nicholson are singled out as major influences.

Much of the book is about birdwatchers themselves, with bird identification, not their study, connecting its two halves. So much ground is covered that some aspects and judgements are inevitably superficial. The term 'birdwatching' is acknowledged as originating in the title of Edmund Selous' 1901 book, but the work itself is dismissed as 'unremarkable', its gloomy, whimsical opening regarded (incorrectly) as typical of the whole. In fact, it was unique for its time, containing the first descriptions of the display of Stock Dove *Columba oenas*, Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*, Eider *Somateria mollissima* and Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, the aerial evolutions of Rooks *Corvus frugilegus*, and much else.

*A Bird in the Bush* instructively relates its subject matter to wider changes in society, upon which much of it depends; corresponding developments in North America are also mentioned. It ends on the sombre note that birdwatching's popularity is contributing to avian declines. Readable and lucid, it is enlivened by many anecdotes, which make it both accessible and enjoyable for the general reader.

**Leo Kinlen**

**PODULKA, S., ROHRBAUGH, R. W., JR & BONNEY, R. (eds) Handbook of Bird Biology. 2nd edition.** 1272 pages, over 1000 black-and-white figures and photographs, 19 tables and compact disc. Ithaca, New York: Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, in association with Princeton University Press, 2004. Hardback, \$99.50, ISBN 093802762X. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, New York 14850, USA; website: [www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu)

Weighing in at 0.54 stone and 6.4 cm thick, this volume will join the heavyweights in the library. It is intended to serve as the textbook for the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Home Study Course in Bird Biology and aspires to '... serve as the most useful general ornithology reference work.' The question is, then, is it a contender and how does it match up with the other challengers in the textbook and reference-book categories?

First, what do we get with this heavyweight? Lavishly illustrated, this book has ten numbered and two unnumbered chapters, one designated H, 'Birds and Humans: A Historical Perspective', which opens the book, and the other E, 'Evolution of Birds and Avian Flight', which is placed between Chapters 5 and 6. Interspersed throughout the numbered chapters are informative, multipage sidebars that expand on topics covered in the chapter. For example, Chapter 6 'Understanding Bird Behaviour' has six sidebars, including 'Bird Brains', 'Play', 'Defense Behaviour', and 'Living in Groups'. A 16-page 'Species Table' follows the body of the text; its purpose is not made clear, but it may be a list of all the species mentioned in the text. This is followed by a 43-page glossary, a section about the authors, over 750 references and an extensive index. Finally, a compact disc is included, containing 71 tracks of vocal recordings keyed to the text. Fourteen different authors contributed chapters to the book, and although such multi-authorship often results in variation in style among chapters, the editors have been unusually successful at maintaining a similar, relaxed style throughout.

How does the text measure up as a textbook? The topics usually covered in ornithology textbooks are all present, plus one, 'A Guide to Bird Watching', that is aimed directly towards the home-study student for which the book is designed. Chapters are authoritative, although I would like to see more references to the original literature in a textbook. A particular strength is the book's uncompromising insistence on evolutionary thinking and, where appropriate, hypothesis testing. It is not often in a taxon-specific textbook that one finds a discussion of group vs. individual selection (6: 24ff.), followed by a set of testable predictions that show the reader how science is done.

Is this the most useful general reference work on ornithology? Here I think the book is less successful. Although most of the topics I randomly selected from *A Dictionary of Birds* by Campbell & Lack (1985) are included, the depth of coverage is variable. There are clear explanations

and depictions of counter-current exchange mechanisms in the lungs (4: 100) and in the arterial–venous system of the leg (4: 151), which are worthy of a physiology text, but little is said of the avian immune system and the description of blood cells lacks details. The chapter on evolution of birds is tilted in favour of the thecodont hypothesis for their origin, but the theropod hypothesis is covered and clearly laid out in the accompanying diagram in the chapter's Appendix A. The discussion of mate-choice and extra-pair copulations (6: 79ff.) is generally well done, but I found the description of the three hypotheses to explain female choosiness to be misleading. The direct-benefits hypothesis includes more than just benefits associated with avoiding diseased or infertile males.

What is the decision? As a textbook for the Home Study Course, the *Handbook of Bird Biology* scores a KO, providing an excellent introduction to avian biology, an innovative use of text and CD recordings, an adequate coverage of most topics, and good value for money. As a reference work, I think it suffers a Technical Knock-Out. I will find myself going to more specialized books for reference material, but for those without access to good libraries, this book will provide excellent information on most topics. Perhaps this outcome should not be a surprise: reaching the top in both the competitive textbook and reference-book categories may have been an impossible goal for a single, albeit robust, contender.

**Charles F. Thompson**

RODRIGUEZ MATA, J. R., ERIZE, F. & RUMBOLL, M. **A Field Guide to the Birds of South America: Non-Passerines: from Rheas to Woodpeckers.** 384 pages, 156 colour plates, 1 full-page map and many small (distribution) maps, drawings. London: HarperCollins, 2006. Hardback, £25.00, ISBN 0007150849.

VAN PERLO, B. **A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Central America.** 336 pages, 98 colour plates, 4 colour maps and 1575 small (distribution) maps, 1 page of drawings. London: HarperCollins, 2006. Hardback, £25.00, ISBN 0007134908.

These two new books in the Collins Field Guide series are both approximately A5 in size and not too heavy, making them truly portable, in contrast to many of the weighty tomes currently used in the Neotropics. Each starts with half a dozen brief introductory pages, including a map of the area covered followed by the species accounts, with text on the left-hand pages and illustrations opposite. *Birds of South America* (BSA) also has a useful introductory summary of about a third to half a page, showing the common features of each of the 63 orders covered. *Birds of Mexico and Central America* (BMCA) unfortunately lacks this. BMCA also compares unfavourably with BSA in terms of layout, its smaller illustrations leaving much unoccupied

white space on each plate. Additionally, BMCA places the distribution maps at the end of the book, which requires irritating flicking back and forward to compare ranges of similar species. The maps in BSA are small but clear, so that potential confusion species can be easily and quickly ruled out on distribution. The BSA fits a surprising amount of information on identification, usually including descriptions of male, female and often juvenile plumages, as well as on habitat, into texts of just 5–10 lines, each facing the generally excellent illustrations which are lively pictures showing individual species in a variety of postures and plumages. Nevertheless, some compromises inevitably arise from trying to fit more than 1300 non-passerine species of South America into one pocket-sized book. The informative text still lacks the detail that could appear in a larger handbook format and there is little or no information on behaviour or vocalizations for most species. This is not a major problem, as a user could easily supplement the book with some of the many birdsong CDs available for South America. More annoying is the lack of information on altitudinal distribution, which is often crucial in separating out potential confusion species. Despite this gripe, *Birds of South America* provides, for the first time, excellent coverage of the continent's non-passerines and is a must for South American birders and ornithologists.

Given the strength of BSA, it is a disappointment that the second book reviewed here is so much less impressive despite the similar format. As well as being small, the illustrations in BMCA are less detailed and not as lively. In the case of many of the tyrant-flycatchers (Tyrannidae), I suspect I would have some difficulty in separating similar species if I were relying solely on this book. The text is also limited (usually only 2–4 lines per species) and there is often less than a single line for the actual species description. For example, the entire description of Spotted Antbird *Hylophylax naeviioides* is given as 'Not unlike 9 (Wing-banded Antbird *Myrmornis torquata*) but with different jizz and patterning', which, without information on the actual jizz and pattern differences, is spectacularly uninformative. The text does score well in including voice descriptions and altitudinal range. All in all, although *Birds of Mexico and Central America* provides information on over 1500 species in a compact format useful for the field, there are better books out there for those birding or working in the area covered.

**Ross MacLeod**

SALE, R. **A Complete Guide to Arctic Wildlife.** 464 pages, many colour illustrations, including 38 plates, over 500 photographs, and maps. London: Christopher Helm, 2006. Hardback, £40.00, ISBN 0713670398 and 9780713670394. Contact (distribution service): 01256 302699; website: [www.acblack.com](http://www.acblack.com)

This lavishly produced and illustrated book falls short of its claim to be complete. It does indeed include descriptions

of all the birds and mammals found in the Arctic, using a broad definition, which takes in species not normally considered Arctic such as Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Common Gull *Larus canus* and Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*, but it has shortcomings as a reference work. The index includes birds already listed in the book itself in systematic order, but unfortunately omits names of plants, as well as geographical and personal names. More serious is the omission of any kind of bibliography on Arctic natural history, which might have mentioned important regional reference works. Nevertheless, this is a very good book, which will be hard to better.

Like other guides, this one is based on a set of illustrations, distribution maps and a concise account of each bird or mammal species arranged under standard headings: identification, size, voice, distribution, diet, breeding, and so on. It scores very high marks for its admirable coloured paintings, which often include the different male and female plumages, and sometimes juveniles too. There are also some excellent paintings of whales. The photographic illustrations cannot compare in quality with the artwork, although a few (e.g. the Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* on p. 300, and the American Tree Sparrow *Spizella arborea* on p. 321) are outstanding.

A valuable feature of the book is the Introduction, which attempts a definition of the Arctic, describes the geology and climate, gives a brief history of human activities there, and mentions the different habitats for birds and their adaptations to Arctic life. It ends with a fascinating account of snow and ice and a notable description of current threats to the Arctic, culminating in global warming, which, the author suggests, may soon bring the Polar Bear *Ursus maritimus* 'to the brink of extinction'. All this, besides a succinct but useful six-page visitor's guide to the Arctic, forms a welcome addition to the scanty information usually contained in most guides, and goes some way to justifying the claim to completeness in the title of this one.

**Richard Vaughan**

SMITH, J.N.M., KELLER, L.F., MARR, A.B. & ARCESE, P. (eds) **Conservation and Biology of Small Populations. The Song Sparrows of Mandarte Island.** 260 pages, many figures, tables and drawings, a few black-and-white photographs, references (34 pages) and index at the end of the book. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Hardback, \$59.50, £35.99, ISBN 0195159365 and 9780195159365.

*Conservation and Biology of Small Populations* summarizes the results of 28 years of intensive research on the genetics, behaviour and population dynamics of a small population of Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia* from Mandarte Island (British Columbia, Canada). The book is an outstanding

illustration of how the continuous monitoring of a small bird population, breeding on an island 700 m long and 85 m wide, can provide a significant contribution towards the understanding of the biology of a species. Importantly, it also identifies the key factors shaping the dynamics of small populations, providing a reference point to other studies of threatened bird populations limited by small population size where extensive population-dynamic data are not readily available.

The book is divided into 11 chapters written by specialists in ecology and evolutionary biology, and each chapter deals with a specific topic, such as patterns of reproduction, interactions with parasitic Brown-headed Cowbirds *Molothrus ater*, social mechanisms and behaviour, inbreeding, immigration, mortality patterns and their effects on population dynamics. By using a small island population of the Song Sparrow as a model system, the book unveils the importance of small population size on the genetic structure and ecological performance of populations. It begins with an introductory chapter on the genetics and demography of small populations and, in the light of Song Sparrow biology and population dynamics, discusses the genetic consequences of small population size such as inbreeding and loss of genetic variation. The last chapter aims to re-evaluate the relative importance of genetics, demography and environmental factors to the survival of small populations.

The title of the book may be slightly misleading – it is, after all, not a conservation biology handbook, although all the topics discussed are strongly anchored in a conservation biology context. Each chapter ends with recommendations to wildlife managers and conservation biologists dealing with small populations. Although it is difficult to make generalizations to other species and populations, this book presents a unique insight into the biology of a wild population where many aspects were investigated over a long period, and should therefore be relevant not only to those interested in the conservation of other avian taxa, but also to other vertebrate species.

The writing style is clear and entertaining, and should appeal to a broad spectrum of readers, from first-year undergraduates to conservation biologists and post-graduate researchers. Furthermore, great care was taken to provide a modern and rigorous statistical approach to all analyses; the statistical tests and modelling approaches are clearly specified and detailed, which can be a great source of inspiration to the reader wishing to apply these in other fields of biological interest. All in all, anyone with an interest in bird biology, conservation biology and genetics, and also those keen on having an overview of statistical methods rigorously applied to ecological datasets, will find much to learn from this concise yet highly informative book.

**Marta Szulkin**

SUMMERS-SMITH, J.D. **On Sparrows and Man.** 111 pages, 34 colour plates. Guisborough, Cleveland, UK: J.D. Summers-Smith, 2006 ('2005'). Hardback, £15.00 + £1.50 p.&p. from the author, 79 Thames Avenue, Guisborough, Cleveland TS14 8AJ, UK, email: [jdss@tribology.co.uk](mailto:jdss@tribology.co.uk). ISBN 9780952538325 and 0952538326.

Moonlighting from Great Tits *Parus major* in my gap year at Oxford's EGI to mist-net and ring sparrows on Oxford's (then) suburban rubbish tips, I have, like Dennis Summers-Smith, long had a soft spot for them. Later that year (1963), I was delighted to discover a freshly written monograph on my target species, the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, which fired me to try to elucidate their ecology further in subsequent postgraduate work. The monograph's author was Dennis Summers-Smith, who had got the bug back in 1947. Forty years and several serious sparrow books later, he has returned to the fray with a book that is more light-hearted and personal than its predecessors. Although it contains some little-known material, such as the use of hollow 'sparrow stones' as nest-sites in traditional Maltese buildings, it is mostly an eclectic ramble through sparrows in history, culture (especially poetry), as pets, pests and commensals, culminating in a discussion of the recent House Sparrow declines in northern Europe. These declines remain inadequately explained, the author drawing attention to the continued presence of good numbers in central Paris (which I saw myself in October 2006), in contrast to London. The book is illustrated with photos of the birds themselves, Maltese sparrow stones, English and Dutch sparrow pots (the original nestbox, but aimed at harvesting the young as food), and sparrows in both western and eastern art – though several of the plates are badly pixellated, rather spoiling otherwise interesting images. Proof-reading seems to have been skimmed too – typos are too frequent, particularly the spelling of names. However, it is an entertaining brief read, and it is sobering to reflect that only a century earlier, the House Sparrow, now a protected species in Britain because of collapsing numbers, was so abundant and reviled that sparrow clubs were formed to wipe them out, and W.B. Tegetmeier's venomous little book, *The House Sparrow* (1899), was subtitled 'the avian rat'. Back then, it was 'a remarkable fact that there is not one eminent practical ornithologist of the present day in England or elsewhere who advocates the protection of this species'. Will someone in 2105 be writing an apologetic epitaph for the Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea*? And weren't vultures regarded as somewhat disgusting until poisoned by cattle medicine?

**Anthony Cheke**

UGLOW, J. **Nature's Engraver. A Life of Thomas Bewick.** 458 pages, 16 pages of (mainly) colour illustrations and numerous black-and-white woodcuts. London: Faber &

Faber, 2006. Hardback, £20.00, ISBN 9780571223749 and 0571223745.

So much has already been written about Thomas Bewick (1753–1828) that any new biography needs to be a good one. This affectionate account of the master wood engraver is a thoroughly good read, but it does have a few imperfections. Jenny Uglow leads us from Bewick's humble beginnings at the farmhouse of Cherryburn on the banks of the Tyne, to his apprenticeship as an engraver in Newcastle, and onwards through his gradual rise to lasting fame as a result of his *General History of Quadrupeds* (1790) and *History of British Birds (Land Birds 1797 and Water Birds 1804)*. She places Bewick firmly in his social and historical context, not least amongst the upheaval and distress caused by the Napoleonic Wars, and she often makes long but worthwhile discourses into other relevant topics such as how he made his woodcuts, his tricky relationship with his long-standing business partner, Ralph Beilby, and the antics and achievements of the many apprentices. One can only marvel at the wealth of detail from the correspondence of family, friends and business associates, and from account books and cash books; much more than will probably survive from a modern graphics unit producing similar items to those that Bewick laboured over in his workshop – bookplates, letterheads, business cards, advertisements, and such like.

Yet despite the level of detail and the many references to Bewick's fellow naturalists, the book somehow fails to give him his proper place amongst them, or to discuss the place of his *British Birds* in the ornithological literature. Also, as is often the case in literary biographies of naturalists, scant regard is paid to the wildlife, the very subject of their passion. There is scarcely any attempt to update the names of birds, so some readers will be left puzzling over references to 'mountain linnets', 'willow wrens', 'black ouzels', 'night warblers' and 'the bunting'. This deficiency is especially highlighted when a 'spotted sandpiper' from the moors of Northumberland is mentioned without comment. One quote that must surely refer to a Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* – 'It runs with great Facility up or down the underside of Branches of Apple or Pear Trees, with its Back downwards. Its note is loud and singular ...' – is identified as a Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*.

John James Audubon (once oddly referred to as James Audubon) met Bewick in Newcastle in 1827, but his vivid description of this encounter, the best that there is for the engraver while he was in his seventies, is rather too truncated to be useful. Elsewhere, William Yarrell appears as both Charles and William.

These faults can easily be forgiven as the book is so well written and the text is so liberally interspersed with finely reproduced examples of Bewick's woodcuts: his birds, farm animals, exotic mammals, and best of all, his intricate, amusing, hilarious, tragic, sad, grim, cautionary tailpieces. To quote Audubon: 'Look at his tail-pieces, Reader, and say

if you ever saw so much life represented before ... you will agree with me in thinking that in his peculiar path none have equalled him.' Years of overexposure on an endless production line of trinkets, table mats, tea towels, and in a host of books and magazines have failed to diminish their abiding charm.

#### Richard Mearns

UNDERHILL, L.G., TOMKOVICH, P.S. & HARRISON, J.A. (eds) **The Annual Cycle of the Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*. (International Wader Studies 19.)** 211 pages, many figures (graphs, maps). Cape Town: International Wader Study Group, 2006. Paperback, €25.00 plus 5.00 p.&p. from International Wader Study Group, c/o BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, UK. ISSN 13549944.

Derived and expanded from a one-day International Wader Study Group workshop held in August 1998 in Cape Town, South Africa, this volume is a compilation of 38 papers about different stages in the annual cycle of the Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* from many different parts of the world. The papers from that meeting have been updated, and others added to provide a more complete geographical coverage. Some gaps remain, notably for South and Southeast Asia, although future papers from those regions are promised. The sequence of papers is roughly geographical, starting with the breeding grounds in Arctic Siberia, then migratory staging areas from North America across Europe and Asia, and papers from non-breeding areas in Africa, the Indian Ocean and Australia. The volume is rounded off by a synthesis of the birds' annual cycle (Underhill), which is described as a 'life-spiral', since first-year birds do not return to the breeding grounds (termed a wader 'gap-year' by the editors), and so follow a different cycle to adults, gradually catching up with the adult cycle in their second year of life. Finally, a list of other key publications on Curlew Sandpipers is provided, which also serves to fill some of the geographical gaps in the present volume.

The Curlew Sandpiper has been known to breed in the Russian High Arctic since a nest was finally found in the Yenisey Gulf in 1897, but it is only since the 1960s that its full breeding range, extending from the eastern Yamal Peninsula to (at least occasionally) as far east as Alaska, has become clear. A useful literature analysis of breeding densities (Lappo & Tomkovich), which could be valuably done for other species, identifies the core breeding areas, which are parts of the Taymyr Peninsula and coastal tundras to the east in Yakutia. Here is where the enigmas begin: Tomkovich and Soloviev, in their synthesis of Curlew Sandpipers on the breeding grounds, state that the birds arrive already paired (so when do those 'gap-year' juveniles get into the breeding system?), and then start breeding in the more southerly parts of their range, but then males, and females whose clutches have failed, move

further north following the snowmelt and apparently make another breeding attempt.

As males then re-mate with successive females, this leads to complex and probably major mixing on the breeding grounds. The extent of the mixing of birds which use very different flyways to their non-breeding grounds (from West Africa to Australia) is still unclear, but it is evident that there is more mixing than in other Arctic wader species such as Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, which have discrete breeding grounds for different flyway populations (see, for example, Piersma & Davidson (1992). *WSG Bulletin* 63, Suppl.). Curlew Sandpipers from at least some parts of their breeding grounds fan out over several very distinct flyways, but it seems that there may be some form of cline, birds from western breeding grounds such as Taymyr mostly migrating through Europe to Africa, and those from further east, in Yakutia, mostly through Asia to Australia. The substantial mixing is exemplified by banding studies in southeastern Kazakhstan (Gavrilov & Gavrilov), from where different birds have migrated to southern Africa, south India and Southeast Asia and Australia. This intriguing paper is just one of 16 from different parts of Russia and eastern Europe, which together contribute intriguing pieces to the annual cycle jigsaw.

Perhaps surprisingly, the papers in this volume add little to the earlier indications of another Curlew Sandpiper phenomenon, at least in those using African-Eurasian flyways, that of 'loop migration', where the birds use different southward and northward routes (Elliot *et al.* (1987). *Ostrich* 47: 191–213; Wilson *et al.* (1980). *Wildfowl* 31: 107–122). Yet there are indications that this may be widespread, from the different abundances of birds in the two seasons reported in many of the papers from Russia and eastern Europe, and probably also in the Indian Ocean (Hockey) and East Asia–Australasia (Minton *et al.*). A further puzzle is the breeding origins of birds regularly occurring in small numbers on the Atlantic seaboard of the United States and elsewhere in North America (Hanson).

With its Arctic breeding and wide geographical range, the Curlew Sandpiper could act as a valuable integrative sentinel of global environmental change (see Piersma & Lindström (2004). *Ibis* 146 (Suppl. 1): 61–69), but there are other key questions about Curlew Sandpipers that remain to be addressed. In particular, given their apparently major mixing on breeding grounds, why is the Australasian population in serious decline while at the same time the East Atlantic Flyway population is steadily increasing (Stroud *et al.* (2004). *International Wader Studies* 15)? Overall, this useful volume significantly enhances our knowledge of an enigmatic wader, through the collaboration of many amateur and professional wader researchers worldwide.

Nick Davidson

**Also received**

BORODINA, O.E. (ed.) [**A Buturlin Festschrift. Contributions to The Second International Buturlin Readings**] (in Russian, with English summaries). 368 pages, many photographs (most in black and white), drawings, graphs, tables. Ul'yanovsk: 'Corporation for Progressive Technologies' Publishers, 2006. Hardback, price not known, ISBN 5946550721. [Note: may also be cited as Volodina, Yu.K et al. (eds).]

An earlier Festschrift, including 'Buturlin Readings', was reviewed in *Ibis* 146: 697. These Second Readings took place again in the Regional Museum in Ul'yanovsk on the Volga, this time in September 2005, and were dedicated to the centenary of Buturlin's Kolyma Expedition and his discovery of the breeding grounds of Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*. The articles, by ornithologists, historians of science, museum workers and students, are arranged in three sections, the first two of which focus, respectively, on the history of the Kolyma Territory and the 1905 Expedition, and the current population status of Ross's Gull. Articles in the third and longest section are on contemporary ornithology, mainly in (eastern) European Russia. Particularly fascinating in this well-produced book are the photographs from Kolyma.

**M.G.W.**

BUSCHING, W.-D. **Einführung in die Gefieder- und Rupfungskunde, mit Federn-Schlüssel zu den Familien. Sonderausgabe [Special edition]. 2nd edn.** 408 pages, 550 figures (including black-and-white photographs), 10 colour plates and 16 tables. Wiebelsheim: AULA-Verlag, 2005. Hardback, €29.80, ISBN 3891046952.

The first edition of this work was published in 1997 and reviewed in *Ibis* 140: 543. Importantly, it appeared as Volume 1 of a projected ten-volume series entitled *Handbuch der Gefiederkunde europäischer Vögel* ['Handbook of plumology of European birds']. The 2005 Special Edition closely resembles its predecessor, but a new Chapter 9 reveals, first, that the decision had been taken *not* to proceed with the Handbook series (main reason: the small number of researchers in the field), and second, most usefully draws the reader's attention to new publications (pre-eminent the journal, founded in 1993, *Beiträge zur Gefiederkunde & Morphologie der Vögel*, Naumann Museum, Köthen) and electronic resources.

**M.G.W.**

DUBOIS, P.J. (Compiler, on behalf of La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux) **Where to Watch Birds in France. 2nd edition.** 400 pages, many maps and line-drawings. London: Christopher Helm (A&C Black), 2006. Paperback, £16.99, ISBN 0713669802 and 9780713669800.

The first edition of this book (1992) was reviewed in *Ibis* 134: 391. Translated (from the French original of 2004) and edited by Tony Williams and Ken Hall, this revised and updated second edition covers 337 sites. The detailed text, much-improved maps (through the use of various shades of green, also bold black boundaries) and abundant illustrations make this an indispensable guide for all birding trips to France.

**M.G.W.**

HILL-COTTINGHAM, P., BRIGGS, D., BRUNNING, R., KING, A. & RIX, G. (eds) **The Somerset Wetlands. An Everchanging Environment.** 240 pages, many colour photographs, maps, drawings, tables and CD. Tiverton, Devon, UK: Somerset Books (DAA Halsgrove Ltd), 2006. Hardback, £19.99, ISBN 0861834321 and 9780861834327. Email: sales@halsgrove.com, website: www.halsgrove.com

Well produced and attractively illustrated, this book on the Levels and Moors of Somerset, where much is being done to conserve and restore habitats and wildlife, is divided into three parts: 'Wetlands through time' (nine short chapters), 'Wetlands and wildlife' (11) and 'Wetlands – what future?' (four plus a poem). There are two chapters specifically about birds in Part 2: 'Birds in a changing landscape' (Sally Mills, RSPB) and 'Winter waterfowl ... at night' (David Chown). I see the book's main strength as presenting contributions from a large team of experts that range widely, from prehistoric archaeology and an autobiographical 'Living with peat' to studies of individual water beetle and water snail species, and farming (past, present and future challenges).

**M.G.W.**

KAZAKOV, B.A. *et al.* [**Birds of the Northern Caucasia (sic). Volume 1**] (in Russian, with English summary). 398 pages, 114 tables, 20 figures (maps), 19 colour photographs on front and back covers. Rostov-on-Don: Rostov State Pedagogical University Press, 2004. Hardback, price not known, ISBN 5848002169.

Northern Caucasia is defined here as the northern macroslope of the Greater Caucasus, a part of the southern macroslope within the Krasnodar Territory, also Predkavkaz'ye [Ciscaucasia], the Rostov Region and that part of Kalmykia abutting the Kumo-Manych lowland. Following a preface and introduction, the history of ornithology in the region is reviewed. The systematic section then describes the distribution, population, migration, breeding and food of 66 species in seven orders (Gaviiformes through to Anseriformes). In the light of recent four-figure counts of White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* at Lake Manych (J. Gordon: BirdsInRussia@yahoo.com), the book usefully summarizes its status there and elsewhere in the region.

**M.G.W.**

Moss, S. **Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Birds ... but Were Afraid to Ask!** 192 pages, line-drawings. London: Christopher Helm (A&C Black), 2005. Paperback, £9.99, ISBN 0713668156 and 9780713668155.

The approximately 500 questions and answers in this book are arranged in ten chapters, each dealing with a different topic – physiology, distribution, feeding, migration, birds and people (which includes names, as food and pets, in culture, protection and study), etc. Boxes present superlatives – the heaviest, smallest, oldest, earliest breeding age, and so on. The majority of the most frequently asked questions about birds are dealt with here. If you have ‘better’ questions or answers, contact the author through [www.acblack.com](http://www.acblack.com).

M.G.W.

Moss, S. **The Private Life of Birds.** 208 pages, many colour illustrations (mostly photographs). London: New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd, 2006. Hardback, £19.99, ISBN 1845374223 and 9781845374228. Website: [www.newhollandpublishers.com](http://www.newhollandpublishers.com)

This book comprises six main chapters: Movement (locomotion and associated behaviours), Migration, Feeding, Breeding, Where birds live (population, distribution, threats, extinction), and Birds and people. There is much overlap with the book reviewed above, but this has longer essays, attractive illustrations and coloured boxes focusing on particular topics within chapters. Both books would make good acquisitions for school libraries.

M.G.W.

Moss, S. **This Birding Life. The Best of the Guardian's Birdwatch.** 216 pages, 7 line-drawings by Jan Wilczur. London: Aurum Press, 2006. Hardback, £12.99, ISBN 1845131800 and 9781845131807. Website: [www.aurumpress.co.uk](http://www.aurumpress.co.uk)

The author's *Birdwatch* column (about 150 to date) began in *The Guardian* in 1993, and this book presents a selection of such pieces, arranged in seven chapters: from ‘Growing up: 1963–1982’, ‘My local patch: 1994–1997’ (disused London reservoir), chapters on birding in Britain and abroad, to ‘Birds, places and people’. All-pervading is a well-balanced philosophy that incorporates the consoling, enjoyable and ‘re-creative’ aspects of birdwatching into an already rich life. The book is a pleasure to dip into or to read as a continuous narrative.

M.G.W.

MUNIER, V. **White Nature.** 160 pages, 72 colour photographs. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Natural Wonders Press, 2006. Hardback, £25.00, \$45.00, ISBN 1905377045. Contact email: [info@antique-acc.com](mailto:info@antique-acc.com)

No special effects, filters or artificial lighting were used by the award-winning Vincent Munier whose marvellous photographs on the theme of winter, snow (falling, drifting), frost, animals and birds surviving, form the core of this book and derive from the Vosges, where he lives, and further afield (Canada, Scandinavia, Hokkaido). Birds portrayed include nine photographs of Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, four splendid studies of Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis* and 11 of Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*. There are half-page texts of zoological details at the end of the book and, on pages 9–19, Lysiane Ganousse's essays on the white theme which, for my taste, stray too far into the purple. Perhaps they simply work less well in English than in their original French.

M.G.W.

RYABITSEV, V.K. (ed.) **[Distribution of Birds in the Urals, their Environs and Western Siberia]** (in Russian). 232 pages. Ekaterinburg: Urals University Press, 2006. Paperback, price not known, ISBN 5752516269. Email: [riabits@etel.ru](mailto:riabits@etel.ru)

This latest (11th) report in an excellent series conceived and edited by Vadim Ryabitsev (see *Ibis* 148: 385) comprises a total of 56 longer articles and short communications relating to a variety of locations and habitats in the vast recording area. The Editorial includes detailed comments, highly relevant to these reports and contributors, on the recently published *Checklist of the birds of the Russian Federation* by E.A. Koblik *et al.* (reviewed in *Ibis* 149: 180–181).

M.G.W.

THE ZAW NAING & VAN DER VEN, J. [Myanmar Bird & Nature Society] (eds) **Field Feathers 2006 [2006–1], 2006–2, 2007–1.** 44 pages, 1 map, line-drawings and tables (2006); 33 pages, colour photographs, 1 map, line-drawings and tables (2006-2); 54 pages, colour photographs, line-drawings, 1 map (2007-1). Yangon: Myanmar Bird & Nature Society, 2006–07. Contact address: 221/223 Shwe Gondine Road, Bahan Township, Yangon 11201, Myanmar. Emails: [royalrose@myanmar.com.mm](mailto:royalrose@myanmar.com.mm) and [javdv@leplanteur.com](mailto:javdv@leplanteur.com)

Following the first *Field Feathers* for Kyrgyzstan (see *Ibis* 149: 188), Joost van der Ven has taken his invented title back to Myanmar [Burma]. The first of three issues (2006-1) for that country contains reports of bird observations from Yangon [Rangoon] in the south to Tanai and the Indawgyi

Lake in the north, between September 2005 and late January 2006. Issue 2006-2 comprises 11 reports, most from the Yangon and Delta area, also north to Mandalay, January to June 2006. Ten reports (bird lists) in *FF 2007-1* include the results of a rare (October) visit to Kawthaung in the extreme south of the country. Page 4 of this latest issue has a complete list of the Myanmar Expedition reports (copies available against copying costs: see above).

**M.G.W.**

VEDDER, L.A. **John James Audubon and The Birds of America: a Visionary Achievement in Ornithological Literature.** 94 pages, many illustrations (most in colour). San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Press, 2006. Hardback, £15.95, ISBN 9780873282178 and 0873282175. Distribution: John Wiley & Sons Ltd: [cs-books@wiley.co.uk](mailto:cs-books@wiley.co.uk)

The Huntington collection includes the original four-volume, double-elephant folio print edition of Audubon's *The Birds of America* (London, 1827–1838), one of about 120 still in existence, and a complete octavo edition of his *Ornithological Biography* (Edinburgh, 1831–1839) – his field observations. Lee Vedder's book most satisfyingly combines the story of Audubon's life and travels, the evolution and ultimate realization of the 'Great Idea' or 'magnificent obsession' – to publish a book illustrating every bird on the North American continent – with 24 beautifully reproduced plates and, on the page facing each, a brief introduction by the author, an extract from the *Ornithological Biography*, then details of the plate inscription, the bird's current name, and the source of the print.

**M.G.W.**