

association with other agencies), and in protecting other threatened species such as the Magenta Petrel, Chatham Island Oystercatcher, Shore Plover, Chatham Island Snipe, Chatham Island Pigeon and Forbes' Parakeet. At least 90 people are named in the book as having been involved in one aspect or another of the robin work at some time during the period 1961 to 1991. Most of these people were members of the former Wildlife Service, but many were from other government departments or from the universities, and some were volunteers who had paid their own air fares to the Chathams.

Much of the book is taken up with details of the management and breeding success of the robins, some of which produced larger and more frequent clutches when "managed" on their new island homes. Each bird was banded and its ancestry recorded (sometimes going back several generations) together with its egg/chick history, which often involved several transfers between warbler, tit and robin foster parents.

All this detailed information, invaluable to geneticists and to wildlife managers faced with similar problems in the future, may seem rather heavy going to the general reader, but this should be less so in the finished book, where the reader will have both text and illustrations together. Even in the proofs, the detailed information about individual robins is enlivened by the accompanying human stories, some of which, like the climbing of the 200 m cliffs of Little Mangere Island and the two instances of small boats being overturned while trying to land in rough weather, involve high drama.

The authors have been successful in catching the flavour of some of these dramatic events and also in conveying the extraordinary enthusiasm, dedication and competence of the people involved. For Don Merton, the leader of the robin team since 1976, the end of the programme of active management of Black Robins means the end of 12 summers spent in the Chathams – how appropriate that the book should be dedicated to his wife Margaret!

Peter Bull



*The Skuas*, by Robert W. Furness. T & AD Poyser, Claton, 1987. ISBN 0 85661 046 1. Price: 18 pounds.

Skuas are closely related to gulls, and are well known for their habit of stealing food from other seabirds. Skuas are divided into the small skuas (Arctic, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas) and the large skuas (Great, including the Brown or Subantarctic Skua, and the South Polar and Chilean Skuas). The small skuas breed in Arctic and subarctic regions and migrate to the Southern Hemisphere, where they are regularly seen around the New Zealand coast. Two of the large skuas breed in the New Zealand region, the Brown Skua breeding on Stewart Island and the Chatham and subantarctic islands and the South Polar Skua in the Ross Sea region of Antarctica.

The aim of this book is to outline knowledge of the ecology of skuas and to consider some of the interesting questions which this raises. Dr Furness has made extensive studies of skuas on the Shetland Islands and is well qualified for this task. The book considers the early history of skuas

and their current classification. The distribution and population sizes of the various species are given, followed by an account of the remarkable migrations of skuas between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Reversed sexual size dimorphism, in which females are larger than males, is discussed, together with the variations in plumage colour within skua species and the habit of skuas of stealing food (known as kleptoparasitism). Further chapters cover behaviour, feeding, social organisation, breeding, population dynamics, and interactions with humans.

The book is illustrated with drawings and 30 photos. It is packed with information and includes 100 figures, 65 tables, an extensive reference list and an index. The bulk of the text refers to the Great Skua in the Shetland Islands, but knowledge of other skuas is extensively summarised as well. This includes studies of the Brown Skua on the Chatham Islands and of the South Polar Skua in the Ross Sea. This book will be the definitive work on skuas for some time. The level of detail also makes the book useful as an example of a comprehensive study of a group of birds that raises many questions about their ecology. It is recommended as a reference work for studies of avian and especially seabird ecology, and is essential reading for anyone interested in skuas.

J.F. Cockrem



*The Sparrows*, by J. Denis Summers-Smith. T & AD Poyser, Calton, 1988. ISBN 0 85661 048 8. Price: 22 pounds.

The House Sparrow is one of the most widely distributed and successful passerine birds in the world. In 1963, Dr Summers-Smith published a detailed monograph entitled "The House Sparrow". House Sparrows make excellent subjects for ornithologists to develop skills in observation, and Dr Summers-Smith's first book is highly recommended as a guide to the habits of sparrows. Dr Summers-Smith has continued to study the sparrows of the genus *Passer* (the true sparrows), and in the present book he considers all 20 species of this genus.

The new book consists mainly of accounts of each species, with additional chapters on the general characteristics of sparrows, their origins and evolution, and their systematics. Each species account includes nomenclature, physical characteristics, biometric data, distribution, habitat, behaviour, breeding biology, survival, moult, vocalisations and feeding. The House Sparrow is considered in most detail, and the chapter includes a comprehensive table summarising published studies of the breeding biology of sparrows. This table includes the New Zealand studies of Dr D. Dawson. The new book is best read with a background of some previous knowledge of sparrows, and can therefore be viewed as a companion to the earlier volume.

J.F. Cockrem