

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.

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