

REVIEWS

Handbook of the birds of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa: the birds of the Western Palearctic, by Stanely Cramp (Chief Editor), K. E. L. Simmons, I. J. Ferguson-Lees, R. Gillmor, P. A. D. Hollom, R. Hudson, E. M. Nicholson, M. A. Ogilvie, P. J. S. Olney, K. H. Voous, J. Wattel. Volume 1: Ostrich to Ducks. 722 pp. 108 col. pl. Many figs and maps. Oxford University Press 1977. £25.00; now \$31.00.

The importance of this work to ornithologists is likely to be so great that, even though a review copy has not been received, several reviewers have been asked to comment on their own copies from the New Zealand point of view in their particular fields of interest. Volumes 2 and 3 (the last one being on waders) are due out in 1980. Seven volumes are planned.

GENERAL COMMENT, by the late R. H. D. STIDOLPH

The *vade-mecum* for ornithologists and bird students for the past 40 years has been Witherby's *Handbook of British Birds* of 5 volumes, in which was amassed all the information available on the species admitted to the British list. This invaluable work is now being augmented by a much more ambitious project, a 7-volume handbook on the birds of the whole Western Palearctic, the first volume of which includes divers and grebes, petrels, gannets, cormorants, bitterns and herons, geese and ducks as the main groups. The interim between these two publications has seen a significant increase in ornithological research and observation, and it is timely that the results of the past 40 years in these fields are being assembled in readily accessible form.

This first volume gives a firm impression of the magnitude of the completed work, due to be finished before 1990. A glance through the 12 pages of closely printed references from which information has been derived for only this first volume leaves no doubt about the complete coverage given under the various sections of each species — field characters, habitat, distribution, population, movements, food, social patterns and behaviour, voice, breeding, plumage, bare parts, moults, measurements, weights, structure, and geographical variations.

Coloured illustrations of each species show birds in various phases of plumage, including nestlings or downy young. These are on a much larger scale than those in the British Handbook and so are a decided improvement. Among the artists are Sir Peter Scott and Robert Gillmor. In addition, there are many text drawings of bird behaviour, voice sonagrams and melograms, and annual cycles, and each breeding species has a full distribution map.

When completed, this will be the standard reference work for many years to come.

PROCELLARIIFORMES, by J. WARHAM

Useful summaries are given of the field characters and biology of 11 petrels on the New Zealand list, namely, Black-browed Albatross, Wandering Albatross, Southern Giant Petrel, Soft-plumaged Petrel, Cory's Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Manx Shearwater, Little Shearwater, Wilson's Storm Petrel, White-faced Storm Petrel and Leach's Storm Petrel.

As many are accidentals from the Southern Hemisphere, much of the information comes from work done on the breeding grounds and will be quite familiar to New Zealand procellariiformists. Nevertheless the accounts provide detailed, succinct, and up-to-date summaries with references as late as 1974. The data are generally accurate, the sections on voice extensive and often supported by audio-spectrographs. The general accounts of the three families — Diomedidae, Procellariidae and Hydrobatidae — are also short but packed with information.

The plates are less satisfactory. Generally the "jizz" of the birds is good but the colours in my copy are defective. Thus in the plate of the albatrosses, the bills and feet of the Wanderers are a dull greenish grey, there's not a trace of reddish or orange on the Black-brow's beak, the "Snowy" Albatross is extraordinarily white, the Northern Giant Petrel has a peculiar head with a frowning aspect, the close-up of the Southern Giant Petrel lacks the diagnostic greenish tip (though referred to in the text), and the Little Shearwaters figured reveal not a trace of blue on their legs.

Other petrels of dubious occurrence in the Western Palearctic are referred to briefly, e.g. the Cape Pigeon *Daption capense* (sic!), and it is noted (correctly) that the subspecific identity of the Wandering Albatross populations in the NZ region is not fully clear.

WATERFOWL, by M. J. WILLIAMS

If only the recent attempts to monograph the waterfowl of the world, with their combination of glossy photographs and superficial text, contained but a fraction of the scholarship evident in the waterfowl section of *Birds of the Western Palearctic*! Here we are, almost 25 years after Delacour's initial effort, and there is still no single work available which provides an updated and detailed account of the ecology, behaviour, and numerical and taxonomic status of the world's ducks, geese and swans.

This book at least helps, for it provides a most comprehensive account on 56 species, about 40% of the world's total, and on this point alone its contribution to ornithological literature is invaluable. But it's the sheer quantity and quality of the text on each species that is so immediately impressive. How have the editors managed it? Cleverly and simply it seems, by obtaining the bulk of their information direct from those people currently working on the species. The editors are clearly aware that all researchers collect far more information than they ever publish, and they have managed to extract a large amount of it. The result is a combination of the published, the nearly-published, and the never-likely-to-be-published, giving the most comprehensive account of species biology that I know of. This approach is surely a lesson for all future monographers.

The editors have also been clever in maintaining an even standard throughout the text. Instead of the usual approach of giving a group of species to one editor, each editor has been responsible for a section of the text on every species. For example, Peter Olney has researched the food and feeding habits, Ken Simmonds has collated the behavioural information and Stanley Cramp had the task of determining distributions. It's a good approach, although not entirely without its problems.

I looked very closely at the text on the Shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna* because it was the only species with which I am reasonably familiar. There I found that the co-operative approach to compiling the text encouraged repetition. For example, the spectacular gatherings of moulting shelducks in the Waddensee is given full treatment under both the 'moult' and 'migration' sections, and the creching of broods is mentioned in three sections, each with slightly different details about who the guardians of the creches are. I also have a quibble about the way some research hypotheses are presented as fact. The conclusion that adult shelducks abandon their young because of the need to undertake the moult migration is highly questionable, as were the conclusions of a Scottish study about the way a population was regulated. I don't mind these hypotheses being presented, so long as they are seen to be just hypotheses. After all, there is no requirement to take everything in science seriously. Perhaps a heavier overall editing of each species' text could have removed some of the repetition (which occurred in most species texts) and exercised a little quality control on the references. These are, however, minor points and the text on the Shelduck is brilliantly thorough. I have no reason to believe it's not similarly thorough on all other waterfowl.

All 56 species are well and clearly illustrated by paintings — the swans and geese by Sir Peter Scott (who else!) and the shelducks, dabbling ducks and diving ducks by N. W. Cusa. Scott's are certainly the better, for he has illustrated his birds in a variety of postures viewed from both the front and side. With but one exception, all of Cusa's paintings show lateral views and the diving ducks are all illustrated on water. Unfortunately this means that breast patterns are not visible and foot colour in the few that are shown are confused by the compensation necessary for the (dirty?) water. The flight illustrations don't help either — the swans, geese and shelducks show flying birds from above and below (but on a sadly tiny scale), but the dabbling and diving ducks are viewed only from above.

I doubt that many New Zealand ornithologists will buy this book at the price, but certainly many will want to use it as a reference source. They couldn't do better, and I commend the book's editors on including references up to 1975, less than two years prior to its publication. Three species of waterfowl occurring in New Zealand are described — the Mute Swan, Canada Goose and Mallard. The distribution map for the Mute Swan shows it to be present in Australia and New Zealand (Canterbury and Hawkes Bay — well done!) and the text mentions its introduction here. The Mallard's presence is illustrated on the distribution map but not mentioned in the text, while the Canada Goose misses out on both. The text on all three species refers to the bird's biology only in its native range.

I did the usual reviewer's trick of checking to see that all papers cited in the text were contained in full in the references at the back — I found one omission — and it's one of *my* papers! Perhaps the editors have exercised a little quality control on the references after all. My pride is hurt, but I still consider this book the best referenced and most detailed account of 56 species of waterfowl that I know of.

EGRETS, by B. D. HEATHER

Any work that sets out to replace Witherby *et al.* faces a tough task. Volume 1 of Cramp & Simmons, as it will doubtless be called, succeeds admirably. The standard of research is high and the quality of presentation is impressive.

I don't regret the £25 (\$50+) I struggled to pay for it. I find I am constantly dipping into it, reading about species and topics I had largely ignored. It applies to New Zealand ornithology more than may be thought, providing a reference standard and showing the kinds of information lacking for the equivalent New Zealand birds. Its references provide a means of entry to the major literature, all available from OSNZ's library. Students of the Black Shag, the Dabchick and the Little and Crested Grebes, for example, should not ignore this volume's texts and illustrations as a standard against which to measure their observations and opinions.

I have taken the Cattle Egret as my sample species, for I know it and the literature for it well. The Witherby *et al.* text was very thin, reflecting how little was known up to 1938-41. Since then, a sizeable literature has appeared, much of it daunting to the amateur, recording detailed work in Africa and the Americas. This literature is splendidly condensed to fill out the rest of the text on distribution and movements within the Western Palearctic. The coverage is therefore clear and thorough, the best we could have for comparing with the New Zealand birds, the eastern race, which has not been studied anywhere in detail.

The colour plate shows a good range from nestling to breeding adult, supplementing well the text descriptions. I rather miss the meticulous detail of Witherby's plumage descriptions and will be interested to see how waders are dealt with in this respect, but I am relieved the basic-alternate system of plumage groupings has not been adopted.

We are resigned to world maps where New Zealand is an afterthought, and a projection centred on the Western Palearctic naturally squeezes us on to a remote edge. Using a magnifying glass, I discovered that the Cattle Egret visits Waikato-Bay of Plenty and West Coast-Canterbury, a reasonable generalisation for the mid-1970s, I suppose.

Users of this work in *Notornis* papers please note the citation form recommended on p. 36 (adapted to *Notornis* style): Cramp, S.; Simmons, K. E. L. (eds). 1977. The birds of the Western Palearctic, Vol. 1.



Some ornithological results of Cook's third voyage, by David G. Medway.. 1979. J. Soc. Biblioph. Nat. Hist. 9 (3): 315-351.

The author extends Stresemann's papers on the birds collected during the third voyage by examining two catalogues in the British Museum (Natural History) with lists by Dryander of the specimens that went to Banks and the paintings of them by Ellis and Webber. The paper works through the 159 species listed in the main (Solander) catalogue, untangling their identity and the cross references to them in the second catalogue, in Latham's, Pennant's and William Anderson's early descriptions, and in Stresemann's and Lysaght's commentaries. Several New Zealand specimens are included. The ultimate fate of Bank's collection is discussed. Review copy deposited in OSNZ library.

B. D. HEATHER