

REVIEWS AND NOTICE

Ireland's Wetlands and their Birds

by Clive Hutchinson 1979. Pp.201. 24 x 18cm. Dublin: Irish Wildbird Conservancy. (£4.95 in Republic of Ireland; £4.50 in U.K.)

Those nameless people who spend countless hours each year braving the elements to count waders and wildfowl must, I am sure, often wonder what becomes of all their hard earned data. If the answer was always books such as this then I am sure 'the workers' would be well satisfied.

The data on which this book is based come mainly from the results of the Wetlands Enquiry. This was initially a survey of estuaries made in conjunction with the British Birds of Estuaries Enquiry, but from 1972-73 it comprised a survey of both inland and coastal wetlands based on monthly counts. In the book these are supplemented by all other wildfowl and wader counts of which the Irish Wildbird Conservancy has records and much other published and unpublished information besides. Consequently the result is an authoritative register of Irish wetlands and their birds.

The text is divided into two parts. In the first, Ireland is divided into 6 regions and the major wetlands in each are systematically described. An account of the geography of each region is followed by details of each wetland and the wader and wildfowl populations held. The second part consists of species accounts. Each includes a basic description of the species followed by a detailed account of status and distribution in Ireland based on the results of the Enquiry. Throughout, the text is accompanied by many drawings and photographs. However, while the production of the text and drawings is of a high quality photographic reproduction is very poor. Indeed, if the poor quality is a result of cutting publication costs it may have been better to exclude them and include more drawings.

The collation of the information from the Wetlands Enquiry and other assorted sources into Ireland's Wetlands within a relatively short time of termination of the Enquiry is a highly commendable achievement for which the author and all associated with the production of the book deserve our congratulations. This has undoubtedly been aided by the uncomplicated approach adopted; the book is an account of Irish wetlands and holds to this remit. This has resulted in a rather dry text with, for example, no attempt made to explain either distribution patterns or seasonal changes in numbers. However, because detailed information is required to do so and because of the acknowledged limitations of the large scale surveys it is commendable, if not inevitable, that no such attempt was made. The strength of the book lies in the fact that it is a detailed register of Irish wetlands and thus stands as a landmark in wetland conservation, not only in Ireland, but also in a broader European context.

As the author notes in his introduction, "the most important reason for writing a book about Irish wetlands is because they are extremely rich habitats in terms of the number and density of animal species they support and because they are so vulnerable to destruction by drainage, infill, refuse dumping and pollution" but "unfortunately an appreciation of the value of wetlands is still too rare in Ireland. For too many people, and too many institutions, marshes and estuaries are wastelands". Unfortunately this lack of appreciation of the value of wetlands is a universal failing of modern society. Indeed, Ireland is probably among the countries where it is least severe. In this context, a particular value of Ireland's Wetlands is that, as a register, while most attention is focussed on the larger wetlands, those holding only small numbers of birds are also documented. It is to be hoped that a similar work may be produced for the rest of the British Isles as there is a great need here for the importance of smaller wetlands to be similarly documented. The focussing of attention on areas of major conservation importance such as the Ribble and the Wash in recent years must not lead to ignoring smaller areas and their deterioration and eventual reclamation!

In conclusion Hutchinson makes a plea for a policy for wetland conservation throughout the island backed by governments of both the Republic and N.Ireland, a policy which must have as its foundation much intensive research on wetland habitats and populations. It will be a fitting reward to all associated with this book if its publication serves as a stimulus for such study.

Patrick. J. Dugan

Cambridge Norwegian Expedition 1978 Report

Edited by J.L.Innes, Cambridge Norwegian Expedition, Cambridge 1980. 107 pages, text figures, maps, illustrated by Keith Brockie. Copies available from J.L.Innes, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3EN, England, cost £1.50 in Britain, £2.00 overseas (bankers drafts, etc in sterling, drawn on a British Bank, please).

Every expedition (should) end in 'the report' - a well-known form of torture administered to expedition leaders which ruins their sleep, health and digestion for years after the happy event! I know! 'The Report' and its production is a discipline and training which probably has a more lasting effect than the expedition itself. So a reviewer who has experienced the labour can willingly be kind and it is a pleasure to read the Cambridge Norwegian Expedition's report on the Hardangervidda - an arctic-montane plateau around 60°N - with its interesting community of birds. The expedition's original aim was to ring as many waders as possible and to provide comparative measurements for other wader studies (and in these things they succeeded) but the aims were sensibly extended to study the breeding behaviour of Purple Sandpipers Calidris maritima and Dotterel Eudromias morinellus. In the event there were also interesting observations of Great Snipe Gallinago media to report and a census of breeding birds in an area of 4.4 km² lying between 1075 and 1155 m above sea level. The scene is set by a botanical report.

The census area contained 13 species of non-passerines including waders Golden Plover Pluvialis apricaria, Dotterel, Snipe Gallinago gallinago, Great Snipe, Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos, Redshank Tringa totanus, Purple Sandpiper, Dunlin Calidris alpina and Ruff Philomachus pugnax. Of the twelve species of passerines Meadow Pipits Anthus pratensis and Lapland Buntings Calcarius lapponicus were the most abundant. The report lists the distributions, densities and the relationships to altitude. Papers specific to waders are a long account of observations on the nesting behaviour of Dotterel, observations on Purple Sandpipers during incubation and hatching, the lekking behaviour of Great Snipe (well illustrated) and a possible method of sexing Great Snipe by the amount of white on the tail. Very usefully the report also lists measurements of all the adult waders caught at the nest (16 Purple Sandpipers, 10 Dotterel, 22 Dunlins, 5 Great Snipe), egg measurements, chick weights and growth rates for a few. In all a useful sample of comparative data.

The report is finely illustrated by Keith Brockie. Those of you who have bought the other wader expedition reports will have to buy this one!

G.H. Green

(A list of the papers concerned with waders can be found in the Recent Publications section of this Bulletin.)