
REVIEWS

Avery, M.I. & Leslie, R. 1990. *Birds and forestry*. T. & A.D. Poyser,

London. 299pp. [£18.00; ISBN 0 85661 058 5]

This book is mainly about the place of birds in the explosive nature conservation issue created by commercial afforestation in Britain. As background, there is a valuable account of forestry practice and the dominant influence of costs, plus chapters on the birds of plantation woodlands and those of habitats, especially upland, affected by afforestation. Desirable forest management to improve bird interest is prescribed, but the prospects for its implementation are uncertain.

Most crucially, the authors attempt to adjudicate the evidence and arguments of the two sides in the conservation conflict. While they aim at even-handed treatment, including giving some stick to both sides, their admitted bias towards forestry shows through in places. Having defined "upland birds" to exclude species widespread in other habitats (e.g. Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* and Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*), they dwell long on the importance of "woodland birds" such as Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea*, whose primary habitat is still open heathland. They speculate on the possible new colonists of woodland, but not on those of upland. Their descriptions of the new forests give a feel for these places, whereas their treatment fails to bring to life the open hills and moorlands. The bland presumption that upland afforestation will continue its expansion also begs the most central question.

A system of conservation evaluation for upland birds is proposed which, like so many other supposedly "objective"

methods, suggests that its authors have never been in the hot seats of actually making decisions on site selection for wildlife protection. It is merely a means of comparing the relative value of arbitrary sample areas, using a single arbitrary criterion, which unsurprisingly confirms that ornithological importance of moorland tends to increase with distance north in Britain. The wish to find a simple unifying index ducks the complexities that have to be faced in practice, and the proposed approach fails to address the crucial problems of boundary definition and number/extent of sites needed for adequate representation of wildlife interest.

Four extensively afforested districts are taken as case studies. In Breckland and the North York Moors, the new forests are seen to have conferred a real gain overall. In Galloway, the authors think forestry has gone too far, and in the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland, despite castigating the Nature Conservancy Council's defence, they regard it as a disaster that should not have happened. Their discussion of forestry politics shows what conservation is still up against, and they correctly diagnose that conservation strategy has been to attack the open-ended march of upland planting, and seek to divert future afforestation onto the overproducing farmed lowlands. Avery and Leslie lament the dearth of hard information on their subject, and go some way to blaming the Forestry Commission's earlier interest in wildlife as limited to pest species.

Indeed, nearly all the evidence for the environmental impacts of afforestation has been gathered by other interests, and the sense that the foresters neither knew nor cared what they were doing has inflamed the controversy over their practices.

This is a useful contribution to the debate which conservationists should read, while looking at the field evidence for themselves and remembering that birds are only one part of the story. The book would have lost nothing from a reduction in repetition, and would have gained much from more tables and figures with quantitative information. It is well illustrated with black and white photographs and attractive drawings by Philip Snow.

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