

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

BIRD RECOGNITION, I: SEA-BIRDS AND WADERS. By James Fisher. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1947: $4\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{8}$ in., 190 pp., with 114 figs. by Fish-Hawk, 77 maps (mainly by W. B. Alexander) and 72 charts. Paper. 2s 6d. (\$.75 in U.S. bookstores).

This is the first in a series of three pocket-size books, which together will comprise a field-guide to the birds of the British Isles. Although the title might lead one to expect them, ducks, geese, herons, and rails are not included in this volume. The volumes to be published later will cover "game birds, waterfowl, and birds of prey" and "perching and singing birds."

This first volume has special interest for Americans because many of the birds described, or closely related species, are found on our continent.

In the main body of the book, Fisher treats 72 sea birds and shore birds ("waders" in British usage). For almost every species there is a page of text facing a picture of the bird, a map showing the bird's distribution in Britain, and a "year-cycle" chart telling its status at each season. A remarkable amount of information, going far beyond mere field identification, is compressed into a page of text under the headings: "Recognition," "Breeding" (if the bird nests or has nested in Britain), "Distribution," "Movements," and "To Read."

The introduction carries a conventional key to identification and a key to the habitats in which the birds are to be found when away from their breeding places. The habitat key is in tabular form, one table for sea birds and another for shore birds, listing the species at the left and indicating preferred habitats by blocks in the proper columns.

At the close of the book, without an introductory heading, there are 11 pages of pictures of shore birds, terns, and gulls in flight, showing mostly the winter or immature plumages of birds figured in breeding plumage elsewhere in the book. There are also a list of the 52 species that have been recorded less than 100 times in Britain and an index.

The main purpose of the volume is to assist the amateur in identifying birds in the field. That aim is accomplished exceedingly well. The comments on recognition are clear and practical, giving special attention to the characters that distinguish similar species. Further, the large amount of information about nesting, migration, and history of the various species, so neatly condensed in this little book, will make it useful as a reference work to many people who do not need it as a field guide; it will be especially useful to those who do not have access to Witherby's five-volume "Handbook of British Birds," which Fisher acknowledges as his principal source. Throughout much of the book Fisher has expressed himself in simply-worded phrases instead of in complete sentences; thus, without sacrifice of clarity, he has achieved a compactness of text particularly appropriate to a handbook of this kind.

The half-tone figures are skillfully done and, although in sepia, they are adequate to their purpose, particularly for this group of birds, in which color details are relatively unimportant for field identification.

The "year-cycle" chart is an ingenious adaptation of the familiar "pie chart." The weeks, months, and seasons are shown clockwise around the rim, and sectors are marked out within the dial to indicate the status of the bird at any time of the year. Thus, on a circle of $2\frac{1}{4}$ -inch diameter, Fisher presents a summary which, in the case of the Woodcock, for example, supplies approximate dates for the following: birds in winter quarters; assembly of residents; early, main, and late passage of foreign birds in spring; eggs, first and second brood; early, main, peak, and late passage of foreign birds in fall; dispersal and passage of residents.

An interesting feature of the distribution maps is the use of the "vice-county" unit in blocking out (by solid color and shadow) the breeding areas and the areas

of non-breeding occurrence. Since the political divisions of Britain vary greatly in size and internal complexity, the vice-county system has been created to divide the counties into smaller areas of "roughly equal [biological] importance." However, the distribution maps are so small in this book that it would be difficult for the reader to identify the exact geographical location of some of the vice-counties of the interior.

The birds are arranged in the order of the British Check-list, which differs considerably from the order of the A.O.U. Check-list. The reader interested in the relationships among birds will notice also that the British scientific names differ from the American for some genera and species.

The inexpensiveness of this book should encourage its sale. However, the low price has been achieved partly through the use of pulp paper of low durability; better resistance to moisture and scuffing would be an advantage in a pocket field guide.

Incidentally, although the title page gives 245 Fifth Avenue, New York, as the American address of the publisher, the book is not obtainable there.

This excellent little book is another reminder of the high state of development of amateur bird study in England.—Harold Mayfield.

THE BIRDS OF NANTUCKET. By Ludlow Griscom and Edith V. Folger. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1948: $5\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ in., 156 pp., 17 photos, map. \$3.25.

This book "is the first of a series of faunal studies from areas of Massachusetts which are of exceptional interest for the variety and abundance of their bird life and the excellence of the historic record."

Nantucket island was early known as a paradise for sea and waterfowl, and there is a long record of its importance to sportsmen. This has been documented in part through publication by the late John C. Phillips of the "Shooting Journal of George Henry Mackay, 1865-1922" (Cosmos Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1929). The record of the non-game species, however, is not so clear, despite the occasional visits of such distinguished naturalists as T. M. Brewer, John C. Phillips, J. A. Allen, J. H. Farley, W. Sprague Brooks, E. H. Forbush, and the authors of the present volume. These last freely admit that there remains much to be learned about the bird life of this and other islands of the northeast. To emphasize the point they list nine "ornithological problems" that they recommend to the attention of bird students visiting Nantucket.

The fact that Nantucket is not on a regular land-bird migration route adds much interest to the rather large number of species that have been listed. Many of these were recorded by Miss Folger, who resided on the island for three full years and who had access to material in the files of the Maria Mitchell Association. Mr. Griscom, on the other hand, has had access to unpublished journals and diaries, and has examined specimens in the principal museum collections. The work covers not only Nantucket but also the smaller islands of Tuckernuck and Muskeget to the west.

The Introduction discusses the physiographic and climatic features and the land-bird migrants, gives an "historical summary," and notes the changes that have taken place in the bird life of the island. This is followed by a systematic list that differs in at least one respect from the usual list: it makes a special point of indicating what is not known. The list contains 274 species, of which 132 are land-birds.

The book is admirably written and may well serve as a model for future reports on insular avifaunas. The photographs used as illustrations are from the files of the National Audubon Society. The report is indexed and concludes with a bibliography.—Frederick C. Lincoln.

WING TO WING. By E. H. Ware. Illustrated with 26 original photographs by the author and 26 line drawings by Roland Green. Harper & Brothers, New York, 1946: $5\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{3}{4}$ in., 159 pp. \$2.75.

During the recent war, E. H. Ware was able to continue his hobby of bird finding while serving with the Royal Air Force in Britain, Algeria, Tunisia, and Corsica. His objective was to make a "memory-collection" of the various species occupying countries where he was stationed. This book is a record of his accomplishment.

Mr. Ware relates with enthusiasm coupled with gentle humor his experiences in seeking species new to him. When each species is ultimately before him, he describes in an earnest, straightforward manner his first impressions. Especially good reading are the two chapters concerning his stay at Bordj Menaiel, Algeria, near the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. This French-Arab village and its countryside presented a peculiar mixture of friendliness and suspicion, of ancient and modern living, of squalor and prosperity. Confronted with such a situation his exploits for birds were occasionally exciting and not infrequently amusing. Also good reading are the chapters dealing with adventures in the highlands of Scotland and Corsica, where scenic beauty rivalled the birds for his attention.

"Wing to Wing" is not, and is not intended to be, a contribution to ornithology. It is written for persons who, like the author, genuinely enjoy bird finding as an end in itself. Roland Green's drawings adequately depict some of the rarer or more interesting birds which the author "collected." There is an index to all species mentioned in the text.—Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr.

AMERICAN BIRDS IN COLOR. LAND BIRDS. By Hal H. Harrison. Wm. H. Wise & Co., New York, 1948: $6\frac{5}{8} \times 9\frac{3}{4}$ in., xxiv + 486 pp. \$5.00.

Mr. Harrison has written good, brief accounts of the land birds of the United States and has added a recognition chart, in which birds are arranged by size and color, and distribution charts, in which birds are listed alphabetically under different regions. In the introduction he tells of the pleasures of bird watching and recommends five field guides, as well as Hickey's "Guide to Bird Watching."

There are 195 photographs in black and white taken by various people; many of these are good, but others exhibit pathetic specimens of stuffed birds. Of the 192 color photographs, a few are excellent; but with the majority, something has gone wrong in the reproduction process, and many of the pictures are too blue or too pale. I fear the author's efforts to help people recognize birds will be nullified by his publishers, who show the Scaled Quail, White-winged Dove, Mockingbird, and Broad-winged Hummingbird with almost no color at all, solid green-blue California Quail, blue and white Sparrow Hawks, pink Brown Thrashers, a blue Bank Swallow, and a brown and white Violet-green Swallow. These and many others of the color photographs, as well as the illustrations of mounted specimens, are worse than useless; they give false and (in the case of the mounted specimens) repulsive impressions of the birds. I cannot agree with the claim on the cover that "text and captions tell you everything you need to know about each bird," nor that this is "the most beautiful, colorful bird book ever created."—Margaret M. Nice.

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