

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA. By Lorus and Margery Milne. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1969: 9 × 12 in., 13 + 340 pp., 300 paintings by Marie Nonmast Bohlen. \$25.00.

We have here a bookseller's dream—something big, splashy, and expensive—to capitalize on the ever burgeoning market for books about birds. The publisher tells us on the jacket's front flap that this is "a distinguished portfolio . . . of 300 full-color paintings of birds—breathtaking renditions which have been widely acclaimed by art critics. . . . [The] portraits give details of plumage and markings which are not captured by even the most accurate cameras." Finally, after extensively praising the literary style of the text, the publisher proclaims: "To established bird lovers, this book is indispensable; to novices, it is an irresistible introduction to some of the most beautiful creatures of one continent. . . . *North American Birds* is a valued addition to every home, school, and library."

In no respect can this book be any such addition. As a portfolio of bird art it is nothing less than a travesty. Each species, usually represented by an adult male only, is depicted in exaggerated and often unlife-like colors. Worse still, the publisher has chosen to blow up the paintings to startling size, thereby detailing and accentuating their dismal failure as accurate delineations. Thrushes, mimids, indeed all passerines, as well as plovers and other non-passerines, have the same scutellated tarsi. In flight, some species have anywhere from five primaries (e.g., the Western Bluebird, p. 20) to a dozen (the Pintail, p. 241, has 15 primaries in one wing and 11 in the other). The spread toes of the Semipalmated Plover (p. 306) fail to indicate the reason for the species' name, and the foot of the Belted Kingfisher (p. 291) gives no suggestion of syndactylism. The bill of the American Redstart (p. 119) is typically parulid rather than flycatcher-like as it should be. And so on. While these inaccuracies might be forgiven as artistic license, the inept and frequently ludicrous form of bird after bird cannot. The worst depictions are those of birds in flight. Wings, in some cases no more flyable than an angel's, appear boneless, out of proportion to body, and improperly positioned. Many birds (e.g., the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, p. 111) look stiff, as if in rigor mortis, their feet and toes grotesquely angled and extended.

There are gross errors. The painting of the Gray Jay (p. 193) is labelled Clark's Nutcracker; the painting of the Clark's Nutcracker (p. 101) is labelled Gray Jay. And there are misspelled scientific names (pp. 93 and 299).

What there is of text is brief and, while factually acceptable, contributes little or nothing that cannot already be found in current field guides. Information about each species, usually given on the page with the painting, or on the one opposite, is mainly an elucidation of what the painting shows with additional mention of sexual differences (or similarities) and, if space allows, food habits, habitat preferences, etc. (There is no explanation as to why the male Summer Tanager, p. 127, is shown on the nest.) Occasionally the total information on one species is contained in a single sentence.

So much for my comments on the book. Disturbing as are its many shortcomings, even more disturbing has been its ready and uncritical promotion by parties who should be discriminating in their choice of bird books. A national wildlife organization and one of the largest state Audubon societies, whose officers are surely qualified to judge the value of a bird book, circularized their members with an eye-catching flier extolling this work as indispensable and suggesting its purchase directly from their home offices. Were the officers so gullible as to accept the publisher's claims without first perusing

the work, or were they so zealous for income as to take on a patently sellable item without regard for its value? Only slightly less disturbing have been reviews or notices of this book in some local ornithological and conservation journals that have simply repeated the publisher's claims without any qualification whatsoever. Procedures of this sort reflect deplorable irresponsibility on the part of organizations and journals. To their members and subscribers they are doing a great disservice.—OLIN SEWALL PETTINGILL, JR.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES. By Robert H. Giles, Jr., editor. The Wildlife Society, 1969: 11¼ × 8¾ in., 623 pp. \$10.00.

The increasing sophistication of technology has provided biologists with an imposing array of electronic and mechanical gadgetry with which to make refined measurements and gather kinds of data previously unobtainable. Most of this technology has been developed for laboratory use; but the techniques utilized by field biologists have also been broadened and refined, although the field biologist more often can implement his research with simpler equipment than can the laboratory technician.

"Wildlife Management Techniques" has undergone a gradual evolution that began in 1938 and has passed through seven editions with several different titles and editors.

The present volume is an attractive publication filled with valuable information on a wide variety of topics pertaining to techniques utilized in wildlife biology. Twenty-five contributing authors wrote 24 chapters and compiled seven appendices in this 623-page volume. Fifty pages cite approximately 1,800 references, and a thorough index contains some 11,000 items. The book is well illustrated with 202 figures plus numerous tables.

The editor describes this edition as ". . . a textbook and manual for well-educated people working with game mammals and birds." The major aim of the book ". . . is to improve the management of the wildlife resource through more rapid development and improved use of techniques." ". . . the objectives are to describe the major approaches to problem solving, suggest ways of implementing these solutions, describe and direct readers to some of the better techniques and tools now known, and indicate gaps in our knowledge."

The following rundown, although succinct, on the kind of information brought together in this publication will clearly indicate its relevance to a variety of ornithological field problems, whether they involve gallinaceous birds or passerines. Several chapters include such practical information as brand names of supplies and equipment, their costs, and addresses from which the information or materials or both can be obtained.

The scope of the book is broad, including chapters that discuss bibliographic tools and reference sources, methods of setting up reference files and a reprint collection, and procedures for preparing a manuscript for publication. One chapter reviews various types of instrumentations that have been used to gather data in a wide variety of mammal and bird studies—many of them with non-game animals.

The book includes a short, but well written, chapter on computers. Different kinds are briefly described and compared. The author discusses how to evaluate whether or not one should use a computer and concisely describes its use. The chapter also provides several examples of computer use in wildlife management. A chapter on radio-location telemetry includes information on the variety of transmitters, methods of attachment to the study animal, receiving systems, and the degree of accuracy in locating the transmitting organism. This chapter might have been expanded to describe the process of telemetry in greater detail and to review more thoroughly some findings resulting from the use of this technique.

The book's longest chapter concerns the sexing and aging of game birds and mammals. The section dealing with birds describes aging and sexing using plumage, gonads, the bursa of Fabricius, copulatory protuberances, penis, color of soft parts, spurs, size and shape of droppings, weights, measurements of various structures, and stage of molt.

Parts of the chapter on habitat analysis and evaluation provide helpful information including methods of assessing the amount or density of covering vegetation, how to determine the type and condition of the soil, how to measure the productivity of various seed crops, and the analysis of vegetation by sampling quadrats and plots and taking transects. Another chapter considers methods of collecting and preserving biological materials, including study skins, tissue samples, whole specimens, blood samples, and plant materials. Quite incongruous and unnecessary, I think, is a section on preserving game trophies and meat.

More and more field studies require the marking of individuals to determine their role in the social system to which they belong. Thus, ornithologists will find useful the section on trapping live birds, where the authors describe the use of several baited walk-in traps, netting, nest traps, and drugs for capturing birds, plus various ways of marking birds that include imping, banding, and dyeing.

Two chapters dealing with animal populations clearly show the necessary orientation of population studies toward statistical analyses. These chapters include an explanation of the statistics of estimating populations, the various methods of sampling, and methods of taking direct animal counts in the field. Survival, recruitment, sex-ratio, age structure, population size and trends, methods of estimating these parameters, and ways of collecting data for studying populations are discussed.

The chapters lack uniformity in the depth of their treatment. Some are sketchy, while others appear to deal rather thoroughly with the subject matter. The editor acknowledges this in the preface. This edition is almost entirely a newly written publication. Two of the chapters were completed three years prior to publication, however; and another was reproduced directly from the 1963 edition.

For years field biologists working with non-game animals have turned to the pages of *The Journal of Wildlife Management* or to one of the editions of this publication to learn techniques that might be applicable to their own studies; for wildlife biologists have pioneered in developing techniques for gathering field data in many areas of study. Therefore, the usefulness of this volume stretches beyond the limits of those working with game mammals and birds. Ornithologists will find a great deal of useful information here, even though the chapters deal more with mammals than birds, and a few of the chapters have no applicability for one working outside the area of wildlife management.—D. A. LANCASTER.

BIRDS OF THE EARLY EXPLORERS IN THE NORTHERN PACIFIC. By Theed Pearse. Published by the author, 1968: 6 × 9 in., 275 pp., 4 bl. and wh. illustrations. \$7.50 (available from Gray's Publishing Company, Ltd., Sidney, British Columbia).

The author has searched the journals of the travelers who penetrated the North Pacific north of a line between Vancouver Island and Kamchatka before 1830 for references to birds. The excerpts he has extracted, which form the bulk of the text, range in significance from nugatory statements of "an abundance of sea fowls" to historically quite important ones, e.g., descriptions of type specimens and species like the Spectacled Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax perspicillatus*), now extinct. Accompanying the excerpts are the

author's attempts at identifying the birds described in terms of recent nomenclature. Many of the descriptions are tantalizing. The sort of person who, upon receiving a phone call from a neighbor describing an unusual bird at the neighbor's backyard feeder, delights in trying to puzzle out which species it might be from the neighbor's unpracticed descriptions will likewise enjoy matching wits with the author on similarly inadequately described birds.

The accounts are arranged primarily by the country of origin of each expedition and then roughly chronologically. Why James Colnett is listed among the Spanish explorers is not explained.

There are four pages of black-and-white photographs, four to a page, of some of the paintings that the artists on Cook's last voyage, William Ellis and John Webber, made of birds of the North Pacific.

The text is marred by frequent misspellings, clumsy sentences, repeated passages, and incorrectly numbered footnotes, all of which could have been put right by a professional editor. The author has gathered together many accounts from references that are rare or not generally available. For this, and for wading through many volumes to extract what little significant information there was on birds, the author will be thanked by researchers on North Pacific history. However, the book's limited scope and careless editing detract from its general usefulness and appeal.—WARREN B. KING.

THE HILL OF SUMMER. By J. A. Baker. Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970: 8½ × 6 in., 159 pp. \$5.00

There are admittedly as many ways of writing about nature as there are eyes to see and ears to hear. Some skim the surface and from the thin top layer create fine word pictures often lacking in life and substance. "The Hill of Summer" is poetry, in which one word picture flows smoothly into the next. "The sparrows' chirping voices are bright nails in the dry grain of the air." The metaphors might seem exaggerated and almost incomprehensible. But slowly the reader becomes accustomed to the style of writing. And then he discovers how the use of words is made into remarkably apt tools expertly wielded in creating accounts of nature that fascinate by their almost uncanny accuracy and precise deductions. Here is nature writing at its most original. And the full flavors of the landscape, the mood of the moment, the behavior and the habits of the wild life, the philosophies of the author, become shared experiences to remember.

The book deals with an English summer and with English birds. There are especially memorable passages on the Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), on the Sparrow Hawk (*Accipiter nisus*) and the Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), a great deal of highly revealing and unsentimental interpretations on the predations of hawks and owls, amazingly closely observed in minutest details.

If at the start the reader is left slightly perplexed, the book grows on him, and he closes it at the end with the distinct feeling of having been given a remarkably penetrating and enchanting look at the wonders of nature by a fine observer and naturalist.

"Suddenly he looks up, scanning my dark shape with bland indifference. Under the pale sunset glow that shines beyond the stained-glass sky of the hawthorns, the owl has the face of a saint. A mouse squeeks, a frail bud of sound, deep in the long grass. The owl stops abruptly, wheeling aside, like a white cloth flicked across my eyes. He thumps down, and the grass swirls open beneath his spreading wings. The mouse is dead."—LOUISE DE K. LAWRENCE.

THE AVIFAUNA OF NORTHERN LATIN AMERICA: A Symposium held at the Smithsonian Institution 13-15 April 1966. Edited by Helmut K. Buechner and Jimmie H. Buechner. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 1970: 8 × 10½ in., 119 pp., 4 figs. (Obtainable from the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office). \$3.25.

In our preoccupation with the manifold threats to bird habitats and environment in North America it is easy to forget that something over 200 species of birds which nest in the United States migrate through, or winter in, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. Conservation and protection measures north of the Rio Grande will be of little avail to these species if their wintering habitat disappears south of that river. It has been suggested, for example, that the population of Kirtland's Warbler is controlled, not by circumstances in northern Michigan, but by the amount of available wintering territory in the Bahamas. In 1966, at the suggestion of the late William Vogt, the Smithsonian Institution sponsored a symposium addressed to the general problem of the status of the birds of northern Latin America, and we now have at hand the proceedings of that symposium.

Papers were given concerning the birds of Mexico (A. R. Phillips, R. Hernández Corzo). Guatemala (J. A. Ibarra), British Honduras (S. M. Russell), Honduras (B. L. Monroe, Jr.), Nicaragua (T. R. Howell), Panama (E. Eisenmann), Colombia (A. Olivares, F. C. Lehmann), and Venezuela (W. H. Phelps, Jr.). General papers were given by L. R. Holdridge, John W. Aldrich and Chandler S. Robbins, William Vogt, and Marston Bates. At the close of the conference a set of suggestions and resolutions was drawn up.

The recurring theme of all the papers, and the discussion of them, was the rapid destruction of the tropical forest habitats under the increased pressure of population growth. Many tropical species are facing extirpation, and even extinction in a short time if this continues. Indeed, some highly endemic species may already have become extinct. There was general agreement among the participants that the North American migrants were in no great danger from these changes. The only bright spot in the picture was the participation in the symposium of several Latin American biologists, who pointed out that thoughtful people in these countries and their governments are not unaware of the problem. The great difficulties of remedying the situation in face of the pressures for more agricultural land and the need for much education of the local people were stressed.

This volume makes interesting, although gloomy, reading. It is to be regretted that publication of the material comes four years after the symposium. Although there is a brief appendix outlining a few developments to 1969, one cannot help but wonder, in view of the rates of population growth and of deforestation described in the papers, if most of the matter discussed is not already greatly outdated.—GEORGE A. HALL.

RECENT PUBLICATION

Check-list of the Birds of New Mexico. By John P. Hubbard, 1970. 108 pp., 3 maps. New Mexico Ornithological Society (Box 277, Cedar Crest, N.M. 87008), Publ. 3. \$2.50, post-paid.