

its beginning, and congratulations are due all round. For no other part of the world, perhaps not even for North America, did so much new information need to be evaluated and compressed before a comprehensive revision could be made. No wonder eleven editors were needed, headed by Stanley Cramp, who covers distribution and population, along with James Ferguson-Lees (field characters), E. M. Nicholson (habitat and voice), Robert Hudson (movements), Peter Olney (food), K. E. L. Simmons (social pattern and behaviour), Malcolm Ogilvie (breeding), J. Wattle (plumages, bare parts, moults, measurements, weights, structure and geographical variation), Robert Gillmor (illustrations), P. A. D. Hollom and K. H. Voous. The layout for each species is a great improvement on its predecessor, the standard of accuracy equally high, and the illustrations considerably better: the names of Paul Barruel, C. J. F. Coombs, N. W. Cusa, Robert Gillmor, Peter Hayman and Sir Peter Scott are guarantees of the excellent plates, but why are they more conspicuously acknowledged on the jacket than in the text? Why not on the title page? Some ornithologists will note with interest, others with regret, that although the editors have broken with the insular British refusal to adhere to the accepted international sequence of bird families, as in Peters's *Birds of the World*, they have chosen to follow Dr Voous's amendments to Peters in his *List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species* rather than Peters proper.

The Manual of Neotropical Birds is a one-man job, and could hardly be expected to be so comprehensive, even if the amount of information available for this region were not vastly less. It covers everything south of Mexico, excluding the West Indies, the Galapagos and the Falklands. In his *Guide to the Birds of South America* (1970) de Schauensee, who omitted Central America, gave only a description, habitat and distribution; Blake has added slightly more taxonomic data (attributions and dates for genera and species; subspecies, more detailed measurements and a bibliography where available). His excellent artists for the main plates are Guy Tudor and Richard V. Keane. But whereas the Palaeartic book illustrates every bird in some detail, Blake shows only a selection, and too many of these only as heads—to my mind the most frustrating kind of bird illustration. However, this book is certainly an advance on what we had before, and clearly it is going to be another generation before enough information becomes available to contemplate a Neotropical Handbook on the scale of the Western Palaeartic—if indeed anybody will ever again launch an enterprise on this titanic scale.

RICHARD FITTER

The Hen Harrier, by Donald Watson. Poyser, Berkhamsted, £6.80.

The Ways of an Eagle, by Lea MacNally. Collins and Harvill, £5.95.

The hen harrier has spread widely in Britain in recent decades. In this account of its biology, the species's relationship with human land use and human attitudes towards predators are recurring themes. The introductory chapters discuss and compare the origins, distribution and characteristics of the eleven *Circus* species. A long chapter describing the hen harrier's history and present status in Britain and Ireland is followed by chapters on hunting behaviour and food, breeding biology, migration and winter distribution, and the hen harrier as an artist's bird—for the book is enlivened by the author's unsurpassed drawings which bring to life not only the bird but its habitats. Part II chronicles the author's study of this raptor in south-west Scotland from its recolonisation of the area in the late 1950s until 1976. The final chapter reviews the uneasy relationship between hen harriers, gamekeepers and landowners.

The earlier chapters are essentially a review of both the published literature and the unpublished data of Donald Watson's numerous correspondents, drawing mainly on British, Irish and North American sources. My main criticisms of the historical chapter (which is fascinating and, I think, important) are, first, that conclusions are drawn about the pre-nineteenth century distribution of the species which the limited data do not permit; and, second, that there is inadequate recognition of the confusion between hen and Montagu's harriers which persisted well into the 19th century. I am sure (from other sources) that the harriers said in 1933 to have nested within living memory 'in

what are now tram-lined streets of Bournemouth' were Montagu's not hen harriers. The biological chapters would have been immeasurably enhanced had it been possible to include the results of two important Scottish studies of hen harriers, whose publication is awaited—the late Eddie Balfour's in Orkney and Nick Picozzi's in Kincardineshire. An analysis of British Trust for Ornithology nest record cards would also have been valuable.

The author's own study on south-west Scotland (Part II of the book) is of great interest, covering as it does a period when extensive afforestation of moorland occurred and young forests began to mature. Overall, young were fledged from significantly more forest than moorland nests, probably due to lack of persecution in the former; complete failure was commonest on grouse moors. This is a book for every raptor enthusiast, and ought to find a much wider audience.

Lea MacNally's book is essentially a description of personal experiences, in which he shares his enthusiasm for golden eagles and particularly for the four pairs he has studied since 1957 in the Scottish Central Highlands. Of the three general chapters, I found the one on prey the most interesting, even though anecdotal. Valuable appendices record breeding success, eaglet weights and prey species of his study pairs. Only 33 eaglets were reared by four pairs in 80 'eagle/years'. Shooting of females at nests contributed to early failure, though, happily, persecution ceased after 1962 (with an isolated exception in 1973). Pesticides may also have been responsible for failures. Nevertheless, a low rate of reproduction is likely to be normal in such a long lived-bird and emphasises its vulnerability to external influences.

COLIN R. TUBBS

Bird Books in Brief

Two check-lists of the birds of the world were reviewed in *Oryx*, July 1976, p. 396, but much better than either for the serious ornithologist is the *Reference List of the Birds of the World*, by John J. Morony Jr., Walter J. Bock and John Ferrand Jr. (Dept. of Ornithology, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY 10024, USA \$6). It is compiled by professionals who have used the obvious source, Peters's *Birds of the World* as amended by various major taxonomic papers, and is therefore complete. It is, however, no more than a list, without even distributional data.

Bird Observatories in Britain and Ireland, edited by Roger Durman (Poyser, Berkhamsted, £5) is an invaluable guide, by 17 authors, to the seven English, two Scottish, two Welsh, one Manx, and two Irish bird observatories, indicating what the visitor may hope to see when he gets there, and much other useful information.

Jon Field's *Guide to the Young of European Precocial Birds* (£20 from Nature Publications, Strandgården, Godhavnvej 4, DK-3220 Tisville, Denmark) is the kind of specialist publication that can only be published because of the enormous number of active field ornithologists nowadays. Precocial birds are those whose young normally leave the nest before they can fly, such as ducks, gamebirds, rails, waders and gulls. The

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