

about the devotees of land and freshwater molluscs, of spiders, and of vertebrate groups besides birds. W. N. P. Barbellion is quoted twice, but somehow Mr Allen resists the temptation to tell us that he wrote that most moving of diaries, *The Journal of a Disappointed Man*, besides publishing (under his real name of B. F. Cummings) some pioneer experiments on the orientation of British amphibians. There is no proper bibliography and its absence is only partly relieved by a chapter of notes on sources.

The illustrations include interesting photos, reproductions of old drawings, and attractive contemporary black and white sketches. I found the print tiresomely small and grey. Unfortunately the price, excessive even by modern standards, will prevent many from obtaining this important and engrossing book.

A. d'A. BELLAIRS

**Nature in Trust: the history of nature conservation in Britain, by John Sheail.** Blackie, £5.95.

It is a sobering experience to see events in which you have taken part treated as history, and to find one's brief notes, penned following a field trip, used as historical documents. This has happened to me in reading John Sheail's chapters on the genesis of the Nature Conservancy and its national nature reserves, for, as secretary of the official committee whose report led to its formation, I took part in many of the field trips to verify that the proposed national nature reserves were still sufficiently unspoiled to be worth recommending.

In many ways this book complements David Allen's *The Naturalist in Britain*, reviewed above, for it leans heavily to the official side of the movement, whereas Allen's book is devoted almost entirely to the unofficial side. This is partly because the official side has left copious documentation about itself, while the documentation of the unofficial side, in so far as it exists, is widely scattered and much less accessible.

However, so far as possible, Dr Sheail covers the ground very thoroughly, from the first stirrings of the modern movement in the mid-19th century down to about 1970. Among other interesting items he disinters the prototype of the Council for Nature: the British Correlating Committee for the Protection of Nature, founded in 1924. This began by taking an interest in the wider world, no doubt under the aegis of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire, and discussed 'the future of the dik-dik in Africa, whales and various migratory species.' However, it quickly repented of this incipient internationalism, which explains why the SPFE, now the Fauna Preservation Society and the second senior British conservation society (after the RSPB), does not merit even a mention by Dr Sheail.

Nevertheless, the book is a must for those engaged in or interested in the British conservation movement. The eye of a historian, who is himself not a biologist but a geographer, gives a refreshing new look at what we have been doing for the past fifty years or so.

RICHARD FITTER

**Rare, Disappearing and Lesser-Known Birds of the USSR**, edited by A. S. Rak. (in Russian) Oka State Nature Reserve and Central Laboratory for the Protection of Nature.

This interesting little book, published under the auspices of the Chief Administration for the Protection of Nature, Nature Reserves and the Hunting Economy of the Ministry of Agriculture of the USSR, consists of a three-page introduction and a collection of brief reports by Soviet ornithologists on thirty species of birds—rare, decreasing in numbers, or little known—including red-breasted goose, Siberian white crane, Ross's gull, Pallas's sandgrouse, the red-faced cormorant of the Kurile

and Aleutian islands, and Japanese crested ibis, probably now extinct in the USSR. There is a sketch of each bird and its distribution, with references to further literature, several photographs, and a list of contents in English.

The introduction refers to the Soviet Union's signature in 1973–4 to four conventions: the protection of wetlands; the restriction of trade in rare species of flora and fauna which specifies many of the birds in this book, for instance the hooded crane *Grus monacha*; the protection of the polar bear; and a Soviet-Japanese agreement on the protection of migratory birds, covering 287 species, 30 of them under threat of extinction, as a result of which a chain of protected areas was created in the Soviet Far East.

JOHN MASSEY STEWART

**The Book of Birds:** five centuries of bird illustration, by A. M. Lysaght. Phaidon Press, £20.

There are some books you take a quick look at and know they will be all joy—this is one. The joys then begin to multiply, as they should with all good art, when there is a chance to live with it. Dr Lysaght is as thorough a researcher as a zoologist, with an uncanny perception of where to look for what she wants to show. And the result is a cross-section of five very productive centuries of bird drawing in considerable depth and variety. Her own comments on each separate illustration touch on art, zoology, history, religion, folklore and personal conclusion, to make each statement varied and interesting as well as highly instructive.

But only her introduction deals with the distant origins of man's portrayal of birds. No examples are reproduced. The five centuries begin with the late Middle Ages and end with the 'greats'—Gould, Wolf, Audubon—probably the richest five hundred years if that must be the set limit. Without wanting to see a single page omitted, however, I must confess to a longing for some real primitives at the beginning and some late 20th-century liveliness from the generations following Wilbur Wright; with him aerodynamics lost its mystery and the essential difference of life style between birds and land animals became suddenly understood, even by artists, who were quick to draw inspiration from the new and even more exciting field.

Dr Lysaght mentions the passing of the big bird books, the ending of the era of the shotgun naturalists and the meticulously portrayed corpse. The future, both for birds and people calls for an involvement with the living, their behavioral study and their art. Perhaps this is the right moment to suggest two more books we would like to see from the same author—just as big, just as beautiful and in just the same format. Volume I would begin with the Lascaux Caves, and Volume III with Thorburn. Meanwhile 'Volume II', it must be said again, is all joy.

KEITH SHACKLETON

**British Birds of Prey,** by Leslie Brown. Collins, New Naturalist, £6.

Leslie Brown, whose experience of African birds of prey is unrivalled, here reveals a deep knowledge of the life histories of British birds of prey and the problems that face them. He begins with an explanation of anatomical functions such as visual acuity, wing slots etc. in relation to their way of life, and a review of their status in Britain and their classification. The next fifteen chapters, dealing with individual species, are some of the best in the book: in a succinct and very readable, almost conversational, style he describes the birds' appearance and status, what is known from ringing about their migrations, and their displays, nesting behaviour and nesting success, all in considerable detail. These life histories are remarkable surveys of the published literature and valuable too in their emphasis on the gaps in our knowledge and the failure of ornithologists to record or publish data.