



REVIEWS

The Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates.

By Simon Aspinall.

Hobby Publications, Liverpool, 1996. 173 pages; 66 colour photographs; 100 breeding maps. ISBN 1-872839-04-5. Paperback £14.99.

Collating data collected over years of research for a number of projects, including the 'Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia', Aspinall's excellent book clearly and concisely details the status and conservation of all of the UAE's 101 breeding bird species. Brief introductory sections cover the area's history, geomorphology, climate and conservation initiatives. The species texts follow. Each account includes the species' Arabic name, and details of its World range, breeding season and the subspecies involved in the UAE. Habitat preferences and breeding status in the UAE are then described. Distributional information exists for 45 of the 48 50-km squares in the country and the now-familiar three sizes of dots clearly map breeding distributions. Population estimates are given for most species, these ranging from 'Nil ?' for

Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* to '150,000-200,000' for the regionally endemic Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*. The regional and global significances of these populations are described and population trends highlighted. The conservation status of any site holding significant concentrations of any species is also discussed, as are any particularly urgent threats, along with some proposed solutions. The book has attractive maps and a number of equally clearly laid-out and informative tables. There are also ten habitat photographs and 56 first-class bird photos. Recommended to anyone with an interest in the birds of or conservation in this fascinating region.

PAUL HOLT

The Chiffchaff.

By Peter Clement.

Hamlyn, 1995. 126 pages; 17 colour plates; 4 colour illustrations; 16 line-drawings. ISBN 0-600-57978-6. Paperback £12.99.

I have to admit it at once: I am not the kind of person who instantly would buy a book dealing with one single species. For this pleasant little book, however, I would probably have made an exception. Not only is the Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* subject to one or several 'splits', but, once looked into, it also has most interesting habits.

The book deals thoroughly with identification, both racial and specific. There are four well-drawn plates, showing both races and confusion species (i.e. most Western Palearctic *Phylloscopus* warblers plus Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*), a number of

colour photographs and some drawings. Among the topics dealt with are distribution, habitat, food and foraging, voice, behaviour, territory, courtship, migration and mortality.

Although Swedish, I kept stumbling at a number of annoying misspellings; I cannot help wondering what a 'god covering of snowfall', the race '*canariensis*', etc., would look like. Apart from these trifles, I found the book very readable and recommend it highly to anyone wanting to dig the slightest bit deeper into the surprisingly fascinating subject of the Chiffchaff.

CHRISTIAN CEDEROTH

The Mitchell Beazley Pocket Guide to Garden Birds.

By Dominic Couzens. Illustrated by Mike Langman.

Mitchell Beazley, London, 1996. 160 pages; 350 colour illustrations. ISBN 1-85732-495-1. £7.99.

This is a splendid book for the kitchen window-sill. Each of 69 species is given a double-page spread of the standard Mitchell Beazley long-and-thin format (19.5 cm deep × 9.5 cm wide). The choice of species is good (I have seen all but seven in my own garden);

it is sensible to have included Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (though the old name of Ring-necked Parakeet is used), and I even approve of the inclusion of Serin *Serinus serinus*, since the text starts 'The serin is not a British bird, but is included here because it's a

familiar garden user on the Continent.' The paintings by Mike Langman are excellent, with usually at least five or six for each species, showing typical jizz, various aspects of behaviour, flight action diagrammatically, and so on: just the sort of things which the traditional hundreds-of-species field guides cannot find the space to include.

The texts are broken up into appropriate sections depending on the species (e.g. for

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* there is an 11-line introduction, followed by sections on voice, identification, young, flight, where found, display, drinking, rain-bathing, breeding, and garden tips).

Author, artist, designers and publishers all deserve congratulations. This is an excellent addition to the Mitchell Beazley Pocket Guide series.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

Leks.

By Jacob Höglund & Rauno V. Alatalo.

Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995. 248 pages; 8 line-drawings; numerous figures and histograms. ISBN 0-691-03727-2. Paperback £18.95.

Leks are groups of displaying males from which females choose mates. Darwin suggested that females' mate preferences arose through aesthetic whims, while Wallace thought that females chose male characters which signalled success in male-male combat. An additional insight is that females may gain fitness benefits from making appropriate choices. Since fitness is difficult to define, let alone measure, it is perhaps not surprising that Darwin and Wallace did not

pursue this possibility. This treatise thoroughly synthesises the scientific literature on leks, leaving me more knowledgeable but little wiser.

If you are a student or professional biologist, here is a competent, well-balanced account which will help you to pass exams or to write papers. If you want a good read which reflects the romance of leks, look elsewhere.

ROBERT MOSS

Where to Watch Birds in Spain and Portugal.

By Laurence Rose.

Hamlyn, in association with BirdLife International, London, 1995. 214 pages; eight colour plates; 30 line-drawings; 49 maps. ISBN 0-600-58404-6. Paperback £14.99.

Where to Watch Birds in Scandinavia.

By Gustaf Aulén.

Hamlyn, in association with BirdLife International, London, 1996. 216 pages; eight colour plates; 30 line-drawings; 41 maps. ISBN 0-600-58459-3. Paperback £16.99.

Where to Watch Birds in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus.

By Hilary Welch, Laurence Rose, Derek Moore, Bill Oddie & Harry Sigg.

Hamlyn, in association with BirdLife International, London, 1996. 216 pages; eight colour plates; 30 line-drawings; 33 maps. ISBN 0-600-58232-9. Paperback £16.99.

These three additions to the Hamlyn 'Where to Watch Birds' series continue in the format established by John Gooders' *Britain and Europe* (reviewed *Brit. Birds* 79: 362-363; 82: 228) and followed by Gerard Gorman's recent *Eastern Europe* book (reviewed *Brit. Birds* 88: 117).

In each book, a brief introduction is followed by sections on each country, some general information on the region's importance for birds, the best times to visit, conservation, and 'getting there and getting around'. The bulk of each book is made up of relatively short site descriptions, highlighting a few key species. The guide to Spain and

Portugal has a useful index to the birding localities and major towns mentioned in the text, and all three have indexes to the bird names.

Laurence Rose's guide to Spain and Portugal covers almost 200 prime birding sites—109 in Spain, 16 in the Balearic Islands, 15 in the Canary Islands, 25 in Portugal, six in Madeira and 11 in the Azores. Most sites have a full page of text, with the Ebro Delta and Doñana each having over two pages. There are only 40 site maps.

The Scandinavian guide has 40 sites in Denmark well described by Klaus Malling Olsen, 40 in Finland described by Finnish

authors, 15 Icelandic sites described by five authors, 45 sites in Norway detailed by two authors, and details of 60 Swedish sites by Gustaf Aulén (the senior author). The individual sites are covered in slightly less detail than in the Iberian guide and, again, there are insufficient (36) maps. The sections on Denmark and Iceland are particularly well done, the others rather more poorly, containing several errors, omissions and oversights.

The guide to Turkey, Greece and Cyprus is also written by a number of authors. Hilary Welch details 74 sites in Turkey; Laurence Rose 63 in Greece (including Corfu, Crete, Lesbos and several other Aegean islands); and Derek Moore, Bill Oddie and Harry Sigg document 27 sites in north and south Cyprus. This latter section reads well and is full of detail, but there are no site maps whatsoever.

Although each of the books has its own

particular merits and strong points, they are all somewhat disappointing. Many of the site directions are too simplistic, there are far too few maps (less than one map for every five sites described), and much of the information is trivial (and occasionally incorrect). Only the 'Turkish' guide has an acceptable bibliography (even noting rival bird-finding guides, such as the excellent Gostour and Prion guides to Turkey). The Hamlyn Turkish guide, however, devotes six pages to giving the English and scientific names of species mentioned in the text, space that would have been better used on some additional maps.

All three books also include eight colour plates depicting 80 of the area's specialities. Although the illustrations are perfectly acceptable, better ones can be found in the comprehensive field guides, and their inclusion in site-guides seems pointless.

PAUL HOLT

This book is a hybrid between an atlas and a minimal photo guide. All the birds of the United Arab Emirates are discussed here. The seasonal status and distribution of each bird is covered in 3 - 16 lines, depending on its frequency in the country. This is not an identification guide but a reference book describing the presence of the birds in the country. Range maps represent the breeding ranges for about 75 species. Lastly, 26 pages are dedicated to birding locations in the UAE. These locations are shown with maps along with notes on the area's habitat along with a list of expected birds. This book is a good data reference for those people wishing to get an overview of the UAE's birds, at least as of 1990 when this book was written. I'm glad to have added it to my library. The Arabian Peninsula serves as a staging post between Africa and Asia for migratory species, and the many lagoons, mud flats, khors and mangrove stands found along the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman provide ideal nesting and feeding sites. An inventory of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the Middle East (Evans 1994) showed this ecoregion to contain 14 out of 33 areas identified in Oman, and 11 out of 20 areas in the UAE. Khor Khalba on the UAE's east coast, bordering Oman, contains an endemic subspecies of the white-collared kingfisher (*Halcyon chloris* ssp. *kalbaensis*). Status and conservation of the breeding birds of the United Arab Emirates. Hobby, Liverpool and Dubai. Aspinall, S. 1996. Start by marking "Status And Conservation Of Breeding Birds Of The United Arab Emirates" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving | Want to Read.