

BOOK VIEWS

by Brian E. Cassie, Millis

"Book Views" will be a regular feature in *Bird Observer*. My plan is to present short reviews of recent titles, news on upcoming publications, and tips on special book values. I am very interested in hearing from the readership. Let me know what you think of the books you are seeing.

HUMMINGBIRDS, THEIR LIFE AND BEHAVIOR: A Photographic Study of the North American Species. Text by Esther Quesada Tyrrell, photographs by Robert A. Tyrrell. Crown Publishers, New York, 1984. 224 pages; 235 color photos. \$35.

This is a dazzling book! Crown has produced a photographic work of uncompromised and almost unparalleled quality. The color, clarity, and composition of the photographs are as delightful as the subject matter. *HUMMINGBIRDS* begins with a "portfolio" of the North American hummingbirds. For each of the sixteen species discussed, there is a life history summary (too abbreviated), two color photographs (excellent), and a large line-drawing (rather heavy-handed and out of place in this book). Following are chapters on anatomy, feathers, flight, courtship and young, food, behavior, and flower pollination. All are engagingly illustrated with Robert Tyrrell's superb photographs. Esther Tyrrell wrote the text, which the blurb promises to be ". . . by far the most complete and up-to-date information on hummingbirds ever assembled . . . the definitive source for both scientists and general readers for years to come." Although it is no doubt true that this will become a standard for hummingbird enthusiasts, it is equally true that the text is neither complete nor entirely up-to-date. The distributional data, especially concerning wintering ranges, are in need of revision, and the main body of text, a broad synthesis of others' work, contains no original research and little of a scientifically "definitive" nature. Still, the text succeeds as a fine general introduction to hummingbirds, and, as such, is a worthwhile complement to the magnificent gallery of photographs. I recommend this book to anyone. Note: Robert Tyrrell is now working on a book on tropical hummingbirds.

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE by Roger Tory Peterson, Guy Mountfort, and P.A.S. Hollom. Fourth edition, revised and enlarged. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1983. 443 pages; 77 color plates. \$17.95.

The outstanding thing that sets this edition apart from the previous three is the quality of its production. The text is printed on lightweight, slightly yellowish paper and shows through to the overleaf. It reminds me of the books printed during World War II, when publishers were forced to use low-grade

paper. More disturbing, perhaps, than the paper is the color reproduction of the plates, which are badly washed out. It is interesting to note that the firm with the British rights to this book, William Collins Sons, had all of the plates reworked after the birdwatching public let its feelings be known. Perhaps Houghton Mifflin will do the same on future printings. In the meantime, if you want a good copy of this well-written, well-illustrated guide, order it from Britain. It will be hardcover (the American version has a flexible binding) and cheaper (about \$12).

GUIDE TO OWL WATCHING IN NORTH AMERICA by Donald S. Heintzelman. Winchester Press, Piscataway, 1984. 193 pages; 65 black-and-white photos, one plate of owl silhouettes. Paperback, \$8.95.

This is the latest in a long series of superficial bird books by this author. In the many years since *Autumn Hawk Flights* was published, Heintzelman has produced a bewildering array of "birdwatching" books that few persons (except publishers!) could take seriously. *GUIDE TO OWL WATCHING IN NORTH AMERICA* purports to be the "first full-scale owl watching guide ever published." Full-scale indeed! The species accounts are very brief (nineteen in twenty-five pages); only three pages are devoted to the unique features of the owl physique; and the bibliography comprises a mere seventeen titles, including two by the author. Furthermore, the photographs are poorly reproduced; the owl silhouettes are not drawn to scale; and the seventy-five-page section on owl watching sites has a bigger write-up on Gooseberry Neck than on Amherst Island. Unless you absolutely have to have every owl book on the market, I recommend against buying this one.

OVERSTOCK BIRD BOOKS. There are a lot of attractively priced publishers' overstocks out there in the retail shops. Here are three 1983 titles currently available.

BIRDS THAT CAME BACK by John Gooders. Tanager Books, 1983. 180 pages; photos. List price \$25, remainder price \$5.98. Rare and reestablished British breeding birds and their stories; not much of great interest to American birdwatchers.

BIRD MIGRATION by Chris Mead. Facts on File, 1983. 224 pages; 250 illustrations. List price \$19.95, remainder price \$7.98. This is a good overview of the subject at a good price.

BIRDS OVER AMERICA by Roger Tory Peterson. Dodd, Mead; 1983. 342 pages; photos. Paperback; list price \$12.95, remainder price \$2.98. The latest reprint of a Peterson standard. Peterson is a fine writer, and anyone interested in birds should enjoy this. The photos are poorly reproduced.

BRIAN E. CASSIE, who runs a natural history book enterprise, has joined our staff to write this feature. Other than books, "his passions" are marine mollusks, birds, and butterflies, and he has led natural history tours for Massachusetts Audubon Society in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

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