

BOOK REVIEW

Lambert's Birds of Garden and Woodland, paintings by Terrence Lambert, text by Alan Mitchell; Charles Scribner's Sons, New York; 1976; 128 pp.

The spreading of knowledge is a beautiful thing. We learn from the simplest of factual accounts, or the enthusiastic verbal teachings of friends in the field, or by reading someone's extensive journal of observations, or by seeing photographs showing us things we might not otherwise be able to see.

But an artist, in the recreation of a vision, draws upon all of the delicate memory, and the understanding of a bird's nature. In his final creation, he fulfills the commitment of the physical undertaking. When one learns from this visual impression, a significant cycle is completed. The observer and artist share a reward.

Terrence Lambert's paintings of some of the more commonly seen birds in Britain are both accurate and lovely. They depict a particular behavior or habitat of each bird, and its atmosphere. The delicate softness of a Woodcock brooding its chick, a Longtailed Tit removing nest feathers, a Willow Warbler taking dew or a Tawny Owl alighting with its prey is shy of anthropomorphism. Lambert designs the page total, allowing negative space and crisp contrast to enhance the impression.

The text describing the often overlooked variety of birds in or near suburbia is brightened by the foreign sentence structure, hinting of narrative with an accent. The favourite British spellings are colourful and amusing, as in the word, "manoeuvrability."

There is a thoughtfully written introduction including a section highlighting the strong advantages of learning to identify birds audially. Much of birding relies on the recollection of song and especially tone or pitch, which is (ideally) always diagnostic of species. This skill is admirable and not stressed often enough, especially to beginners. The verbal representation of calls appearing in the text may appear elementary, but it is an important, realistic method of learning. The overall impression is to be cautious, reserved and conservative in identification. Also in the introduction are vegetative descriptions of Britain's geography which conjure visions of woods and woodland edges, pastures and well-kept gardens, where most of these fifty-nine birds species are found.

This collection of British birds will appeal to those who have become familiar with them abroad, as well as to those studying all types of birds in depth. Many species relate or are similar to North American birds. Grey Heron is to Great Blue Heron as Marsh Tit is to Black-capped Chickadee; or, Goldcrest is to Golden-crowned Kinglet as Great Spotted Woodpecker is to Hairy Woodpecker. On the other hand, learning of the peculiar Wryneck, the Nightingale's evening song, the Stock Dove's occasional habit of nesting in rabbit holes, and the feather-and-moss nest of a Longtailed Tit intrigues the reader to pursue them further, and the Latin names encourage this.

This first book of Terrence Lambert's works is a visual treat, and will easily grace your coffeetable or bedside, and leave you yearning for travel.

MJL