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REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS

- FJELDSÅ, J. 1977. GUIDE TO THE YOUNG OF EUROPEAN PRECOCCIAL BIRDS. pp 285, 39 colour plates, 29 text figures, numerous vignettes. Skarv Nature Publications, Kongevejen 453, 2840 Holte, Denmark. D. Kr. 200 (approx. £14.80)

We were surprised recently to hear from the publishers of this book that rather few copies of it had been sold since its publication in 1977. The book should certainly be available to workers on waders and other precocial species. As no review has previously appeared in WSG Bull., we take this opportunity of publishing (with permission of the editors) a shortened version of a review which first appeared in Ibis in 1978 (Vol. 120: 380). Perhaps, at that time, the price (then equivalent to £19-50) was considered rather high, although the quality of production of the colour plates and other aspects of the book was certainly also high. As the Danish kroner price is still the same, the effective sterling price is lower (even now), at less than £15, and the book is undoubtedly very good value, especially when one considers the extent of inflation over the past 6 years.

With the proliferation of field guides and popular texts on birds, it is perhaps surprising that guides to the identification of unfledged birds should be so late in appearing. A start in this direction was provided by Philip Burton's excellent illustrations in Colin Harrison's A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of British and European birds (London: Collins, 1975), but these included only examples from each group of species. FjeldsÅ's coverage of precocial young is more complete. The book deals with an area delimited by the Azores, the Mediterranean (but including its islands), the Black Sea and the Caucasus in the south, the Ural River and Mountains in the east, and all arctic dependencies of European countries, including Greenland, in the north. This allows the inclusion of those species which spend much of the year in Europe but breed in the high arctic, to which area several European-based studies have recently been extended. All 180 precocial species of grebes, flamingos, wildfowl, game-birds, Gruiformes and Charadriiformes (the last including here sand-grouse Ptercolitidae and divers Gaviidae) which nest within this area, are described, and nearly all are illustrated in at least one colour plate and usually in one or more text figures also.

The book is divided into three main sections: about 25 pages of introductory chapters, the main descriptive text of 162 pages followed by the 39 colour plates, each with a facing page of notes on identification. Six pages of introduction are devoted to a summary of material examined; it is a pity that larger publishing houses are not similarly prepared to allow space for reference to source material. However, the general biological information on, e.g., fledging periods is not so well supported; there are no references cited in the text and a final list consists of only 26 general works. Two short introductory chapters provide an interesting discussion of adaptations of the various categories of precocial birds with reference to behaviour, distribution, plumage and development. A short section provides useful advice on ringing of chicks and more detailed information is given separately in the main text for each group and species.

The main section of the text consists of introductory accounts for each family (or other grouping). These discuss common features and are followed by species descriptions in note form. Both sections include descriptions of the young, development, moult, breeding biology and behaviour, parental care, social relations, effects of human disturbance and ringing. Special note is taken of whether the young are likely to mix with those of other species. The family descriptions commonly include excellent comparative text-figures showing dorsal views of the species concerned. Following the use of down patterns in studies of systematics, in some cases possible phylogenetic trees are suggested.

Although the excellent colour plates themselves are likely to justify the purchase of the book for some, the test of the book is whether these, together with the text, can be used for identification. At the season when this review was written, no live young were available but, by courtesy of the Royal Scottish Museum, I was able to attempt identification of a range of preserved skins. Most species of gamebirds, rails and waders produced little difficulty, but uncertainty was experienced with some ducks. However, the problems were such that they would be unlikely to occur with live young in preened plumage. Gosling identification was less successful but, as this depends heavily on colour of soft parts and anatomical details of bill, museum specimens did not provide a fair test. While I am prepared to accept Fjeldså's contention that all precocial young can be identified to species, distinction between some of the larids proved too difficult for me and may, I suspect, remain the preserve of the specialist, as identification depends on probability distributions of plumage markings and detailed structure of bill and feet. One error detected concerns the lobes of down on the bills of *Mergus*; the main text and plate are correct but the note facing the plate is wrong.

For most species, only newly hatched young are illustrated. Although this generally seems to be enough for the identification of older young, a visual indication of other stages would be useful. Illustration of older young are included to 38 species including most gulls, some terns, five game-birds, four rails and single examples from most other groupings. While it would clearly be impracticable to illustrate a range of ages for each species, references to those detailed studies in which age classes of particular species have been described or illustrated would have been a useful inclusion.

Despite these minor criticisms, undoubtedly the book ably fills a notable gap in the ornithological literature. It is strongly bound with an attractive water-resistant cover, rather than a dust jacket. Although at 25.5 x 17.5 cm it is rather large for most pockets, the book will be most valuable in the field.

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MOSS, D. (ed.) 1983. SCAN RINGING GROUP REPORT 1981 AND 1982.

68pp. Copies available (price £1.50 incl. postage) from the editor, 36 Gorwel, Llanfairfechan, Gwynedd LL33 0DU, U.K.

Here is another comprehensive and informative report on the activities of SCAN Ringing Group who operate in North Wales. Apart from the usual (and useful) summaries of each catch, and lists of recoveries and controls, there are reports on specific activities (which include seabird ringing), and some short papers on data collected by the group. Topics here include seasonal variation in wader weights, further information on the Turnstone population in North Wales, weight losses of Dunlins and Turnstones in captivity, and movements of Canada Geese. SCAN Ringing Group must be congratulated on the extensive fieldwork which goes to make this report interesting reading. Notable results include the high recapture rates achieved for many species (nearly 40% for Dunlin in 1982), and the longevity of some individuals. One Dunlin was caught in at least its sixteenth year, an age that exceeds that previously recorded (14.45 years - *Ringers' Bulletin* Vol. 6 No.2).

Few criticisms can be levelled at this production. Maps of recoveries would be improved by distinguishing separately birds ringed as pulli, other juveniles and adults. In the analysis of weight data, note should be made of the possible biases resulting from different catching methods (see Pienkowski and Dick 1976 *Ringing & Migration* 1: 105-107, and Goss-Custard et al. 1981 *Wader Study Group Bull.* 32: 13), particularly where comparisons are made between species and catching sites. Overall, this is a most useful report of the work of an active ringing group.

Andy Wood.

