

The British ornithologists' guide to bird life. Jim Flegg, consulting Editor. Original text in Swedish by Carl-Fredrik Lundevall. Illustrations by Stefan Ullstrom. 1980. Blandford Press Ltd., Poole, Dorset (U.K.). ix + 324 pp. Distributed in U.S.A. by Sterling Publ. Co., New York. \$27.50.

This guide to bird life is neither a true field guide nor a handbook, but rather a brief summary of life histories of the birds covered. The closest North American equivalent is the series of Audubon field guides written by Richard Pough about two decades ago. It is ideal for the casual birder visiting northern Europe, who already has a good field guide but wishes to know a little more about the birds there without too much detail.

Four pages of introductory material describe bird-watching activities, give useful tips to bird-watchers, and comment on avian biology in general. This is followed by a series of drawings illustrating the topography of several species and a series of plates on which are painted over 300 species of birds, some in more than one plumage and/or posture. Each species is numbered on the plates, these numbers corresponding to those in the "descriptive notes" in the following text. Each species is discussed in 1/3 to 3/4 page of notes on field identification, calls, breeding, food, and status. A sentence of text is also found by the main illustration of each species. A one-page list of books and indices to scientific and English names completes the book.

The plates, except for their English captions, are evidently the same as those in the original Swedish edition. Thus, some species are included that have never been reported in Britain and various vagrants to Britain are excluded. Yet the text and plate captions are not mere translations of the original Swedish, with status always referring primarily to the British Isles (sometimes merely stating that the species has yet to occur there) and other comments usually emphasizing British conditions. For example, the text on Willow Grouse refers primarily to the British race, the Red Grouse, and similarly the description of the Dipper is based on the British race, with a comparison with the continental race. On the other hand, the text for other species is not

particularly appropriate to British readers. Thus, notes on field identification for Spotted Crake, Wheatear, and Tawny Pipit compare them to species not yet, or only accidentally, known in Britain, and the illustration of the Great Northern Diver (Common Loon) is in breeding plumage, whereas most British observers are more likely to see it in winter.

In general, the illustrations are good, but not outstanding. Most are of the species in appropriate habitat, and the range of activities represented shows the artist to be an observant field naturalist. Most of the species with which I am familiar appear to be drawn accurately, but the Fieldfare on the topography page is badly misshapen and the tarsi of the Arctic Tern much too long, contradicting the accurate caption and text descriptions.

I found no errors of fact in the text, although Snowy Owls on the Canadian prairies in winter hunt all day, not "mainly at dusk," and while breeding in the High Arctic encounter almost no dusk. This may represent a geographical behavioral difference or merely an inappropriate choice of words. A few printing errors slipped by the proof-readers, the worst being *Scila* for *Sula*. Some of the scientific names (e.g. *Hydroprogne tschegrava* for Caspian Tern) are outdated. In general, the text reads well and the author writes graphically, describing the whistle of the Dunlin as "worthy of any zealous football referee" and the song of the Dartford Warbler as harsh and "bad-tempered."

Banding (ringing) is mentioned only briefly in the introduction, but the fact that young Gannets not fully fledged have been recaptured 70 km away from their colony must have been determined through banding. Banders who have grimaced at the vise-like grip of the Evening Grosbeak's bill will shudder on reading that the massive beak of the Hawfinch is capable of splitting plum stones!

In short, in spite of minor faults, this "guide" is a worthy addition to the libraries of bird-watchers who frequently visit northern Europe.

Martin K. McNicholl