

A Twitcher's Diary. Richard Millington. 1981. Blandford Press, Poole, Dorset, England. Distributed in U.S.A. by Sterling, New York. \$24.95.

In British terminology "listing" is called "ticking," and an ardent "ticker" who expends considerable energy in attempts to "tick" rarities is a "twitcher." Richard Millington is one such "twitcher" and this book is an illustrated diary of his observations in England in one year—from 8 Jan. 1980 to 1 Jan. 1981.

Millington's emphasis is on rarities—many birds are indicated as constituting the first, 10th or 28th in England, as well as species seen out of season, in unusual numbers, or found regularly only in a few sites in England (e.g. European Avocet, Capercaillie). The author is interested in more than just "ticking" and frequently remarks on a particular behavior pattern or odd circumstance, such as how well concealed such conspicuous species as Dotterel can be in some habitats and "punk-dyed" Red Knots with green underparts. Such passages make interesting reading, but much of the book consists of brief lists of species seen at a particular time and place, occasionally even a statement that nothing of note was seen.

The emphasis on rarities for Britain precludes this book's value in aiding visiting naturalists in finding birds in Britain except for the highly localized regulars. Interesting tid-bits such as the fact that Cetti's Warbler now nests regularly after its first ever sighting in Britain in 1971, relieve a generally rather tedious text. North American readers not familiar with British colloquialisms might be confused by some passages. I am still unsure whether a "crippling" view of a bird is one in which all details are seen well at close range as sometimes implied, or any good view of an extreme rarity as implied in the description of the Red-eyed Vireo as a "hyper-zonky megacrippler!" I was even more puzzled at any resemblance between the feeding behavior of a vireo and that of a Hippo (p. 154) until I read of Melodious and Booted Warblers (pp. 156 and 157) as being "typical Hippos," and thus realized that a "Hippo" referred not to a large African mammal, but to *Hippolaeus* warblers. Some readers may not be aware of the term "Commic" tern as indicating Arctic and/or Common, although this usage has appeared in some scientific literature.

On the whole, I found the book relatively free of errors, although Forster's Terns are more widely distributed than the s. U.S. (p. 31) and the stout blood-red bill of the Arctic Tern is not its only reliable field mark—the short tarsi are in fact more reliable, as bill color is not fool-proof. Most of the drawings are pleasing and essentially accurate, but many appear slightly distorted in shape or slightly "off" in pattern—for example, the smudge on the winter plumaged Spotted Sandpiper (p. 127) looks a bit odd, yet clearly illustrates the correct species. The proof readers earned their keep—I noted only two minor printing errors.

Apart from one reference to a "ring" on a bird, and the use of netting to solve an identification dispute (Spectacled vs. Subalpine Warbler), there is no mention of banding, and banders will be most interested in descriptions or mentions of leucistic Herring Gull and House Sparrow, melanistic Grey Heron and partial albino Winter Wren.

I found the book a welcome diversion on a long bus ride, and no doubt ardent "twitchers" in Britain and elsewhere will enjoy parts of it as a casual read, but even they will hesitate at the price and more likely invest it in a good field guide, bird-finding guide or bird atlas.

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