

Book Reviews

The Wildfowl Trust Annual Report series gave only infrequent reviews of books. WILDFOWL will endeavour to deal more regularly with those volumes on our subject which are brought to our attention and are thought worth reviewing.

Handbook of Waterfowl Behaviour by Paul A. Johnsgard. 1965. xvi + 378 pp. Photographs and line drawings. London: Constable. 75s.

Paul Johnsgard spent nearly two years at Slimbridge studying the behaviour of the ducks, geese and swans then in the collection. He shot off a mile and a half of 16 mm. film through his gun-stock mounted camera. And when his long figure was not to be seen loping through the grounds, his whereabouts could generally be ascertained from the rattle of his typewriter. More than a dozen specialized scientific papers poured off the machine. This book makes his activities and conclusions available to a wider audience.

The book is called a Handbook and a Handbook it is. One must not expect long discursive essays, but rather a compressed catalogue of the types of display known in each living species. A further caveat which must be entered is that the adjective 'Social' or perhaps even 'Sexual' could have been inserted before 'Behaviour' to emphasise the strong bias that the book has. The author's main interests in behaviour are concerned with systematics, and behaviour associated with mate-selection and copulation in birds does throw light on their evolution, development and relationships. It is also the most visually stimulating, and often bizarre. The latter aspect is reflected in the descriptive vocabulary, full of grunt-whistles, oblique pumpings, hunched-rushes, plonk-kicks, kinked-neckings and post-copulatory burps.

We are certainly glad that the Slimbridge Collection provided Paul with his opportunities, and through his work, one of the scientific justifications for its existence.

The Giant Canada Goose by H. C. Hanson. 1965. xxiii + 226 pp. Photographs and line drawings. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. \$9.75.

The taxonomy of the Canada Goose has given rise to many controversies and the exact number of intermediate races that are described varies with individual taste. The situation has been complicated, perhaps hopelessly, by attempts to re-establish the bird in areas from which it

had been wiped out. One race which was thought to have gone for ever was the largest, *Branta canadensis maxima*.

This book tells the entertaining story of the author's rediscovery of the race and his subsequent finding that it was still moderately abundant, its numbers exceeding 60,000. He also shows that much of the research work thought to have been done on other races of large Canada Geese should be referred to the Giant. Consequently the book develops into a very useful account of what is known of the breeding range, migration, wintering grounds, nesting, feeding habits, physiology, behaviour, population dynamics and management of the race. To this research the author has contributed extensively.

The 74 photographs are excellent, clear, and helpful in illustrating in detail the finer points of the text, figuring the bird in all its places, postures and parts, from bill to genitalia.

Waterfowl in Australia by H. J. Frith. 1967. xxi + 328 pp. Diagrams, photographs and coloured plates. Sydney: Angus and Robertson. 100s.

The introductory chapters, with the very fine ecological photographs, give the feel of a fascinating, rather frightening, sub-continent to those of us not fortunate enough to have visited it. Then come species by species accounts in full detail. The use of sonograms to illustrate vocalisations is a useful novelty. The sections on distribution, migration and breeding are especially valuable, revealing many strange facts; strange that is to those familiar with northern wildfowl. Thus the Australian wildfowl tend to be nomadic rather than migratory; their movements and their breeding cycle determined by water levels rather than daylength; females may be larger than males; hole nesting is common; few species have dull 'eclipse' plumages.

The author himself prepared a series of black-and-white identification plates with birds on the water, in flight and overhead. Rightly he disclaims artistic ability but these sketches do get the 'jizz' of the birds. The colour plates by Betty Temple Watts have a certain originality about them, but they should have been to scale within the confines of each plate; the downy young are less pleasing. There are some outstanding 'portrait' photographs and, quite unrivalled, shots of ducks under water.

A Wealth of Wildfowl by Jeffery Harrison. 1967. 176 pp. Diagrams and photographs. London: Andre Deutsch. 30s.

If anyone can be said to epitomise the 'modern wildfowler,' zealous in defence of his sport but urging moderation to ensure its continuation, then this is our Council Member Jeff Harrison. He has long been a link-man between shooters and protectionists, striving tirelessly to turn both into balanced conservationists. This book tells the story of the efforts that he, and others, have successfully made to bring about the present degree of *rapport*; he takes the reader behind the scenes of wildfowl 'politics.' It is a tale worth telling, and it is well told. With his scientific background and a flair for exposition he also makes a fine job of explaining to the man-in-the-field the purpose of research into wildfowl biology and what has been achieved. He covers wildfowl counts, ringing, habitat ecology, breeding biology, predator control, oil pollution, lead poisoning, sex and age ratios, conflicts with agriculture, pesticides, food requirements, and the establishment and management of reserves. In many cases the wildfowlers, urged and led by the author, have co-operated with the researchers of the Wildfowl Trust.

Waterfowl: their Biology and Natural History by P. A. Johnsgard. 1968. vii + 138 pp. Photographs (including colour) and line drawings. Lincoln: University of Nebraska. \$8.95.

After his Handbook on waterfowl behaviour and a student's text on animal behaviour, the author sought to turn his prolific pen to making known to a wider audience the group of birds which had become so much a part of his life. It is rather doubtful if his text will succeed in this, largely because he has tried to do too much in too small a space.

But the photographs are quite a different matter. Nearly all the living species of ducks, geese and swans are reproduced, mostly from his own camera, and many taken at Slimbridge. Sometimes, alas, the printers have been less than kind, bleeding off a beak here, a tail there. The black-and-white reproductions tend to lack the contrast of the original (a common fault with the process used). But such gripings aside, many of the colour plates are masterpieces which cannot fail to convey the magic quality of wildfowl to those who view them for the first time. Outstanding are the White-faced Whistling Duck, the Red-breasted Goose and, best of all, the Comb Duck male in all its sheeny glory.

Handbuch der Vögel Mitteleuropas.

Volumes 2 and 3. Anseriformes. By K. M. Bauer and U. N. Glutz von Blotzheim. 1968-69. pp. 535 and 504. Many diagrams, maps and line drawings. Colour plates. Frankfurt am Main: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft. DM 48.50 per volume.

David Lack has written elsewhere: 'This is unquestionably the greatest handbook on birds yet written, and the sooner it is translated into English the better.' This statement cannot be bettered.

The title of the series is somewhat misleading as an indication of its scope. Middle Europe is taken to include Benelux, Germany East and West, Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. Any bird which has occurred in that area, even as a rare vagrant, receives the full treatment; the Ring-necked Duck does, for instance. So as far as wildfowl are concerned, these volumes cover virtually all the holarctic species. And what a coverage; the older texts of Kortright and of Delacour do not hold the proverbial candle to these volumes.

Under each species very clear, detailed and fully referenced information is given on field characters, dimensions, moult, vocalisation, breeding distribution, population size and fluctuations, migration, biotope, growth, survival, behaviour, food and feeding. There are no procrustean limitations to these sections; where there is a lot of information available on a species or a subject, a lot of space is allowed. Thus the Mallard is given virtually monographic treatment for 73 pages. But even that of the Marbled Teal (one of the shortest) runs to seven.

One of the exciting things about this pair of volumes is that they are not just superb compilations of published data. The authors have shown great ingenuity and persistence in cajoling unpublished information from biologists sitting, as they all too frequently do, on mounds of data. The staff of the Wildfowl Trust in particular were happy to be milked in this way, both by correspondence and in the course of an action-packed visitation from Urs Glutz.

We hope that the fervent prayers one hears on all sides will ensure long life to the authors so that this great work may run through to completion. At least we can give praise to Wetmore, whose Order ensures that the real birds are treated first and the little brown jobs are the ones in distant prospect.

G.V.T.M.