

Reviews

WOODPECKERS OF EUROPE: A STUDY OF THE EUROPEAN PICIDAE

By Gerard Gorman, illustrated by Szabolcs Kókay. Bruce Coleman Ltd, Chalfont St Peter, 2004. 192 pages, 10 colour plates, numerous line-drawings, colour distribution maps. ISBN 1-872842-05-4. Hardback, £35.00.

Europe's woodpeckers are an attractive bunch, and this portable and well-produced volume will increase your awareness of this frequently neglected group. Covering the continent's ten breeding species, and sensibly excluding vagrants such as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*, this book will appeal to anyone wanting an insight into the lives of these engaging, but sometimes elusive creatures. The book is divided into three parts, of which the first 'Systematics, structure and natural history' and last 'Woodpeckers and the wider world' provide brief but necessary contexts for the middle and longest section. This section contains the individual species accounts, preceded by a block of coloured plates and distribution maps.

Gerard Gorman is clearly a woodpecker enthusiast and, by deftly weaving various published and unpublished sources with his own opinions and eastern European experience, he has produced a text that is both interesting and informative. I was, for example, fas-

cinated to learn that a Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* had been witnessed foraging on a limestone cliff face in a manner recalling Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*. The individual species accounts cover not only expected themes such as plumages, habitat preferences, nest-sites, feeding habits and population trends, but also include helpful discussions on hybrids (a topic mostly neglected in ornithological literature), and signs. This last subject is of more use for certain species than it might at first appear, for, as Gorman notes, it was the distinctive foraging marks left by White-backed Woodpeckers *Dendrocopos leucotos* that led to a previously overlooked population being discovered on the borders of Austria and the Czech Republic in the 1990s.

The illustrations by Hungarian artist Szabolcs Kókay form an important part of this work. His skilfully crafted black-and-white line-drawings are scattered throughout the book, and are not only decorative but cleverly designed to illustrate points in the text, while the colour plates are simply some of the most lifelike and instructive woodpecker paintings available.

Criticisms? Well, yes, there are a few niggles, though the only one I feel serious enough to warrant mentioning concerns the maps, which as well as covering Europe (excluding woodpecker-free Iceland) extend beyond its boundaries to include adjacent parts of central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. Here, I would have

expected distributions to be shown for the entire area mapped, yet this is not the case. Without either prior knowledge or reference to individual species texts, there is nothing to indicate, for example, the presence of breeding populations of Great Spotted Woodpecker *D. major* in Morocco and Tunisia, or Syrian Woodpecker *D. syriacus* in Israel. Distributions are shown, however, for non-European Turkey but (bafflingly, as it is part of Europe) inconsistently so for the Caucasus region. Furthermore, comparison with *BWP Concise* reveals a number of other small discrepancies and suggests that the ranges are more crudely indicated than necessary, even allowing for the scale of map used; the much tinier 'thumbnails' in the *Collins Bird Guide* (Svensson *et al.* 1999) appear better in both those respects. As a former cartographer (of sorts), I suspect that the person who compiled the maps had little background in cartography, as these do not show the same attention to detail evident elsewhere in the book.

In spite of my doubts concerning the content and execution of the maps, I believe that anyone with an interest in European woodpeckers would do well to acquire this volume for its useful text and excellent illustrations. However, it should not be allowed to simply accumulate dust on the bookshelf; my copy will certainly see service on visits to woodpecker-rich parts of Europe.

Pete Combridge

INSECT AND BIRD INTERACTIONS

Edited by Helmut F. van Emden and Miriam Rothschild. Intercept Ltd, Andover, 2004. 301 pages; five colour plates; maps, figures, tables, line-drawings, black-and-white photographs. ISBN 1-898298-92-0. Hardback, £70.00.

This book, which grew out of a conference held in 1997, contains 20 papers that provide a wide-ranging overview of insect-bird

interactions. The volume is divided into four subject sections, the first of which (Population Management Issues) devotes four of its six chap-

ters to the important and topical subject of birds and their insect prey in agricultural environments. Three of these focus on the impact of agricultural change on farmland insect populations and, hence, on insectivorous farmland birds, while the fourth provides a useful review of techniques for assessing and identifying the invertebrates actually eaten by farmland birds. The

opening chapter, however, reviews how the availability and quality of intertidal invertebrate prey affect shorebird populations, with the aim of drawing out conclusions relevant to insect–bird interactions.

The second section reviews the ‘Effects of Insecticides on Bird Populations’, including the evidence for the indirect effect of changing farmland pesticide use on bird populations. Other chapters include a case study based upon the detrimental impact of household insecticides on the highly endangered Seychelles Magpie Robin *Copsychus sechellarum*, and a review of the consequences of organochlorine insecticide use for British raptors. Although the latter might seem well-known, there are intriguing insights into the relative impacts of DDT and of cyclodiene pesticides such as dieldrin, and

why bird-eating raptors such as Eurasian Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* suffered more than mammal-eating ones such as Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus*.

The third, and largest, section discusses ‘Foraging Behaviour of Birds on Insects’. Two chapters are case studies, looking at Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla* and ants (Formicidae), and Great Tits *Parus major* and caterpillars respectively, two address factors influencing birds’ use of aposematic prey, and two others tackle rather specialised aspects of the role of odours in affecting bird behaviour. The three chapters of the final section (‘Ectofauna’) comprise perhaps the most eclectic grouping, incorporating avian defences against ectoparasites, how young cuckoos (Cuculidae) acquire their host-specific feather lice, and the interactions between detritivorous insect

larvae and birds. As the last-named points out, here lepidopteran caterpillars are the unexpected consumers, feeding on the waste products of birds, and the chapter includes an outline of the evolutionary pathways leading to this specialisation.

Overall, the book admirably fulfils, and even exceeds, the coverage promised by its title, containing much of interest to ornithologists and entomologists alike, whether amateur or professional. It is also nicely produced, and well it should be at the price, which is its main drawback. The publishers appear to have chosen a short print run/high profit margin route, aimed at academic libraries, which will keep this book away from many who might otherwise have enjoyed and learnt from it.

Robert Prýs-Jones

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS IN NORTHEAST ENGLAND

By Dave Britton and John Day.
2nd edition. Christopher Helm,
A&C Black, London, 2004. 416
pages. ISBN 0-7136-6826-1.
Paperback, £16.99.

First published in 1995, this guide contains comprehensive coverage of 75 sites in Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Durham and Cleveland, with short notes on a further 81 locations. Northeast England – with the seabird spectacle of the Farne Islands, lekking Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix* in Teesdale and the migrant hot-spots of Holy Island, Druridge Bay, Hartlepool

and Teesmouth – offers some of the finest birding in the country.

One key site that has come to prominence since 1995 is East Chevington, in Northumberland, part of the network of five wetlands that stretch along Druridge Bay, so it is good to see this site given its own section. The inclusion of the newly created St Mary’s Wetland, Whitley Bay, is also to be welcomed.

The authors have also looked to the future. The section on the North Tees Marshes (incorporating Saltholme Pools) spells out the exciting developments in this area, where the RSPB is developing an extensive reedbed, pools and wet grassland, and plans to open its

first reserve in Northeast England in 2007 (*Brit. Birds* 97: 672).

The updated guide has better maps than the original and the access details are extremely precise; at random, I checked if the authors had noted the change of ownership at the hypermarket next to Wallsend Swallow Pond – they had. Northeast England is under-watched, yet consistently turns up some excellent birds. Anyone contemplating a trip to the region should buy this book. When that Fea’s Petrel *Pterodroma feae* is lingering off Newbiggin, you’ll want to know *exactly* where you’re heading!

Adrian Pitches

ATTU: BIRDING ON THE EDGE: A QUARTER CENTURY OF BIRDING THE WESTERN REACHES OF NORTH AMERICA

Edited by Christa Watters. Charles Osgood & the ABA, Colorado, 2003.
214 pages; many colour photographs; figures.
ISBN 1-878788-31-0. Paperback, £29.50.

Go on, look at the title again (birding on the edge, etc.). Shades of shock and awe, or is it all just so much bilious derring-do by a

bunch of Yank listers? Think of this book as a handbag. It contains a lot of unnecessary clutter which, when exposed to the glare of daylight,

would be better off chucked in the bin. The photographs range from mediocre to abysmal. They look like old, scrapbook material, yet many are taken within the last decade. The accounts of the place and its birds are hugely varied. Some chapters are riveting. The best by a long chalk is Larry Balch’s spellbinding tale of how he conceived and ran Attours (cheesy

titles are *de rigueur* everywhere) for over 20 years. At the other extreme are the pages of poems. Hello? These fall somewhere between tree-hugging and pre-Eskimo Nell.

Actually, I still enjoyed this book, even though I felt that it fell short of documenting the birds and the place to a standard that both deserved. I can imagine the wildness and remoteness, and the wonderment of being 'within touching distance' (900 km) of Kamchatka and an Asian migration wormhole. It was frustrating then to read pseudo-introspective twaddle such as 'Why am I here? Why do I do this? Give me the money and I will go to Attu! On the other hand, I would find the company of collectors, another constituent of Attu's Yank birders, hard

to stomach. Top-class rarities (and who knows how many more) get blasted. Scant mention is made of the practice anywhere in the book. Old World readers may be shocked to know that easily identified rarities, seen and photographed by many people, were then killed. Examples are spring male Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina* and Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*. Perhaps deliberately (as an attempt at emasculation), no clue is given in the book that these birds were shot. At least North America's first Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, found on Attu by a lone (and clearly unarmed) observer in October 1985, was allowed a final winter to live until 'birders' returned in April 1986 and bagged it. I trawled through every

page of the book wondering if there would be any mention of collecting. I found only one. On page 89, Brooke Stevens, writing a log about her all-women group ('The Murrelets') says, 'The birds that are blown off course are often exhausted and never reach their breeding grounds; some are collected for the record. Misguided nonsense or tour-guide brainwashing? Bemoaning the lack of current trips, the back-cover blurb effuses, 'and to inspire those, who might, in the future, work toward making such trips possible again.' In fact, visits by boat are planned for 2006. Maybe, in celebration, the vessel will be flying the skull and crossbones?

Anthony McGeehan

**A BIRDWATCHERS' GUIDE
TO TRINIDAD AND
TOBAGO**

By William L. Murphy.
Prion Ltd, Cley, Norfolk, 2004.

176 pages; numerous
photographs, maps and
line-drawings.

ISBN 1-871104-11-4.
Paperback, £14.75.

A certain DIY product is advertised as 'doing exactly what it says on the tin'. Authors of bird-finding guides would do well to follow this maxim. I have never done any DIY and cannot vouch for that product, but surely a bird-finding guide should do exactly what it says on the cover?

This guide covers all major and many minor birding areas on the islands. Detailed directions are given and the birds likely to be seen are listed for each site. Some of the more sought-after species are poorly dealt with, however. In the selected bird list, six places are mentioned for Trinidad Piping

Guan *Pipile pipile*, the only bird endemic to these islands, yet only one of these is dealt with in the site guide. The Main Ridge Forest Reserve on Tobago is inexplicably hidden in the Little Tobago Island section, yet this is the only site given for the very localised White-tailed Sabrewing *Campylopterus ensipennis*. Should you wish to see Oilbirds *Steatornis caripensis* at the Caves of Aripo, this book actually recommends either using another book or hiring a local guide! Greater focus on how to find some of the specialities would improve this guide considerably.

Size and weight should be important factors when producing any bird-finding guide but a lot of space here is sadly wasted. The photographs, all in black and white, neither help with finding birds nor enhance the text, as most are poorly reproduced. The first point here also applies to the many line-drawings, and yet there are only 12 maps (one showing the islands' position in the Caribbean), which is far too few. Furthermore,

the maps lack detail; for example, few of the areas mentioned in the text for the Nariva Swamp are marked on that map, which will surely lead to a lot of frustration.

Equally wasteful is the baffling inclusion of some irrelevant sections: a half-page on the history of the islands, two pages on the islands' biota (mostly repeated elsewhere), and a ludicrous nine-page *selected* (!) bibliography, only one page of which covers birds. I felt that all the useful information could have been presented in half the space.

This follows a similar format to the other books in the series, which I have found helpful. Opening sections on travel, accommodation, when to go and what to bring are complete and useful. While this guide could be better, it is very reasonably priced and should you visit these islands it would indeed enable you to DIY.

Richard Schofield

Although the European green woodpecker is shy and wary, it is usually its loud calls, known as yaffling, which first draw attention. It 'drums' rarely (a soft, fast roll), but often gives a noisy ky¹/₄-ky¹/₄-ky¹/₄ck while flying. The song is a loud series of 10â€”18 'kl¹/₄' sounds which gets slightly faster towards the end and falls slightly in pitch.[10] The female makes a thinner p¹/₄-p¹/₄-p¹/₄-p¹/₄-p¹/₄-p¹/₄. [12] The flight is undulating, with 3â€”4 wingbeats followed by a short glide when the wings are held by the body.[13]. ISBN 1-904244-13-0. Gorman, Gerard (2004) Woodpeckers of Europe: A study of the European Picidae. Bruce Coleman. ISBN 1-872842-05-4. Woodpeckers Of Europe book. Read reviews from worldâ€™s largest community for readers. Gives an account of the European Picidae through the author's lifeti... Goodreads helps you keep track of books you want to read. Start by marking Woodpeckers Of Europe: A Study Of The European Picidae as Want to Read: Want to Read savingâ€¦ Want to Read. Excellent study, superbly illustrated. Click to have a closer look. ISBN: 9781872842059 Hardback Dec 2004 Out of Print #147075. About this book Related titles. Images Additional images. About this book. A personal and well researched account of the European Picidae through the author's lifetime study of these fascinating birds. The book covers all aspects of the natural history of the ten species including evolution, taxonomy, topography, flight patterns and drumming. There are full detailed accounts of each species. Other chapters deal with their country status, forestry, their relations