

The book is well written except for misuse of 'will' and 'shall', 'would' and 'should', recalling the time-honoured S O S : "I will be drowned, no one shall save me". It should appeal to all the regenerate scientific men who now take an interest

in social relations, but being somewhat too 'extreme' and dogmatic, it is not an entirely safe book to place in the hands of the million, for whom it was obviously written.

E. H. T.

British Birds

The Handbook of British Birds

By H. F. Witherby, Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain, Norman F. Ticehurst and Bernard W. Tucker. Vol. 1 (Crows to Flycatchers). Pp. xl + 326 + 32 plates. (London: H. F. and G. Witherby, Ltd., 1938.) 25s. net; set of 5 vols., 21s. net each.

THE eagerly awaited first volume—there are to be five in all—of the "Handbook of British Birds" has now made its appearance. It may be said at once that the work is fully up to, and indeed exceeds, the high expectations formed. The editors, all of them distinguished ornithologists, have laboured long, unostentatiously and with sustained enthusiasm to make the book a success, and it is safe to say that neither in Britain nor indeed in Europe is there in existence so complete and accurate a work on birds.

A feature of this volume—as it will be of the four succeeding volumes—is the coloured plates which portray the bird, both male and female, in summer, winter, and immature plumage. These plates are finely reproduced, and the colouring of the birds is clear and faithful.

In their preface, the authors tell us something of the history of the work, which has been with them a labour of love. Their aim was to produce something that would be of practical value not only to the expert, but also to the beginner and to the student interested in birds yet knowing little of them, and they have admirably succeeded in their task. The many readers of the "Practical Handbook", which was the ornithologists' Bible and which went out of print in 1934, will be interested to learn that the present work is much more than a new and enlarged edition of that 'Handbook'. New and valuable features have been introduced. One of these is a chart of song periods, prepared by Mr. H. G. Alexander—the fruits of thirty years close observation; another is the descriptions of display and posturing, written by Mr. Jourdain and Mr. Tucker; a third is a series of maps showing the breeding sites of certain local species in Britain, and the migrations of certain species, discovered by the *British Birds*' ringing scheme. The inquirer can indeed turn up any British bird at random, and read, placed before him clearly and concisely, all that is known about it.

No book of this kind could have been produced without extensive researches into the subject, and it is pleasant to see that the ornithologists—a considerable company—who have supplied information are individually thanked in the preface.

When this volume is compared with the older standard works on British birds, it is seen at once how greatly the number of species has increased. To take an example; in the old days an author described the jay, and thought that there was one, and only one, species of jay in the British Isles. The experts of the present day have discovered that no fewer than three species of jay may be found in the British Isles—the British jay, the Irish jay and the Continental jay, all with small, but quite distinct, differences of appearance. Let us take another bird, the crested tit; old authors were not aware that three species of this bird had been found in Britain—the Scottish crested tit, the Northern crested tit and the Central European crested tit. Other examples are the British blue tit and the Continental blue tit; the British long-tailed tit and the Northern long-tailed tit; the British tree creeper and the Northern tree creeper, and so on.

Whether this differentiation of species may be carried too far is a controversial subject—the late Abel Chapman was a strong opponent of it—but there is value in the descriptions of all the recognized species, and it should now be possible for the student to discover from a bird in the hand whether it is a native of Britain or an immigrant of an allied Continental race.

Another thought must occur to the reader of this work—the remarkable spread of certain species into areas where they were hitherto unknown.

I hope the education authorities of Britain will take notice of this work, for I can imagine nothing more likely to encourage nature study in the younger generation. In our great public schools also, the completed five volumes might be given as a most valuable prize.

Since we have now the finest bird book in Europe, let us see that we become up to date with our Wild Bird Protection Acts, and let us arouse public opinion to save those species of birds which seem—unless some special measure is taken for their preservation—doomed to extinction.

SETON GORDON.