

always get the shape of the bird quite right and often draws the bill rather too long. I think I might have trouble in trying to identify some of the small waders from these pictures but one or two of the pictures of gulls in flight have light, life and beauty.

My final comment on this book is that it is sad to see the text printed in such small type. Presumably it was used in a laudable attempt to keep the price down—which is reasonable as present prices go.

Another book which is not easy to read is the large format book with several photographs on each page. In *Wonderful World of Birds and their Behaviour*, by Donald Broom (Hamlyn: London and New York; £2.95), I get the impression that the designer was thinking more about designing the page to sell the book by its photographs than about the difficulty the reader might have in finding his way to the text through the jumble of pictures and legends. This lay-out I found particularly distracting, even though Donald Broom has written a text which gives a good succinct general description of different aspects of the way that a bird lives, beginning with a chapter on the physical characteristics of some of the more exciting birds of the world. This is followed by chapters on their evolution and a description of the families of birds, how they feed, their courtship and nesting, migration, and finally a chapter on the economics of birds as they are used by man or as pests. The colour photographs are excellent and as a general rule the legends are informative.

Penguin (Peter Owen: London, 1977; £5.95) is another seabird title, but the book is a personal account by L. Harrison Matthews apparently written from his 50-year-old diaries about a visit with the *Discovery* expedition of 1924 to the Antarctic, on which he was primarily engaged in whale research. There are six chapters, five of which are headed by the names of various penguins and one chapter entitled Captain James Cook. The text is a mixture of anecdotes of early travellers in the far south, personal reminiscences of his own life and voyages, and of the birds encountered on them. The ornithological interest is rather thin, comprising extracts from his diaries about the birds he met 50 years ago and occasionally referring to more up-to-date work. The photographs were apparently taken at the same time. More recently taken and clearer photographs might have helped the layman, for whom the book must have been intended, with the identification of the species referred to in the text. It is a pity that the author did not stick to the subtitle *Adventures among the Birds, Beasts and Whalers of the Far South* as the main title for, as a personal account of his travels in the far south, this is an amusing book to read. The title *Penguin* is misleading.

Whereas most of the books that I have been reviewing have been about the results of other people's research, there is only one book which described the techniques of watching birds. In this case, as its name *Bird Count* (Kestrel/Penguin: Harmondsworth, UK, 1977; hardback £2.75; paperback 75 pence) suggests, it summarises the various methods which have been developed largely by the British Trust for Ornithology for their surveys and censuses of the bird populations of various habitats in Britain, in which they have involved a large proportion of their membership. This book is intended for



Taken from *Birds of the Coast and Sea*

anyone interested in discovering more about wild birds in a methodical and thorough way. Humphrey Dobinson begins with a chapter identifying about 60 common birds, which I would have thought was slightly out of place; anyone who was going to use the techniques that followed would need to have had far more experience at identifying birds before embarking on the surveys. He follows with chapters on the various methods of counting birds. The common bird census

has been an invaluable technique in showing changes in the population levels of breeding birds since 1962. The technique was originally introduced at a time when many of Britain's birds were dying as a result of the misuse of the organochlorine pesticides and when it was felt that the bird population needed to be monitored on an annual basis. The author gives a summary of some of the results of the first ten years of the survey. Particularly noteworthy was the discovery that several species of birds which bred in this country were severely hit by the disastrous droughts in the Sahel region, and population levels of several species, notably whitethroat and sand martin, were considerably reduced. The count also shows that the populations of many wintering species, goldcrest amongst others, have soared in recent years because of the lack of severe winters. Dobinson then goes on to describe other techniques of counting birds on waterways, how to count colonial birds including seabirds, how to find nests, and how to study migration.

The book does not contain all the detail that a textbook would have, and anyone seriously needing to use these well-tried techniques would need to seek the original papers. There are also simpler methods of assessing the relative abundance of birds; this he does not mention. Mr Dobinson is a schoolmaster and his book was, I felt, written very much with the senior pupils and other amateur bird-watchers in mind, who may have passed beyond the listing and identification stage and want some project which will give them something more to think about. For this purpose, the techniques can produce useful results. Mr Dobinson has produced a very useful and serious book, which contains much useful information.

Peter Conder

Peter Conder recently retired as Director of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Bird-watching in West Africa

A Field Guide to the Birds of West Africa. By W. Serle and G. J. Morel. (Collins: London, 1977.) £5.95

THIS new *Field Guide* should prove indispensable to the growing number of bird watchers who visit West Africa. The area covered includes the entire bulge of Africa south of the Sahara and extending eastwards to Chad and the Central African Republic. The text is clear and concise, and contains many useful nuggets of information: how to tell, for instance, the difference between the African golden oriole and its European counterpart, both of which may be in the same area at certain times of the year.

The coloured illustrations are, of course, vital to amateur and professional ornithologists, and most of them are reasonably accurate, though a few are perhaps a shade too bright. It is a pity that the birds of prey are not in colour, as this group of birds is notoriously difficult and confusing to identify. The picture of the mouse-brown sunbird (opposite p225) shows a typical down-curved beak, whereas the description (p229) clearly states that this sun-bird has a short, straight beak.

These points aside, however, and bearing in mind that the book has around 1,000 birds to deal with, this *Field Guide* reaches the high standard which ornithologists all over the world have come to expect from Collins.

J. & G. Newmark

J. & G. Newmark have recently returned from an ornithological field excursion to West Africa.