

# Reviews

## PETRELS NIGHT AND DAY

By Magnus Robb, Killian Mullarney and The Sound Approach. The Sound Approach, Poole, Dorset, 2008. 300 pages, 17 full-page colour plates; many colour photographs; and sonograms of most of the 127 sound recordings presented on two CDs.

ISBN 978-90-810933-2-3.  
Hardback, £34.95.

This is the second volume in The Sound Approach project, master-minded by Mark Constantine, who fashioned the first introductory volume and project style. *Petrels Night and Day* is written by Magnus Robb, with sound recordings by Magnus and others and colour plates by Killian Mullarney. The book covers 15 forms of shearwater and petrel (Procellariidae) and 10 forms of storm-petrel (Hydrobatidae) that are encountered in the northeast Atlantic. These 25 taxa are dealt with in 12 chapters: gadfly petrels (*Pterodroma*), Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*, the three *Calonectris* shearwaters, 'Little' shearwaters (*Puffinus*), Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*, Mediterranean shearwaters (Yelkouan *P. yelkouan* and Balearic Shearwater *P. mauretanicus*), Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina*, European storm-petrels (*Hydrobates*), Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*, band-rumped storm-petrels (*Oceanodroma*), and Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *O. monorhis*. All 22 northeast Atlantic breeders (if we include Swinhoe's) are dealt with thoroughly via an informative text, high-quality sound recordings and sonograms, ample-sized colour photographs, and superb colour plates. Each of the three southern-ocean breeders, Great *Puffinus gravis* and Sooty Shearwaters *P. griseus* and Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, is introduced mainly through colour plates incorporated

within the chapter of a near relative.

*Petrels Night and Day* comprises an impressive set of elements, as summarised above, but the book as a whole is so much more than the sum of its parts. It is unique, it is enigmatic, and it offers a truly engaging experience. This book combines the arts and sciences in a way that I have barely encountered previously in ornithology and never before with tubenoses.

For each taxon, Magnus Robb creates a vivid impression of his experiences of the remote locations he visited to record them. The reader travels with him, learning the history of the petrels, meeting the people of the islands, sitting down for dinner with them, scrambling across rocky terrain, overhanging hair-raising cliff faces, witnessing spectacular, moody scenery; and then, seemingly always in the remotest of spots, witnessing the sounds of petrels by night – some eerie, some sorrowful, and some downright amusing to the human ear. Stunning colour photographs, many occupying a full page, suggest images for Robb's narrative. The reader is left with a sense of having been there; followed by a realisation that you have not, and then an urge to go there as soon as possible.

Each species account flows smoothly from social and aesthetic experiences to analytical and factual discussion of the sounds of petrels by night through sound recordings and sonograms. Sonograms assist the listener by allowing better understanding of the structure and texture of petrel calls and facilitating comparison with calls of similar forms. The reader/listener is encouraged to take this step forward and by so doing to get to grips with the taxonomic propositions of the book.

Some identification nuggets for petrels by day are scattered throughout the text, but consolidated and amplified in the colour plates. Indeed, the plates alone offer a handy identification kit, with

some new criteria and guidance on how to separate some of the more difficult species groups, such as the *Calonectris*, 'Mediterranean' and 'Little' shearwaters. Some colour plates show all likely confusion species side by side. An example is shearwaters in typical flight profile comparing Manx, Yelkouan, Balearic, Sooty and Cory's Shearwaters *C. diomedea*. Such guidance extends to the four newly proposed and highly cryptic band-rumped storm-petrel species (see below). As with the text, the colour plates incorporate wonderful vignettes that transport the reader into the situation: a Cory's Shearwater on a nest in a cave or a flock of swimming Bulwer's Petrels 'exploding' from the sea surface in all directions when approached too closely.

This book proposes several taxonomic changes. Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* becomes two species: Fea's Petrel and Desertas Petrel. The three forms of Cory's Shearwater are treated separately, as are two forms of what we currently call European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* ('British' and 'Mediterranean'). Band-rumped Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro* becomes a complex four-way split: 'Grant's', 'Madeiran', 'Monteiro's' and 'Cape Verde'. A basis for this taxonomy exists already in the literature, variously discussed in terms of biometric differences, spatial and temporal separation, different breeding habitats, and some DNA work. *Petrels Night and Day* makes a further, compelling case through a detailed study of vocalisations. Those of us trained with the eye might argue that these forms look so similar that it is hard to accept that they are distinct species. Those trained with the ear might well retort that since reproductive activity happens in the dark, it is 'how you sound' that counts, not 'how you look'. Speciation is much more likely to be reflected in sounds than looks. This argument offers an explanation for the apparently disproportionate number of cryptic tubenoses.

If accepted, there are wide-ranging consequences of these taxonomic developments. They are certainly exciting for researchers and pave the way for a variety of further studies (breeding biology, life history, and indeed further studies of vocalisation). For field observers, however, the new taxonomy is something of a headache. For example, the following table summarising the proposed split of Band-rumped Storm-petrel highlights both the cryptic nature of the proposed species and several gaps in knowledge pertaining even to rudimentary field identification. Whether these taxa can be separated reliably in the field is debatable and any solutions are probably some way off. We should not, however, blame the messenger for the 'bad news'.

There are very few points where

I take issue with the text. Regarding the field identification of Zino's Petrel *P. madeira*, I do not follow the argument that it is reasonably 'safe' to identify clearly large-billed *Pterodroma* petrels in Madeiran waters as Desertas Petrel, but not so clearly small-billed ones as Zino's. And I find it presumptuous to suggest that the large-billed *Pterodroma* petrels in British waters in autumn are most likely Fea's Petrels from Cape Verde rather than Desertas Petrels from Bugio, Madeira, based on differences in timing of breeding (Fea's in the northern winter, Desertas in early autumn) and relative population size (there are more Fea's). The occurrence of a large-billed *Pterodroma* in August could just as easily be explained by northward incubation foraging flights of

Desertas Petrel as it could by a roaming, off-duty Fea's Petrel.

This book is sumptuously produced. Magnus Robb has composed a magical and informative blend of text and sound, Killian Mullarney has crafted endearing and instructive artwork, and Mark Constantine has started something completely different and much welcomed in The Sound Approach. In this era of largely boring field guides and dry journal ornithology, The Sound Approach offers a new and exciting brand of learning and in this book applies it to perhaps the most enigmatic of bird groups. We are offered an opportunity to liven up and get animated with *Petrels Night and Day*. I say we take it!

Robert L. Flood

Breeds	Grant's Azores, Madeira, Selvagens, Canaries, Berlengas	Madeiran Madeira, Selvagens, Canaries (rare)	Monteiro's Azores	Cape Verde Cape Verde
Pairs	3,000–5,000	2,000–4,000	300	Low thousands?
Breeding dates	Aug to Mar	Late Mar to Oct, one month later Selvagens	Late Mar to Oct	Oct to Jun, possibly two seasons, changeover Mar
Tail	Little or no tail fork	Short tail fork sometimes visible	Tail longer than Grant's, fork twice as deep	Probably little or no tail fork
Wing	Narrower than Cape Verde	—	—	Broader than Grant's
Upperwing-covert bar	Ends well short of carpal joint	Indistinct, ends short of carpal bar	Extends to carpal joint, relatively pronounced	Indistinct, ends short of carpal bar
Uppertail-covert band	Narrow	Narrow but variable	More prominent than Madeiran	Broad
Bill	—	Rather heavy	—	Proportionately long
Biometrics	Large, shorter wing & tail than Monteiro's	Smaller in wing, tail, & tarsus than Grant's	Large, longer wing & tail than Grant's	Smaller than Grant's & Monteiro's
Primary moult, adult	Feb to early Aug	Presumed Aug/Sep to Feb	Aug to Feb	Presumed Mar to Dec

**LOST LAND OF THE DODO:  
AN ECOLOGICAL HISTORY  
OF MAURITIUS, RÉUNION  
AND RODRIGUES**

By Anthony Cheke and Julian Hume. T. & A. D. Poyser, A&C Black, London, 2008. 464 pages; 39 colour plates; many black-and-white illustrations. ISBN 978-0-7136-6544-4. Hardback, £45.00.

Despite the wealth of detailed information it contains, this is an eminently readable, at times enthralling, account of the ecological history of the Mascarene Islands. The first author is a specialist in the chronology of extinction events and this is reflected in the way the book is set out. The early chapters cover the geography of the islands and what is known about their pristine state, followed

by a detailed account of the impacts of the first visitors from Europe and subsequent human settlement. Later chapters cover the more recent history of the islands and the increasingly rapid ecological degradation brought about by a burgeoning human population. Scattered throughout the book are 38 excellent boxed accounts of the islands' most important species and species groups (many now

extinct), including illustrations and direct quotes from contemporary accounts by early visitors.

The scale of early human exploitation and its impact on the islands' unique assemblage of wildlife makes for a sobering read. Large numbers of Dodos *Raphus cucullatus* were apparently killed solely for their gizzards (enough to provide two men with a tasty meal!) and Giant Tortoises, including *Cylindraspis triserrata* on Mauritius, and *C. vosmaeri* and *C. peltastes* on Rodrigues, for their livers, the rest of the carcasses being discarded. A recurring theme is the ease with which birds and other creatures that had evolved in the absence of predators could be slaughtered. Even birds still capable of flight often did not try to escape from humans. A technique commonly used with several species, including the huge Broad-billed Parrot *Lophopsittacus mauritianus*, was to catch one individual and make it call out, as this would draw in others that could then easily be caught by hand. Many of the flightless birds such as the various rails, the Dodo-like Rodrigues Solitaire *Pezophaps solitaria* and the Dodo itself could simply be approached on foot and clubbed to death. Early visitors in the seventeenth century, no doubt numbed by weeks at sea, could barely contain themselves, relishing the sport of catching and killing such exotic creatures, as well as the prospect of a more varied and (apparently) healthy diet than they had been used to.

By way of contrast, the penultimate chapter, by Carl Jones, provides at least some grounds for optimism. This is a thought-provoking account of the innovative conservation efforts that have pre-

vented a small number of the surviving native species from going the same way as the Dodo. Work to restore populations of the Mauritius Kestrel *Falco punctatus*, Pink Pigeon *Nesoenas mayeri* and Echo Parakeet *Psittacula echo* will be familiar to many, although it is perhaps less appreciated that all were, at one time, down to a mere handful of individuals in the wild – they are now far more secure, though much still remains to be done. Work on these birds has at times been hindered by local politics and a lack of resources; even some conservationists have taken the view that funding might be better spent on more straightforward projects. Jones is clear in his belief that work on these high-profile, though difficult, species has had great value. In particular, it has encouraged wider conservation initiatives such as attempts to restore native vegetation and the establishment of Conservation Areas as well as a National Park on Mauritius.

The authors use numbered endnotes throughout the text and all the reference sources and explanatory notes are in a block towards the end of the book. This sensible approach has ensured that the book will be of great value to the more serious students of the ecological history of these islands, without breaking up the text in a way that could have been off-putting for the more general reader. Almost every statement made is fully referenced and the explanatory notes make up nearly a quarter of the book, demonstrating the huge amount of research that has gone into this volume. Julian Hume's distinctive colour plates provide an evocative and rather chilling insight into what has been

lost from the islands, none more so than the artistically licensed Dodo on the front cover, eyeing the approach of a landing party in the bay below with apparent trepidation! There are also many black-and-white line drawings from historical accounts by early visitors, some of which have not seen the light of day for centuries. The inclusion of more than the handful of photographs (limited to one of the appendices) would, to my mind, have further enhanced some of the accounts of more recent events as well as giving a better flavour of the islands today.

Although the geographical focus of this book is relatively narrow, the whole gamut of conservation issues affecting threatened birds across the world are dealt with, making the book of far wider interest than might be initially apparent from the title. These include direct over-exploitation by humans, deforestation and the associated problems of erosion and drought, the adverse effects of intensive agriculture and, perhaps most significant of all, the ecological damage caused by invasive introduced species including rats, pigs, cats, snakes (even monkeys!), not to mention a whole host of invasive plants. Sir Peter Scott was clearly not exaggerating when he reflected after a visit in the 1970s that 'Mauritius illustrates many of the earth's environmental problems in microcosm.' Some lessons have been learnt in recent decades, and if this has come too late for most of the Mascarene Islands' special wildlife, one can only hope that it will help to inform decisions made in other parts of the world.

Ian Carter

#### THE GREATER FLAMINGO

By Alan Johnson and Frank Cézilly. T. & A. D. Poyser, A&C Black, London, 2007. 328 pages; colour and black-and-white photographs; maps, line-drawings. ISBN: 978-0-7136-6562-8. Hardback, £40.00.

There are several instances in ornithology where if you mention a particular species then the name of an individual immediately comes to mind, for example the Mauritius Kestrel *Falco punctatus* and Carl Jones, the Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* and Derek Ratcliffe, the House Sparrow *Passer*

*domesticus* and Denis Summers-Smith. Belonging to this select list is certainly the pairing of the Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* and Alan Johnson.

Alan arrived at the Tour du Valat research station in the Camargue, France, in 1962 and before long became fascinated by

Greater Flamingos. He was soon involved in a detailed study of them, which is still continuing under the leadership of his co-author, Frank Cézilly. Prior to Alan's work, Luc Hoffman, the founder of the research station, had been monitoring the colony for several years, counting the number of breeding pairs, noting their success and marking the chicks. He also became aware of the constraints on the population, especially erosion of the breeding island and disturbance from many sources, especially aircraft.

Alan's arrival coincided with the cessation of Flamingo breeding in the Camargue, but when it resumed, in 1969, there began a much-needed programme of conservation management by the staff of Tour du Valat: the vital building of a nesting island, reducing human disturbance by full-time wardening, and persuading the authorities to ban aircraft from overflying the colony. This management was backed by a detailed research programme aimed at

revealing the life history, population dynamics and movements of the flamingos. This programme was gradually extended, through example and Alan's enthusiastic advocacy, to the neighbouring countries of Spain and Italy, and then across the Mediterranean to Tunisia. Now, all the scientists and amateur ornithologists studying this population of the Greater Flamingo, from Doñana in the west to Lake Tengiz, Kazakhstan, in the east, keep in close touch and co-ordinate their studies.

The two authors bring to this book the results of their combined total of over 65 years of research, with the result that they have produced an exhaustive (in the best possible sense) account of the Greater Flamingo, covering the history of its discovery in the Camargue, through its ecology, distribution and numbers, movements, feeding ecology and behaviour, breeding biology and conservation and management. Naturally, although Alan's studies have concentrated on the

Camargue, there are plenty of examples and comparisons drawn from other parts of the range.

While the breeding of the Greater Flamingos in the Camargue is an undoubted conservation success story, with the number of nesting pairs, rarely more than 3,000–4,000 in the 1950s and 1960s, climbing to over 20,000 by 2000, this very success has brought about its own particular problem, with local farmers claiming that the birds are eating significant amounts of newly sown rice, a conflict which as yet has no satisfactory solution. Man the conservationist can celebrate a major conservation success, but Man the creator of artificial habitats then complains when these are utilised by protected species.

This excellently produced and illustrated book concludes with a thought-provoking chapter on what the future might hold for the Greater Flamingo, and an inventory of the more important breeding sites in Europe, Asia and Africa.

*Malcolm Ogilvie*

#### 100 BIRDS TO SEE BEFORE YOU DIE

By David Chandler and  
Dominic Couzens. Carlton  
Books, London, 2008.

224 pages; over 200 colour  
photographs.

ISBN 978-1-84442-019-3.

Hardback, £19.99.

I was intrigued by the title of this book and that was really why I agreed to review it. It was not quite what I had anticipated – and against all my expectations I thoroughly enjoyed browsing through it and reading those bits which took my fancy. It's not all about rare or endangered species (although it includes birds which are both). Perhaps the authors' words in their introduction sum it up best: '...our approach has been to take a much more rounded look at the planet's avian diversity and to create a wish-list that celebrates the wonder, beauty and amazing

lifestyles of the world's avifauna.'

They have succeeded in their aim, in my view, and have produced well-researched and easily readable accounts of the 100 species they have selected. Inevitably, there is a high degree of subjectiveness in choosing those 100 birds and, equally inevitably, none of us will agree with all the choices (where are Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori* and Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca*, for instance?). It hardly matters. You will find many selections of which you heartily approve, and can enjoy yourselves arguing about the rest!

The photographs are very good – and some of those of the many species I've never seen are positively mouth-watering. One deserves a mention because it's not very good, that of the incredible Standard-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx longipennis*. Blurred and indistinct, it nevertheless perfectly recaptures the wonderful hot

evening in Sierra Leone when I first saw this bird, and I really like it because of that.

The species order is a countdown from 100 to the most desirable bird of all at number one, and that final selection, above all else, surely conveys all the fun, the pleasure and the (perhaps) absurd hopes our great hobby brings us. It is, of course, Ivory-billed Woodpecker *Campephilus principalis*. Why not?

*Mike Everett*

#### THE BIRD BOOK

By Rob Hume and Peter Hayman.  
Kyle Cathie, London, 2008.

464 pages; over 250 British  
and European species covered,  
with over 650 paintings;  
distribution maps.

ISBN 978-1-85626-805-9.

Paperback, £8.99.

A straightforward, small-format guide.

**NOMADS OF THE  
STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR**

By Fernando Barrios Partida.  
Grafisur, Tarifa, Spain, 2007.  
429 pages; numerous colour  
photographs.  
ISBN 978-84-934263-4-2.  
Hardback, £36.99.

My earliest birding memories are of flocks of raptors over Gibraltar, my home town, which fuelled a lifelong interest in ornithology. Fernando Barrios is a native of nearby Algeciras and he too was captivated from childhood by the spectacle of migrating birds, the 'nomads' of the title. This book is his tribute, both in words and through very many outstanding photographs, to this remarkable area – and his successful attempt to bring its natural wonders to a wider public.

The main part of the text is a series of essays on: the natural parks of the Strait and Los Alcornocales; an introduction to migration in general and at the Strait; White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* migration; raptors and other migrants; and 'Misadventures and deaths', describing the hazards faced by migrants locally. A chapter on birds and wildlife on the Rock of Gibraltar has been contributed by an invited author, Dr John Cortes of the Gibraltar Ornitho-

logical and Natural History Society. There are concluding sections on identifying soaring-bird species and advice on watching migration at the Strait.

Bird books arouse a variety of emotions and this one made me homesick. Barrios has succeeded spectacularly in conveying his enormous enthusiasm for his subject and his area. When your home patch is the Strait of Gibraltar, you won't lack for exciting subject matter, but he is a very readable author and a skilled observer who fills page after page with compelling images and insightful comment.

The photographic skills of the author are renowned locally and some of his best work illustrates the book. There are many atmospheric shots of landscapes, his trademark close-ups of raptors in flight, dozens of beautiful portraits of flora as well as fauna and plenty of shots of migration in action: soaring flocks, birds struggling in from the sea, great gatherings of grounded migrants awaiting improvement in the weather and tragic images of those which didn't make it. The drowned Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* washed up in a sandy cove (p. 326) is an evocative reminder that many large birds fall victim to the debilitating crosswinds which they may face over the sea. A Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus*

*gallicus* (p. 332) lying a few metres from its right wing, severed by a wind turbine, is a highly topical reminder of how hazardous this technology can be: the Strait has one of the largest windfarms in the world. Like many a nature photographer, Barrios is prepared to go to great trouble to get results. However, I doubt whether anyone else has thought of hiding inside a giant White Stork model, propelled by his own two legs clad appropriately in red pantyhose, in order to try and mingle with a crowd of resting storks (p. 234). It didn't work.

This is a highly anecdotal and somewhat idiosyncratic book, very strong indeed on evocative accounts of remarkable events, but not a systematic treatment of the subject. This is not intended to be a criticism. Others have written authoritative but much drier accounts, replete with graphs and tables, placing the details of migration at the Strait on record. Here instead is a book that genuinely conveys the feel of the area. If you know the Strait, it is a magnificent souvenir that will make you want to return there soon. If you have yet to visit, it will provide powerful encouragement to do so. In any case, it is an entertaining and worthwhile read.

Ernest Garcia

**THE BIRDS OF THE  
HUDDERSFIELD AREA**

By Paul and Betty Bray.  
Huddersfield Birdwatchers'  
Club, 2008. 420 pages;  
many maps and drawings.  
No ISBN number.  
Paperback, £16.00 (incl. p&p,  
from 2 Bankfield Park Avenue,  
Taylor Hill, Huddersfield  
HD4 7QY).

Huddersfield has had a long and distinguished ornithological history; the first species list was published in 1859 and the Mosleys' book of 1912–15 was probably the first local British avifauna to illus-

trate distribution by coloured maps. HBC has published records since 1966. The area studied covers over 600 km<sup>2</sup>, south from the River Calder as far as the northern edge of the Peak District, and west to the Oldham fringe of Greater Manchester, thus covering parts of three present recording areas. The town lies near the northern boundary. Much high moorland lies along the Pennine Way, and there are a number of reservoirs, including Blackmoorfoot (see below).

This scholarly account incorporates the maps from the already published *Atlas* of 1987–92. In addition to the annotated list of 261 species recorded up to the end

of 2004, there are admirable introductory chapters on geology and climate, habitats and ornithological history. The drawings, in contrasting pointilliste and impressionistic styles, are by Stuart Brocklehurst and Michael Pinder. The price has been kept to a modest level by eschewing colour but the binding will easily crack. The following paper books can both be obtained from the same source (all incl. p&p): *Birds of Blackmoorfoot Reservoir 1985–2003*, by Mike Denton (£4.50) and *The Huddersfield List to December 2007* (£1.00).

David K. Ballance

**THE BIRDS OF GWENT**

By W. A. Venables, A. D. Baker,  
R. M. Clarke, C. Jones, J. M. S.  
Lewis, S. J. Tyler, I. R. Walker  
and R. A. Williams.

Christopher Helm, A&C Black,  
London, 2008. 416 pages;  
82 colour photographs;  
83 line-drawings; numerous  
maps and tables.  
ISBN 978-0-7136-7633-4.  
Hardback, £40.00.

This book has been a pleasure to review. It exudes quality from the moment you pick it up and are struck by John Gale's atmospheric paintings of Dippers *Cinclus cinclus* and Hawfinches *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* on the dust jacket. It has been compiled on behalf of the Gwent Ornithological Society (GOS) by a team of eight authors and supported by seven additional contributors led by Al Venables. Yet the whole text reads so seamlessly that you would think that it had all been written by a single erudite writer.

The book follows on from the two previous GOS publications: the first *Birds of Gwent* (1977) and the *Gwent Atlas of Breeding Birds* (1986). In the 313-page systematic list, changes in status since these volumes appeared are identified and, in particular, comparisons are made between the results of the 1986 atlas and the survey carried out in 1998–2003. Indeed, it is the breeding birds which demand greatest attention in the book. Gwent has a wide variety of habitats: newly created coastal wetlands,

fast-flowing rivers, Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* woods, coniferous plantations and heather-clad moorlands, as well as pastoral farmland. This diversity has produced an amazing 122 confirmed breeding species and a further 15 probably or possibly breeding during the atlas survey period, compared with 112 and eight respectively for the 1986 atlas, a 14% increase in number of species. A chapter of conclusions and comparisons, which follows the species accounts, informs readers that 33 species occur in at least 10% more tetrads than they did at the time of the last atlas, while 36 have declined by this amount. The former includes several birds of prey, Common Raven *Corvus corax*, Goosander *Mergus merganser* and species such as Siskin *Carduelis spinus*, Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* and European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, which are taking advantage of the increase in forestry restocks. The roster of declining species is a typical list of farmland and woodland species, which largely reflects the current UK situation rather than any particular changes in Gwent. The breeding avifauna also includes eight colonists which have bred for the first time since 1994, most of these being associated with wetland habitats.

Wintering birds are less important than the breeding species but the county does support internationally or nationally important populations of several wildfowl and waders. WeBS count data for key species are tabulated for each important site.

Most county avifaunas feature a mouth-watering selection of vagrants, but for Gwent this is the least significant aspect of its avifauna. Nonetheless, details are given of all occurrences of rarities and I was reminded of the famous American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus* at Magor in late 1981. Was it really over a quarter of a century ago? The bittern is included in the excellent selection of 82 colour photographs, although as is often the case with books of this ilk, the balance between bird and habitat pictures could perhaps have been tipped further in the direction of the habitats.

The systematic list is preceded by introductory sections comprising a brief history of Gwent ornithology, an overview of the county, its geology and bird habitats, a 20-page guide to important bird locations, and details of the methodology and overall results of the two breeding atlases. The book concludes with a series of appendices including population estimates, ringing data and a gazetteer, a comprehensive bibliography and three indices.

As indicated at the start of this review, this is a scholarly work which clearly sets out the importance of Gwent as a stronghold for many breeding birds. It is an essential purchase for all those with an interest in the status and distribution of Gwent, Welsh and UK birds, and for collectors of county avifaunas it maintains the recent very high standard of the genre.

John Clark

**GARDENWATCH: MAKING  
THE MOST OF WILDLIFE  
ON YOUR DOORSTEP**

By Sarah Whitley. New Holland,  
London, 2008. 128 pages; many  
colour photographs and illustrations.  
ISBN 978-1-84773-112-8.  
Hardback, £14.99.

Published in association with the BTO, this book provides advice on attracting wildlife to your garden, and how to watch, identify and record it.

**BLACK'S NATURE GUIDES**

**WILD FLOWERS OF BRITAIN & EUROPE**

By Margot and Roland Spohn. ISBN 978-1-4081-0153-7.

**MEDICINAL PLANTS OF BRITAIN & EUROPE**

By Wolfgang Hensel. ISBN 978-1-4081-0154-4.

**TREES OF BRITAIN & EUROPE**

By Margot and Roland Spohn. ISBN 978-1-4081-0152-0.

**MUSHROOMS AND TOADSTOOLS OF BRITAIN & EUROPE**

By Andreas Gminder and Tanja Böhning. ISBN 978-1-4081-0156-8.

**BIRDS OF BRITAIN & EUROPE**

By Volker Dierschke. ISBN 978-1-4081-0155-1.

All published by A&C Black, London, 2008. All paperback and priced at £9.99, and all crammed with detailed illustrations and colour photographs.

**A LIFE OF OSPREYS**

By Roy Dennis. Whittles Publishing, Dunbeath, 2008. 211 pages; many colour photographs. ISBN 978-1904445-26-5. Paperback, £18.99.

As might be guessed from the title, this book is very much a personal account of a lifetime's involvement in Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* conservation. It is full of observations and anecdotes from decades of fieldwork and richly illustrated by many of the author's photographs. Short extracts of handwritten notes from his diaries add to the personal feel. The main focus is very much on the recovery of the Osprey in Scotland, from the return of the first birds at Loch Garten in the 1950s (close to where the author now lives), through to the present day and a resurgent population of around 200 pairs. Recent exciting developments in England and Wales are described and there is a lively account of the reintroduction project at Rutland Water, with which the author is closely associated. There are also chapters on the

history of the Osprey in Britain, conservation, breeding ecology and migration. The last includes the results of recent work based on satellite-tracking, which has led to significant new insights into migratory behaviour. We now know, for example, that some young birds from Britain take a southwesterly heading on their first autumn migration and can end up far out to sea in the Atlantic, often, though not always, with predictable results.

As an acknowledged authority on the species, Roy Dennis has travelled extensively in search of Ospreys and has been involved in numerous conservation projects around the world, including recent reintroduction attempts in Spain and Italy. He is passionate about the need for direct human intervention in order to restore the fortunes of species that have suffered at the hands of humans in the past. For the heavily persecuted Osprey, modern interventions include the construction of artificial nest-sites and nest protection to deter egg-collectors, in addition to the well-publicised translocations. Based on an assessment of the available

habitat in Britain and the fact that Ospreys are perfectly capable of breeding in close proximity to people (provided they are left unmolested), it is suggested that the current population might be only one-tenth of its true potential. Clearly there is more work to be done and further translocation projects in southern Britain are seen as a high priority.

The book does not attempt a comprehensive overview of what is known about the Osprey throughout its world range, and lacks a full review of the literature available for this well-studied species. Almost all of the data included are from studies in Scotland and the fledgling populations in England and Wales. There are very few references, which may frustrate readers wishing to follow up areas of particular interest and there is no index, which makes it difficult to locate specific information quickly. Nevertheless, the book contains a wealth of well-presented information about this iconic species and is a thoroughly enjoyable and absorbing read.

Ian Carter

## News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

### RSPB awarded £500,000 for farmland birds

With time running out for the UK Government to meet its 2010 target of reversing biodiversity decline, government agency Natural England has given the RSPB more than half a million pounds for farmland bird conservation. A further £200,000 was awarded to the Society to fund reedbed restoration for the Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*.

Farmland birds in England have declined more than any other group in recent times. Of the 40 species on the Red List of the UK's

Birds of Conservation Concern, over one-third are reliant on farming. These birds were placed on the Red List in 2002 because of declines of more than 50% over the previous 25 years, or because of large historical declines. The RSPB's £536,700 will be spent on three key projects: Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* reintroduction to Cornwall; Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* recovery in the South Pennines, its last toehold in England (the 2008 population was fewer than 100 pairs at just 15 colonies); and boosting core

farmland bird populations in the Fens, Sherwood and the borders of Lancashire and Cheshire. Dr Mark Avery, the RSPB's Conservation Director, said: 'The declines of wildlife in England have been among the greatest anywhere in Europe, and farmland species have suffered more than most. The RSPB has an excellent record of researching why farmland birds are declining and then putting in place recovery plans.'

Responding to the news of the award for reedbed restoration, Dr

From the barking of Bulwer's Petrels to the crying Cory's Shearwater chicks, *Petrels Day and Night* shares the authors' experiences and exploration of 21 petrel species through a rich soundscape crammed with hidden meaning. Touch-screen technology was made for *The Sound Approach*; throw in adventures on the high seas, intricate and thorough analysis of the vocal outpourings of an enigmatic group of ocean wanderers that only occasionally offer glimpses of a life utterly wild, and *Petrels Night and Day* will draw you in, amaze, inspire and make *Sound Approach* disciples of you all "if you aren't already" in equal measure. More information. *Petrels Night and Day* by Magnus Robb, Killian Mullarney and The Sound Approach (iBook edition, The Sound Approach, Poole, 2015). "*Petrels Night and Day*" is available for free here, as are the rest of the *Sound Approach* books: <https://soundapproach.co.uk/petrels-night-day/>. But I would still buy it if you get the chance, it really is one of the very best bird books of the last 10-15 years, and an exceptionally fascinating read! Reply. There is a Princeton sale on for the next three days and this book is available half price with free worldwide postage. <https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691175010/oceanic-birds-of-the-world>. Actually all their titles are half price but it looks like they only have rights to distribute a lot of the titles in limited countries, so "worldwide" isn't true for many others. Photos with Snow Petrel. Distribution. Snow petrels breed on the Antarctic Peninsula and various Antarctic islands which include South Sandwich Islands, GÅologie Archipelago, South Georgia Islands, and other islands of the Scotia Arc. Some birds remain at the colony all year, while others range north at sea and return at the colonies from mid-September until early November. Snow petrels are gregarious birds. During the winter, they disperse to the pack ice, ice floes, and the open sea where flocks are often seen sitting on icebergs. Snow petrels are agile fliers that hunt by day; they fly close to the surface and may make shallow dives to catch their prey. They may even feed together with whales and other petrels. Buy *Petrels Night and Day* (9789081093323): A *Sound Approach* Guide: NHBS - Magnus Robb, Killian Mullarney and The Sound Approach, The Sound Approach. Afghanistan Aland Islands Albania Algeria American Samoa Andorra Angola Anguilla Antarctica Antigua and Barbuda Argentina Armenia Aruba Australia Austria Azerbaijan Bahamas Bahrain Bangladesh Barbados Belarus Belgium Belize Benin Bermuda Bhutan Bolivia Bonaire, Saint Eustatius and Saba Bosnia and Herzegovina Botswana Bouvet Island Brazil British Indian Ocean Territory Brunei Darussalam Bulgaria Burkina Faso Burundi Cambodia Cameroon Canada Canary Islands Cape Verde Cayman Islands Central. Northern storm petrels are seabirds in the genus *Hydrobates* in the family *Hydrobatidae*, part of the order *Procellariiformes*. The family was once lumped with the similar austral storm petrels in the combined storm petrels, but have been split, as they were not closely related. These smallest of seabirds feed on planktonic crustaceans and small fish picked from the surface, typically while hovering. Their flight is fluttering and sometimes bat-like.