

## BOOK REVIEWS

### THE COLLINS FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF WEST AFRICA

W. Serle, G. J. Morel and W. Hartwig. 1977. Republished 1988 by The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington, Massachusetts; distributed by Viking Penguin Inc., 40 W. 23rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10010. Illus. Hardback. 351 p. \$21.95.

If you have to bird in in this part of the world (the area from Morocco to coastal Angola) this is an essential field guide. Some of the illustrations (for example the water birds) are primitive compared to many of the field guides available for other geographic areas. On the other hand the illustrations of the passerine birds are reasonably good. If you think identifying the flycatchers in Central America is challenging, you should carefully examine the warblers (Plate 32) and the bulbuls (Plate 38) in this text. These are the sorts of birds that have driven ornithologists to drink.

All of the birds that occur in this region are not illustrated, but most are described in the text. A complete check-list of all species, including those of very local distribution or those that are very uncommon is appended at the back of the book. You may have to use additional sources (such as the Collins Guides to East Africa or Europe) to get complete descriptions of all possible species. Given the long history of involvement by different European nations in West Africa, there is also an appendix of equivalent vernacular names for the scientific names in four different European languages (English, Spanish, French and German). Interestingly, there are no non-European vernacular names listed.

The book is bound and presented in what has become the standard fashion for the American equivalents of the Collins Guides and will probably sell modestly well.—H. T. Hendrickson

### THE COLLINS GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE

H. Heinzel, R. Fitter and J. Parslow. 1984. Republished 1988 by The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington, Massachusetts; distributed by Penguin Books, 40 W. 23rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10010. Illus. Paperback. 320 p. \$15.95

As earlier reviews in this journal have indicated, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., the English publishers of nature guides for a generation of naturalists, have made arrangements to expand their audience by having their books republished in the United States by The Stephen Greene Press. The present volume has been the standard field guide to European birds since 1972.

Given the existence of a Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe, it is inevitable that comparisons will be made. One of the first things that will catch the attention of American bird-watchers is the European penchant for placing corvids (the crows and their allies) at the

end of the book, in keeping with the idea that these are the most highly evolved of birds. The other point that will catch your attention is that the geographic range of coverage of the Collins guide is much greater than that of the Peterson guide. This makes the Collins guide a much better investment if your travels include eastern Europe, the Middle-east and north Africa.

European range maps are printed with the species accounts and the illustrations, somewhat like the arrangement in the popular Birds of North America by Robbins, Bruun and Zim. This puts everything you need all together in one place, unlike the Peterson series where the text is in one place, the illustrations are clustered together in the middle, and the maps are all tucked away in the back. The Collins guide does have a separate list of range maps in the back showing the distribution of bird species in the British Isles.

The book is the right size for a field guide, well printed, well bound, flexible enough to flip around in the field and apparently tough enough to stand up to the kind of abuse that field guides always suffer. If you want or need a European bird guide, this is definitely the most important one to have.—H. T. Hendrickson

## THE GREAT CYPRESS SWAMPS

John V. Dennis. 1988. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, photos by Steve Maslowski, Hardback. 142 pp. \$29.95.

For folks who are charmed by the wonder and mystery of swamps, this book is almost as fascinating as the real thing. John Dennis clearly is such a person and has written this guide to the swamplands of the southeastern United States. The author makes it obvious at the outset that while all of the swamps are characterized by the presence of cypress trees, that may be the only trait that they share in common. Cypress swamps are remarkably diverse ecological entities.

From the Pokomoke River Swamp in Maryland, to the Big Thicket of Texas, Dennis gives a world class tour of our forested wetlands. You get remarkably clear descriptions of the geology and hydrology of each of the major swamp forms, as well as concise histories, a narrative of the interesting floral aspects, and a reasonably complete run-through of the more interesting animal life. Each entry also provides you with maps and directions so that you can make your own explorations. Nearly half of the chapters providing detailed descriptions of the various swamps concern those of North and South Carolina, thus providing a great deal of local interest to readers of *The Chat*.

Maslowski's photographic portraits exhibit the high quality that we have come to expect. I stumbled across only a few typesetting problems, and only one mis-captioned photo (a Common Moorhen that was identified as a Purple Gallinule). The maps were sparse but clear, and adequate to enable anyone who was motivated to find the swamp of his dreams. While few of us would consider this book a bargain, it is an extremely valuable addition to a swamp-lover's library.—H. T. Hendrickson