

of the objective initial criterion of occurrence in under 15 10-km squares: many locally abundant and even some species such as *Koenigia islandica* and *Taraxacum pseudonorskedtii* are in no real danger. The crucial factor unsurprisingly appears to be habitat destruction, so that arable weed and wetland species figure prominently.

The book is neatly produced and not without its lighter moments—it appears that no botanist has braved the Surrey nudist colony where *Teucrium botrys* once grew to check its status.

ALASTAIR FITTER

**Wildfowl of Europe**, by Myrfyn Owen; colour plates by Hilary Burn. Macmillan & the Wildfowl Trust, £12.

Something that is different about this book is its apparent acceptance that people enjoy birds for their own reasons—individual, specific and varied, not all of them closely connected with ‘ornithology’, and it sets out to nourish all these interests with a well-rounded approach to the subject. Wildfowl themselves are a perfect choice for such treatment: a group many would say that runs favourite in the combined stakes of beauty, romance, spectacle, aviculture, and even, according to taste, gastronomy. And the book combines much of the detailed biology of a monograph with the visual illustration, comparative descriptions, and distribution maps of a good field guide. But there is much more besides. Since 1967 Myrfyn Owen has been working with the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge and not surprisingly has a strongly ecological attitude to waterfowl. The subject has not been chosen arbitrarily as a good excuse for a book, but as one that lends itself perfectly to a demonstration of where a specialised group of birds belongs in the scheme of things. Pressures for and against them are discussed, plus environmental threats past and present, migration trends, and the conservation of wetlands so vital to them and therefore to us.

In the same tradition Hilary Burn’s pictures achieve something rare in bird portraiture—a skill with detail that presents her subjects as live, well-understood working animals in their landscape rather than their glass cases. Joe Blossom’s line drawings share this harmony; clear and decorative and just what is needed to enhance the visual interest of the pages while ‘illustrating’ the text in the truest sense of the word.

KEITH SHACKLETON

**Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: Birds of the Western Palearctic, Vol. 1, Ostrich to Ducks**, edited by Stanley Cramp and others. Oxford U.P., £25.

**Manual of Neotropical Birds. Vol. 1, Spheniscidae (Penguins) to Laridae (Gulls and Allies)**, by Emmet R. Blake. Chicago U.P., £30.

The closing months of 1977 saw two giant strides towards achieving that highly desirable aim of an up-to-date ornithological handbook for every zoogeographical region of the world. The Indian Sub-region was first, in 1974, thanks to the indefatigable labours of Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley. North America, which began with a flourish in 1962, did not manage its next two volumes until last year and is now challenged by two other regions: the Western Palearctic with the opening volume of a seven-volume set, and the Neotropical Region with the first of a four-volume set. This still leaves huge gaps. The Chinese part of the Eastern Palearctic is the most serious, but both the Oriental and the Australian need pulling together—there are already excellent handbooks to parts of these regions—while somebody must surely some time give us a conspectus of all the islands of the tropical Pacific Ocean.

For more years than we care to remember, British and European ornithologists have been looking forward to a revised edition of Witherby’s path-breaking *Handbook of British Birds*, in its promised expansion to include the whole of the western Palearctic, i.e. east as far as the borders of European Russia, Turkey and Iraq. Now at last we have

its beginning, and congratulations are due all round. For no other part of the world, perhaps not even for North America, did so much new information need to be evaluated and compressed before a comprehensive revision could be made. No wonder eleven editors were needed, headed by Stanley Cramp, who covers distribution and population, along with James Ferguson-Lees (field characters), E. M. Nicholson (habitat and voice), Robert Hudson (movements), Peter Olney (food), K. E. L. Simmons (social pattern and behaviour), Malcolm Ogilvie (breeding), J. Wattle (plumages, bare parts, moults, measurements, weights, structure and geographical variation), Robert Gillmor (illustrations), P. A. D. Hollom and K. H. Voous. The layout for each species is a great improvement on its predecessor, the standard of accuracy equally high, and the illustrations considerably better: the names of Paul Barruel, C. J. F. Coombs, N. W. Cusa, Robert Gillmor, Peter Hayman and Sir Peter Scott are guarantees of the excellent plates, but why are they more conspicuously acknowledged on the jacket than in the text? Why not on the title page? Some ornithologists will note with interest, others with regret, that although the editors have broken with the insular British refusal to adhere to the accepted international sequence of bird families, as in Peters's *Birds of the World*, they have chosen to follow Dr Voous's amendments to Peters in his *List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species* rather than Peters proper.

*The Manual of Neotropical Birds* is a one-man job, and could hardly be expected to be so comprehensive, even if the amount of information available for this region were not vastly less. It covers everything south of Mexico, excluding the West Indies, the Galapagos and the Falklands. In his *Guide to the Birds of South America* (1970) de Schauensee, who omitted Central America, gave only a description, habitat and distribution; Blake has added slightly more taxonomic data (attributions and dates for genera and species; subspecies, more detailed measurements and a bibliography where available). His excellent artists for the main plates are Guy Tudor and Richard V. Keane. But whereas the Palaeartic book illustrates every bird in some detail, Blake shows only a selection, and too many of these only as heads—to my mind the most frustrating kind of bird illustration. However, this book is certainly an advance on what we had before, and clearly it is going to be another generation before enough information becomes available to contemplate a Neotropical Handbook on the scale of the Western Palaeartic—if indeed anybody will ever again launch an enterprise on this titanic scale.

RICHARD FITTER

**The Hen Harrier**, by Donald Watson. Poyser, Berkhamsted, £6.80.

**The Ways of an Eagle**, by Lea MacNally. Collins and Harvill, £5.95.

The hen harrier has spread widely in Britain in recent decades. In this account of its biology, the species's relationship with human land use and human attitudes towards predators are recurring themes. The introductory chapters discuss and compare the origins, distribution and characteristics of the eleven *Circus* species. A long chapter describing the hen harrier's history and present status in Britain and Ireland is followed by chapters on hunting behaviour and food, breeding biology, migration and winter distribution, and the hen harrier as an artist's bird—for the book is enlivened by the author's unsurpassed drawings which bring to life not only the bird but its habitats. Part II chronicles the author's study of this raptor in south-west Scotland from its recolonisation of the area in the late 1950s until 1976. The final chapter reviews the uneasy relationship between hen harriers, gamekeepers and landowners.

The earlier chapters are essentially a review of both the published literature and the unpublished data of Donald Watson's numerous correspondents, drawing mainly on British, Irish and North American sources. My main criticisms of the historical chapter (which is fascinating and, I think, important) are, first, that conclusions are drawn about the pre-nineteenth century distribution of the species which the limited data do not permit; and, second, that there is inadequate recognition of the confusion between hen and Montagu's harriers which persisted well into the 19th century. I am sure (from other sources) that the harriers said in 1933 to have nested within living memory 'in