

components of the fauna with their evolutionary history and their discovery. Two consider human exploitation, introductions, conservation and management legislation, while the final two deal with classification and nomenclature and present a synopsis of all orders in which marine, freshwater and terrestrial species are known from Australia. Each chapter is fully referenced and there are many fine colour photographs, maps and line drawings. The book is beautifully produced and would be a valuable addition to the library of anyone with an interest in Australia's animals and their environment.  
*Editor.*

## **The Birder's Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds**

*P. R. Ehrlich, D. S. Dobkin and D. Wheye*  
Simon and Schuster, London and New York, 1989, 785 pp., \$15.95

When British naturalists prepare to go west and enjoy those lands across the Big Ditch, they might well take with them this splendid book. Subtitled 'The Essential Companion to your Identification Guide', it more than lives up to its description. It presents field notes on 650 species that regularly nest in North America, supplying stacks of natural history information and insights to rejoice the heart of the most fastidious birder. A first-rate complement to the regular field guides in the Peterson style.

But much more important are the ornithological essays throughout the book, hundreds of them. Often dealing with birds generally rather than specifically, they cover ecology, behaviour, nutrition, distribu-

tion, evolution, management, conservation, the lot. Some specimen subjects: temperature regulation; how do birds fly?; promiscuity; migration; distraction; colour; island biogeography; banding; Niko Tinbergen; preening; clutch size; feather trade; salt glands; DDT; displays; sonagrams; and mobbing.

Written with eminent authority and spirited style, they have already given me many hours of instruction and entertainment. I would get many times my money's worth from the book even if I never again set eyes on a North American bird.  
*Norman Myers.*

## **A Field Guide to Birds of the USSR**

*V. E. Flint, R. L. Boehme, Y. U. Kostin and A. A. Kuznetsov.*  
*Translated from the Russian by N. Bourso-Leland*  
Princeton University Press, 1989, 353 pp., PB \$27.50

This book is a revised paperback version of the original Russian-language edition published in 1968. It is also the only field guide to the birds of the entire Soviet Union, spanning an enormous region from eastern Europe to Kamchatka and from the Arctic islands to the deserts of Central Asia.

The text gives the field-marks, habits, ranges and comparisons with similar species for a total of 728 birds. The illustrations are good and are backed up by some 70 line drawings. The test of a field guide is, of course, to try it out in the field with an unfamiliar avifauna and I suspect there might be difficulties with immatures in the hardest groups such as pipits and warblers, but this comment is a general one applying to virtually every guide. Simply glancing through the book drives home

the sheer diversity of the avifauna of the USSR, and engendered a very strong urge to go to see it for myself! It is certainly an obligatory purchase for any ornithologist who has that chance.

*Roger Wilson.*

## **A Handbook to the Swallows and Martins of the World**

*Angela Turner and Chris Rose*  
Christopher Helm, London, 1989, 258 pp., HB £19.95.

Another useful handbook from the Christopher Helm series, living up to the high standard set by the titles on Shorebirds, Seabirds and Wildfowl. One has to say, though, that this group is less difficult and has, I believe, a less dedicated band of watchers than the previous three. One looks forward as well to Raptors, or even Swifts!

There are chapters on the general features of the group – morphology; plumage; classification; distribution and migration; food, foraging and competition; behaviour; breeding biology; population sizes and conservation – to go along with the species descriptions. Checking on some of the less well documented swallows I happened to have some experience of, the descriptions appear accurate, clear and complete, indicating the quality of the bulk of the text. The illustrations, however, made me pause, appearing to be exaggerated in colour – particularly the blues and glosses – or rather faded – the browns. They look good on the page, but not like the birds as they appear in life, something which should be borne in mind by the user faced with a multitude of swallows in some far-flung part of the globe.

*Roger Wilson.*