

REVIEW

The Kestrel, by Andrew Village. 1990. T & A.D. Poyser Ltd. 352 pp. £18 Sterling.

This book covers 11 years of study of the European Kestrel by the author in Scottish grassland and two types of English farmland.

The author, under the supervision of Dr Ian Newton (author of *The Sparrowhawk*), began his studies at Eskdalemuir, where the habitat was ideal for voles and so for vole predators. The comparisons between this habitat and that of a totally different environment in eastern England form an important part of the book, especially in terms of population regulation.

The book is divided into 21 chapters covering the complete life cycle of the Kestrel. Difficult to study aspects such as hunting, food intake and energetics are well covered.

Illustrations by Keith Brockie and over 30 photographs enhance the book. I found that the numerous graphs enabled me to digest easily the wealth of data presented, assisted by the summary at the end of each chapter.

The appendix includes useful information on measuring diets and home ranges, and 77 tables complete the book.

Recommended as of particular value to raptor enthusiasts and also to those interested in the complete life history of a species.

S.B. Lawrence

Parrots Of The World, by Joseph M. Forshaw. Illustrated by William T. Cooper. Third (revised) edition. 1989. Lansdowne Editions, Willoughby NSW. 672 pages.

Since the publication of the first edition of *Parrots of the World* in 1973, this work has been recognised as one of the major works on Psittaciformes, not only because it is the only work that discusses all members of the Order (with the exception of some vicicultural works such as Rosemary Low's *Parrots – Their Care and Breeding*), but also because of the quality of its production. All those interested in fine books about birds would be impressed by the presentation of the earlier editions, including the paintings by William T. Cooper.

For members not familiar with the earlier editions of this work it takes the form of an introduction in which the author discusses parrots generally, starting with an examination of their classification, natural history (distribution, habitats, feeding and breeding habits, etc.). The book then examines each species in three groupings: (1) Parrots of the Pacific Distribution; (2) Parrots of the Afro-Asian Distribution; and (3) Parrots of the South American Distribution. In the species discussions there is a description of each bird's physical appearance, its range, call, feeding, and breeding. All species and many subspecies are illustrated in paintings by Cooper.

This earlier edition was in my view a well-produced book, which brought together in a convenient form adequate summaries of all species of parrot,

with attractive paintings that provided a good impression of the bird's appearance. An adequate bibliography supplied further reading for those who wished to find out more details on particular species. This last point is important because, to cover the approximately 340 species discussed, each article has had to be brief. The author and illustrator have produced a companion volume *Australian Parrots* [second (revised) edition, Lansdowne – Rigby Publications, Willoughby, NSW, 1981], which follows the same format, but as it is dealing with only 54 species, it is able to discuss these in much more detail, with the author giving examples from his own extensive field-work. One sometimes yearns for that sort of treatment when using *Parrots of the World*.

Another feature that makes *Parrots of the World* difficult to use is the author's failure to list alternative common names of species. For example, the species that Forshaw calls the Superb Parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*) is commonly known outside Australia, especially in the avicultural world, as Barraband's Parakeet.

A final criticism of the earlier editions of this work concerns its binding. This has always been an expensive book, and it is disconcerting to find that my copy of the second edition (which is less than 10 years old and has been handled with a great deal of care) needs rebinding. I am informed by a book-binder that this results from the type of binding used, which is inadequate for such a large book.

The recently published revised third edition continues the standard set by earlier editions. Many of the colour plates are those which appeared in earlier editions, although 10 new paintings have been added.

The work has been fully revised and expanded. This new edition is 56 pages longer and takes account of work published up to 1988. One exciting example of new material is a report of a confirmed sighting of the rare and mysterious Night Parrot (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*) in South Australia. Numerous possible sightings over the years had indicated that the species continued to exist, but it is pleasing to have this confirmed.

It is noticeable that some of the distribution maps (e.g. that for the Red-tailed Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus magnificus*) have been redrawn, showing what appears to be a greatly reduced distribution for the species, and it would have been useful to know whether this results from a decline in the bird's range or a refining of the recording and mapping techniques. Unfortunately this point is not explained.

It is also unfortunate that the author has not taken the opportunity to remedy the omission of other common names of species and that, to my inexperienced eye, the binding of the new edition seems of the same quality as on the second edition.

However, these criticisms aside, the new edition of *Parrots of the World* will make a most worthwhile addition to the literature on one of the most interesting Orders of birds. It brings together the present state of knowledge on the species in a convenient form. Although expensive, this handsome book will make an attractive addition to the collection of anyone who admires fine books or the fascinating birds discussed in it.

W.L. Ormond