

REVIEWS



Bird Atlas 2007–11: the breeding and wintering birds of Britain and Ireland By Dawn Balmer, Simon Gillings, Brian Caffrey, Bob Swann, Iain Downie & Rob Fuller. BTO Books, Thetford. 2013. ISBN 978-1-908581-28-0. 720 pages, numerous colour photographs, distribution maps and figures. Hardback, £69.99.

This book, heralded as 'the most important British and Irish bird book for decades', and the result of 'probably the largest scale bird survey' ever carried out, is the fourth in the series of UK and Ireland atlases. The previous atlases could well have laid claim to the above plaudits at the time of their publication of course, but this latest in the series is more of a leap forward than a step along the same path. The Bird Atlas 2007–11 is the first to combine data from both the breeding and winter periods, and a flick through the various iterations highlights the advances in analytical, mapping, and publishing standards.

It's a massive work, big even by bird book standards, with its 720 pages divided between three main sections. The first of these details the 'behind the scenes' work such as the organisation of fieldwork, data analyses, and presentation of the data. The bulk of the book, 490 pages, is devoted to the species accounts, and it finishes with some appendices, including a rather jaw-dropping list of those who contributed data.

Like the book, this review also comes in three sections. The 'bird book lover' in me is more than adequately catered for here. It's a beautiful book, lavishly produced and well laid out, with well-selected photos for most species, and with gorgeous paintings dividing the various sections. The maps, at first glance, look neat and tidy, and the text is nicely broken up with diagrams and boxes. It is without doubt the best-looking bird book that I own.

The birder in me is also very happy with this book. Taxonomically it is right up to date (it's great to see Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* getting the full

treatment, for example), and along with BWP and the Migration Atlas, it will be my first port of call whenever I need to get some background info on a particular species. Flicking through the species accounts, the maps clearly document well known northerly range expansions like that of Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* (and less well known ones, such as the spread of the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* into the most northerly reaches of mainland Scotland), as well as more worrying apparent range contractions like that of the Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*. I'm slightly put off by the inclusion of several 'plastics', which to other purists like me might sit uncomfortably between more worthy species (Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*, Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*, Bar-headed Goose *A. indicus* and Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata* all feature) but I understand the need to collate and present this information. This snapshot of the region's avifauna wouldn't be complete without these birds - and who knows what the next Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* will be?

It's when I start to look at this book through the eyes of a seabird enthusiast that I begin to see one or two cracks. One can't help wonder if the organisers of the survey have missed an opportunity here. The methodology used by fieldworkers stated that while counts of colonial breeders were desirable, they were not mandatory, and as such, only 60% of data returned that was pertinent to colonies included counts. Also concerning is that many of these counts will be incomplete, with observers counting easy to access parts of colonies only. The result of this is that counts of species like Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, Gannet *Morus bassanus*, Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Shag *Ph. aristotelis* were 9%, 4%, 20% and 8% of the counts returned by the Seabird 2000 census, respectively. With progress towards the next full seabird census lumbering at best, who knows how valuable these data could have been?

The result of this lack of count data is that representations of the declines in colonial species

are poor. While many accounts include maps that represent changes in relative abundance through the 'atlas era', these are lacking for many seabird species. Consequently, maps for species like Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, for some key areas at least, present a picture of stability that is misleading. Turning to the text one can read about a 44% decline across the UK between this and the last atlas, but the maps, what this book is all about, unfortunately do not enlighten us any more.

Due to the bulk of the book, the text for each species is necessarily brief. In light of some of the shortcomings of the maps, such as those highlighted above, I would have preferred to see more room available for text in each species account, allowing more in depth discussion of the trends for each species. While I understand the importance of presenting information on the development of the project and the database structure, for example, I can't help but feel that these aspects of the work might have been better suited to a dedicated website. It's all interesting, but I can't imagine too many people will be buying the book to access this information. The

intention is to make the data available via the internet after publication (although I can't find it at the time of writing) so one would have thought that presenting the nuts and bolts of the project would be essential as part of the data portal. It's worth noting that the data that contribute to this book are the real legacy of the project rather than the book itself, and in the future its success may be judged on how available, accessible and useable these data are. The future of this sort of work is online, so it's a shame that as of yet, this resource is not available.

Regardless of these issues, the book is a triumph of citizen science, and the way the Atlas partners have engaged with the region's birding public to harness its manpower is to be commended. The result of this effective collaboration between the 'man in the field' and those who have worked with the data is a book that will be enjoyed by people from a wide range of bird-related backgrounds, and referred to for many, many years to come.

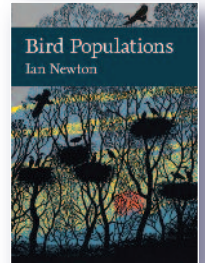
Mark Lewis

Bird Populations By Ian Newton. Collins, London. 2013. ISBN 978-0-00-742953-0 (hardback), 978-0-00-752798-4 (paperback). 596 pages, 213 figures including graphs, maps and colour photographs. Hardback £55.00, paperback £35.00.

This gem of a book also happens to be a hefty tome... and I'm talking about the paperback version! When it landed on my desk, quite literally, it made a loud and dull 'thud'. The kind of intriguing sound you hear in period-piece Hollywood movies when some medieval messenger's head is returned to the King's table in a basket. But, really, based on Ian Newton's publishing record, how could I possibly expect anything less? Professor Newton has produced a series of influential and encyclopaedic works throughout his career, every one of them jam-packed with clear explanations, detailed examples, and illustrative case studies. In fact, his previous offering on this same subject, *Population Limitation in Birds* (1998), fortuitously appeared just as I was launching into my own doctoral studies. Over that period, it became a permanent fixture on my desk, and, especially while writing my thesis, was never far from my side.

This current volume, number 124 in the legendary and much cherished Collins New Naturalist series, builds upon that previous body of work, but introduces many new findings and a vastly updated reference section (nearly two-thirds having been published since the previous volume, according to the author's foreword). I doubt your grandfather would recognize this as a New Naturalist, though. This volume is not the in-depth monograph focused on a single genus or family to which we've become intimately accustomed. Rather, it is a grand, sweeping analysis of an expansive subject, highly relevant to ornithologists of all stripes. Not that I'm suggesting this work is anything other than comprehensive - the treatment of the subject matter is, in fact, extremely thorough and, as a well-recognized authority on the science of all things avian, Ian Newton leaves no stone unturned.

As is customary with the New Naturalist series, the focus is on the British Isles, and the lion's share of the examples used throughout the text is drawn from a wealth of studies undertaken in Britain. The subject matter, however, is universal. The Contents shows a similar subject line up to Parts 2 and 3 in the *Population Limitation in Birds*, with the very welcome addition of a major chapter on Climate Change. Chapters in this new volume include Food



Supplies, Nest-sites, Predation, Parasitic Diseases, Competition, Weather, Climate Change, Hunting, and Pollutants. This book is far from just a laundry list of environmental factors influencing bird populations, however. It is much, much more - effectively, a clear and careful explanation and examination of individual versus population level impacts, with several of these factors being split to address individual and population impacts in separate chapters. Particularly pleasing is the recognition of the complexities involved, including a genuine and determined exploration of the interactions between factors limiting bird populations, with special attention given to the interactions between predators and resources, and between parasites and resources.

In Chapter 1 (Preview), Professor Newton quickly and adroitly introduces the concept of density-dependence, an idea he continues to explain and expand upon in Chapter 2 (Population Regulation). In fact, the theme of density-dependence is woven throughout the fabric of this entire book, from the very first chapter to the very last.

Despite Ian Newton's own primary research interests over the years (finches, geese, and raptors), the examples and case studies described

throughout this volume are drawn from all across the taxonomic spectrum, including passerines, raptors, wildfowl, waders, waterbirds, and, notably for readers of this journal, seabirds. In fact, I was extremely pleased to find that seabirds have been given considerable and specific attention throughout this volume. As they should, of course!

Overall, this book is highly accessible, written in plain language, without jargon or overly technical terms, just as we have come to expect from the influential *New Naturalist* series. It is also beautifully illustrated, with hundreds of high quality photographs throughout, peppered with well-described graphs, and includes an appropriate smattering of informative tables judiciously used to support the text. This book is a landmark edition in an already outstanding natural history series, and will make an extremely valuable and treasured addition to the library of anyone serious about birds and their biology.

Order it today, and await the tell-tale and enticing 'thud'!

Iain Stenhouse



Puffins By Euan Dunn. Bloomsbury, London & New York, 2014. ISBN 978-1-4729-0354-9. 128 pages, numerous colour photographs. paperback, £9.99.

This little book (15 x 21 cm) is neither a coffee-table production nor a monograph, but a worthy effort in the RSPB's new Spotlight series at bridging the gap between the two genres by introducing "readers to the lives and behaviour of our favourite animals with eye-catching colour photography and informative expert text." Euan Dunn has done a good job with the text, which is loosely divided into life history chapters and interspersed with numerous text boxes. Subjects covered also include geolocator studies, human harvesting, island population restoration, pollution and climate change. The writing style is accessible without dumbing-down too far, and often includes personal anecdotes. However, I surely can't be alone in bemoaning the constant use of 'puffling' (for chick/fledgling), and a few of the headings are just too 'popular' for comfort (e.g. 'Tunnel of love' to describe chick-rearing).

The photos used are generally appropriate, informative and of excellent quality. Some are familiar from *The Puffin* (Harris & Wanless 2011) or other publications, others were new to me and are striking, especially those illustrating piracy and predation; in a few cases, though, the image and the caption seem mis-matched (p. 25 lower, p. 65 lower). There are one or two other glitches that should have been picked up in a more thorough final edit, for instance some colony dots in the distribution map on p. 121 are either missing (Great Saltee, Foula in the inset) or in the wrong location (Rathlin Island). These quibbles are minor, however. Seabird Group members will (or should) have their own copy of the 2011 Poyser monograph, but this new book would make an excellent, informative and affordable Christmas present for an interested relative or an up-coming youngster. It will undoubtedly sell well at reserve gift shops, and deserves to do so.

Martin Heubeck