

REVIEWS

THE BIRDS OF IRELAND. By P. G. KENNEDY, S.J., R. F. RUTTLEDGE, C. F. SCROOPE. Oliver and Boyd. £3 3s.

This is an account of the history and distribution of birds in Ireland and of their migrations. It claims to touch on habits, only where these differ notably from those in Great Britain, but in fact there is much valuable general information on bird behaviour. There are clear descriptions of many interesting and unusual happenings, for instance, how a greater black-backed gull manœuvred a flock of coots until it could pounce upon a straggler to carry it away and devour it, and how a pomarine skua caught a black-headed gull and plucked in on the water. Two great skuas chased by a peregrine must have been a fascinating sight and how well the remarkable display of the great northern diver is described.

Though of course generally the same, there are many differences even in species between the birds of Ireland and England. Ireland has no nuthatch, the reed warbler has bred once only, the redstart is a rare occasional visitor. As in England some birds are increasing and others decreasing and it is often difficult to find the reason. Oil pollution is given as a possible cause of the decrease of guillemot and razor bill. This may indeed be true, but man can hardly be blamed for the decrease of the arctic tern when the common tern increased so much in Dublin that, in 1950, eggs were laid on the flat roofs of coal dumps. Among birds which have increased in Ireland as elsewhere are swifts, grey plovers and fulmars; and, it need hardly be added, herring gulls. During the eighteenth century the woodcock spread widely and now the new coniferous plantations have given it cover, seclusion and freedom from disturbance. But it is sad to turn to the story of the birds of prey. We read of the hen harrier "Few sportsmen seem capable of sparing these large slow-flying birds which are so confiding", and of the kestrel, "No bird suffers more undeserved persecution." It is a relief to read that in spite of this the peregrine is probably increasing.

Ireland has not yet made great progress in bird protection. The only sanctuary of note, the North Bull, has more than once been threatened with elimination. It is true that the only known nesting area of the red-necked phalarope was bought by the Irish Bird Protection Society in a splendid attempt to keep the colony in existence, but unfortunately the action seems to have been too late.

Many bird casualties are reported from Irish lighthouses. Would it not be possible to institute floodlighting at some of them at least. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has reported this to be a practical and reasonably cheap method of saving bird life, and it has passed the experimental stage.

This book might easily have been long-winded or become merely a catalogue. It has avoided both dangers and is well balanced and very interesting. The Wetmore order is used but races are given separate consideration as in the "Handbook". I would have preferred them to be combined under their respective species. There are eleven good, well-chosen plates.

C. L. B.

HOW ANIMALS MOVE. By JAMES GRAY. Illustrations by EDWARD BAWDEN. Cambridge University Press. 16s.

It is many years since I did any physics, and that only the sketchy requirements of the medical course, but reading Professor Gray's book has produced three major reactions in me: a wish that the Royal Institute Christmas lectures had been available to me when I was at school; a wish that I could have been present at this particular series, with the fascinating demonstrations which I can only reconstruct from the illustrations of the book; and thirdly a profound delight that school children now get the chance of appreciating the interdependence of all branches of science, and of realizing that physics is not necessarily only a prelude to the study of atomic weapons, space ships, and other mechanical marvels—or monsters—of our age.

Into this book, written about ourselves and other living things, many of them everyday creatures with which we are all familiar, come such a variety of physical laws, and such a diversity of common interests, that it would, I think, be impossible for anyone to fail to find something to meet his individual taste. For the schoolboy interested in sport there is swimming, riding, running and jumping; for the young physicist there are kinetics and electricity, aerodynamics and radar; for the naturalist there are creatures of all sorts, familiar and unfamiliar; and for all there is the fun of learning "how it works".

The facts and laws set out in the graded series of chapters are basic. Professor Gray brings them to life and admirably succeeds in his purpose of demonstrating the essential obedience of all things, living and inanimate, to the fundamental laws of