

sive review of the 417 species which have or may have occurred up to 1972. The information is slotted away most neatly, and includes such unusual and welcome features as an indication of which museums hold specimens and precise dates of rare occurrences. As there are, also, full page paintings of eight species by Don Eckelberry, a set of 28 colour plates by John O'Neill showing 219 species (including a fair number of females and immatures), and 41 line drawings and photographs, the former covering 26 more species and the latter illustrating an account of the island habitats, one gets a really good idea of the bird faunas. One of my few grumbles about the book, which could easily be carried in one's pocket or knapsack, is that there are no cross-references from plates to text.

Alexander Skutch's look at the hummingbirds is something different, to be read and savoured rather than thumbed, although it could, for instance, well be used to illumine Richard French's account of the 18 hummingbirds recorded in his islands. The author mentions, and/or the attractive pictures by Arthur Singer depict, 106 of the 320 known hummingbird species, but both kinds of references are woven into a tapestry in which aspects of life history, ranging through adornments, flight, food, temperament, courtship, nesting, enemies and friends, past and future, are vividly portrayed—and leave one marvelling.

Both authors talk about conservation and it seems that, even in the islands, where, both on paper and in practice, more has been done to maintain the superb display of birdlife than in most of the mainland countries, much senseless and profitless destruction continues. Let us hope that in 20 years' time these books will not be sad memorials to a beauty that has gone.

HUGH F. I. ELLIOTT

The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland, by Stanley Cramp, W. R. P. Bourne and David Saunders. Collins, £3.50.

It is now, I was astonished to find when I looked it up, twenty years since the last monograph on British seabirds, the New Naturalist volume by James Fisher and Ronald Lockley. The scope of the present one is both narrower, being confined to the British Isles and excluding the North Atlantic, and more detailed, in that it is able to draw on the results of Operation Seafarer, in which James Fisher himself played a leading part up to his death. Its appearance makes one realise not only how badly it was needed for seabirds, but also how badly needed similar volumes are for other groups of British birds. The British Trust for Ornithology's forthcoming atlas will provide the factual basis for such analyses, but it is the analyses themselves that are so valuable. With the ecological background changing as rapidly as it is at present, twenty years is far from being too long an interval between assessments of what is happening to our bird populations.

The three authors are exceptionally well qualified to deal with their subject (some authors nowadays seem to be not qualified at all). Stanley Cramp is senior editor of the monumental *Birds of the Western Palaearctic*, reportedly about to give birth to its first volume. W. R. P. Bourne, one of our most dynamic ornithologists today, has made seabirds his specialism, and is even interested in that unfashionable subject, taxonomy. David Saunders was in charge of Operation Seafarer, that Domesday Book census of British and Irish seabirds, carried out by more than a thousand volunteer observers in 1969–70. The bulk of the resulting book is a systematic examination of the distribution and breeding and feeding

ecology of every breeding seabird of the region, sometimes by an outside specialist, such as J. C. Coulson on the kittiwake. To many ornithologists the map section and detailed appendices at the end will be one of its most valuable features.

RICHARD FITTER

Oiseaux de l'Île Maurice et de Rodrigue, by France Staub and Rivaltz Chevreau. Mauritius Printing Co. Port Louis, Mauritius, 3.50.

So much has been written about the extinct dodo of Mauritius and solitaire of nearby Rodrigues that one might suppose there was nothing left to be written about the avifauna of these tiny Indian Ocean Islands. Not so, for on these two islands there still exists a unique and interesting avifauna which is at last receiving the long overdue attention it deserves. The present volume is the first popular treatment of these birds, and it comes at a time when efforts to save the endemics from extinction are gaining support. An informative book, it is an important contribution to the conservation effort.

The text, in French, covers briefly the life histories of 78 of the islands' birds, including not only the 14 endemic or indigenous forms, but also migrants, seabirds and introduced species. Much of the information is new, based on the authors' own field work, but, unfortunately, some old published inaccuracies are perpetuated. The style is an easy-to-read narrative rather than a stiff field-guide format. Unfortunately, there is neither a complete checklist nor reference maps.

The book is well illustrated with 47 good-quality photographs, 13 in colour—the first time that all the endemic birds have been illustrated in one book, and, for some species, the first photographs ever to be published.

A welcome guide to the increasing number of birdwatchers now visiting Mauritius and Rodrigues, this should be a standard work for some time. An English language version should be available in 1975.

STANLEY A. TEMPLE

Owls of the World, edited by John A. Burton. Peter Lowe, £5.95.

To give an account of the 130-odd species of owls known in the world (many of them very ill-known) is an ambitious project, only attainable with a team of writers. The result is an extremely useful reference work but suffers from the inevitable inequalities of team work.

The Introduction and the three general chapters composing Part 1, by John Sparks, C. A. Walker and Philip Burton, present the biological characteristics, ecology, history and lore of owls competently, though with some repetition. Part 2, the bulk of the book, describes owls in six groups, each tackled by a different author, and each containing distribution maps and copious colour illustrations (photographs and paintings). First, Ian Prestt and Reginald Wagstaffe document the world-wide distribution and differentiation of the successful barn and bay owls group adequately. One might cavil at the description of *Tyto alba gracilirostris* as the Canary Islands barn owl, since this subspecies is found only on the two eastern islands, the western ones containing the widespread *Tyto a. alba*. Furthermore, the area of overlap of the white-breasted and dark-breasted barn owls (*T. a. alba* and *T. a. guttata*) is underestimated in the distribution map, since the latter occurs in the Channel Islands. The statement about