

Swifts in a Tower by David Lack. Reprint by Chapman & Hall Ltd., London. 19 photographs and 24 figures. \$2.50.

The publishers are to be congratulated on reprinting this book, first published by Methuen's in 1956, and thus making it available to a wider circle of ornithologists and of others who wish to extend their knowledge and understanding of birdlife. With a complete absence of technical language, the late David Lack describes the results of several years of intense study of the nesting of the Common Swift in all its strange facets, made in the tower of Oxford Museum by substituting glass-backed boxes for the ventilators in which the birds were nesting.

There is of course much more included than the results of the study. There is an absorbing chapter on the astonishing nesting habits of many of the world's swifts, including the two species which straggle to this country; and in a chapter on the author's reclassification of the whole family of Apodidae, the application of Gloger's and Bergmann's rules is made perfectly clear to the non-scientific reader.

From a mass of intriguing detail, I shall mention one item because of its particular application. A British observer noted for several years that swifts regularly hunted round his bee-hives. Thinking that they must take a great many bees, he shot eight birds at intervals. On dissection he found that they had only taken the drones, harmless of course to the swift and valueless to the bee-keeper. How does the swift in flight at 25 mph distinguish a drone from a worker bee? The author goes on to say that bee-eaters have often been shot as pests in countries where they are common, but that a recent study in Czechoslovakia has shown that hive-bees formed only two per cent of the bee-eaters diet, and all of them were drones! I know that years ago the Australian bee-eater, now more usually called the Rainbow Bird, was destroyed as a pest by apiarists, but we can hope that they have now all been made aware of the true position.

A. B.



Birdlife at Waikanae Estuary, 1969-1972. By M. L. Falconer, C. A. Fleming & K. A. Wodzicki. 19 pp., illus. [Wellington]: "for private circulation, by the authors," October 1973.

The Waikanae River mouth has long been known as a favoured haunt of estuarine birds which have been studied over the last century by such ornithologists as Buller and Wodzicki. There are now proposals to stabilise the river mouth which would inevitably destroy the habitats of bare sand, tidal flats and shallow ponds essential to these birds. The authors have produced for private circulation a small booklet summarising the present healthy position of the bird life barely affected by the now continual stream of fishermen, white-baiters, boatmen and weekend strollers. Fleming's diagrams although not all to the same scale are of particular value, illustrating for example with careful and sympathetic treatment of form and attitude 6 varieties of shag met with in the Wellington area. Since Falla's article on shags (*Tuatara* 2 (3), 1949) is hard to come by, one would hope that these items, at least, of the booklet could be made available for wider circulation.

J. M. C.