

REVIEW.

“HOW TO STUDY BIRDS.”—Stuart Smith, B.Sc., Ph.D.

(Collins, 1945, 10/3 all booksellers.)

This book should be on the shelves of every bird watcher in New Zealand, whether serious study is carried out or not. The first part deals with a year in the life of a typical European migrant. Chapters include discussions on the dates, path (“broad fronts” and “fixed routes”), extent, and reasons for this yearly migration, and the significance of territory to a bird. The chief merit of this readable book is that it includes summaries of all the most recent discoveries in the bird world, and brings the reader up to date. Such subjects as “brood-spots” are fully discussed, and an interesting point is “. . . the mere presence of a male bird on the nest should not necessarily be taken to mean that the bird is incubating the eggs in the sense that it is contributing to the development of the embryo. Thus in certain cases, such as the blackbird, where the hen bird normally does all the incubation, it has been found that in isolated cases where the cock bird has been found covering the eggs, **these were quite cold** * when the bird was flushed from the nest. (* Heavy type mine.—J.M.C.) No brood spots are developed by the male blackbird, and the suggestion is that such birds are incapable of truly incubating eggs . . . records of the male on the nest should not be treated as necessarily indicative of incubation.”

Winter flocking is discussed, and the suggestion is made that more work might be done on the roosting habits of the “social” birds, such as starlings, rooks, sparrows. Dewar’s 20-10 seconds diving rule for duck is explained and inheritance and imitation in young birds receive a well-merited chapter to themselves.

The rest of the book deals with special problems in more detail, and contains interesting charts and diagrams on such subjects as ringed bird recoveries of partial migrants (thrushes, blackbirds, etc. offer scope in New Zealand for similar studies). The eye is of all importance to a bird, and for that reason is treated in great detail, with explanations and diagrams of the functional parts. The reason for a bird’s great keenness of sight becomes simple when the chapter is read, as do its colour reactions. (Many readers will be surprised to learn that some birds can see all round them at once.) A further chapter is included on the design of a bird’s wing, and the book includes a great many suggestions for bird watchers.

Not the least important section is the list of references, which is remarkable for its range, and the admirable photographs by the author, Eric Hosking, F.R.P.S. and A. G. Brittan are not used simply as “pretty pictures” but each has the specific use of illustrating a particular point in the text.—J.M.C.

The “South Australian Ornithologist” for March, 1946, Vol. XVIII., No. 1, includes a paper by E. F. Boehm on “Distraction Display by Breeding Birds in South Australia.”