

British Birds in 1989-1990: The Conservation and Monitoring Review

By D. A. Stroud and D. Glue. 1991. British Trust for Ornithology/Nature Conservancy Council, Thetford, England. 216 pp., illus. £6.95.

This review is a working document which I read with a mixture of alarm, envy, and hope. Printed on economical paper, it packs a lot of information into its 216 pages. It is divided into four parts. The first part deals with 16 major conservation issues; the second with reports on 31 studies having a special focus. The third part is a series of brief status reports on 167 breeding species which are subject to regular monitoring. A short but critical conclusion, summarising a not entirely promising picture, shows there is much work to be done. Each report is short, and on occasion cryptic, which allows the editors to include a large number of inputs.

The review shows that, despite a very dedicated effort by a large group of contributors, there is so much more work to do. Real progress has been slow despite the increased awareness of environmental issues. Conclusions like "poor management of fish stocks ... reduces marine resources for man" sound all too familiar. I certainly envy Britain's large network of groups, clubs, and individuals who give freely of their time for conservation. The results show what can be done and give hope that we will achieve true progress.

ROY JOHN

Uranium Saskatchewan Association Inc. 600 Spadina Crescent East, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 3G4

Fish Watching: An Outdoor Guide to Freshwater Fishes

By C. Lavett Smith. 1994. Cornell University Press, Ithaca. x + 216 pp., illus. + plates. Cloth U.S. \$42.50; paper U.S. \$19.95.

The avowed purpose of this book is to promote fish-watching as a worthwhile activity for the naturalist. Whether the author succeeds in doing so will depend on the personality of the reader. In my opinion, people who came to love nature through bird-watching and extensive hiking will not find fish-watching very gratifying. Fish are prey for many animals, so they try hard not to be seen or heard. After reading this book, I am left with the feeling that fish-watching is for the quiet naturalist who likes to take it easy, sitting by the water or slowly paddling along the shoreline, wondering about the life of interesting but rather secretive animals.

The book is divided into four sections. In the first one, general advice on fish-watching is given. Polaroid sunglasses (to cut glare from the water's surface), a field notebook, good boots, and patience appear to be the fish-watcher's main tools of the trade (I would have added bug repellent, the fish-watcher being, obviously, always near water). The author also gives tips on how to find the best vantage points (high is the key), how to take notes (right away), and how to photograph fish (but don't expect a long exposition of professional methods here). The second section is "watching by habitat", in which descriptions of aquatic ecosystems (e.g., rocky or marshy creeks, rivers, estuaries, ponds, lakes, wetlands) are given along with a list of the 10 or so species most likely to be found in them. The third section contains accounts of the 32 most important North American families of fish (the author correctly points out that species accounts are not necessary, as most fish cannot be identified down to the species

level just by sighting them in the water). Most families receive a one-page treatment on their general appearance, habitat, and the behaviour one is most likely to witness if the fish is spotted. Some comments on distribution are given, but they are scanty and maps would have been a lot more useful. The final section, on the general biology of fishes, is insightful in most places but too short in a few others. The uninitiated naturalist will be intrigued by the mentions of "catch per unit effort" or "capture-recapture", but will pine for examples to illustrate these methods of estimating population size. Also, I would have liked more information on physiological ecology (e.g., the various ways in which fish react to low oxygen availability) and behavioural ecology (e.g., why do fish school?) but I admit that this is a matter of personal taste.

The book is written in an engaging way by a scientist (Emeritus Curator of the Department of Herpetology and Ichthyology at the American Museum of Natural History) who has a healthy curiosity about nature. Many examples are given of questions that one can ask after seeing fish in particular circumstances. The author did not convince me, however, that answers to these questions are attainable by mere observation, without actually catching the fish and extensively sampling its habitat. But the experience of simply observing a fish may be enough to prompt one to read more about these animals and bring a renewed commitment to preserving their habitat which, as we all know, is still vulnerable to abuse and encroachment by human activities.

STÉPHAN REEBS

Département de Biologie, Université de Moncton, Moncton, New Brunswick E1A 3E9

HUGH BOYD

Ottawa, Ontario K2B 5Y5