

are taken directly from his previous work *Birds of Costa Rica* (written by Richard Garrigues in 2007), but illustrations of around 150 species have been newly created for this book. His work in the Costa Rica guide suffered from rather faint colour printing, but that is not a problem this time. Male and female plumages are shown where it matters and, in a small number of non-passerines, there are immature plumages too. However, only a few birds are shown in flight, and I was left wanting more images of many of the raptors and half of the nightjars. This guide is actually not much smaller than that created by Ridgely & Gwynne and I recommend having both with you for the wealth of information in the latter. Being a softback, this book will surely suffer from wear and tear in the field, but it offers a much better solution for rapid use, putting all the essential information in the same spread.

Keith Betton

**Avian Survivors: The history and biogeography of Palearctic birds** by Clive Finlayson. T. & A.D. Poyser/A. & C. Black. 2011. 320 pages, numerous tables, graphs and maps and 29 colour photographs. Hardback £50.00.

This is an academic book, but it provides a fascinating story of the birds of the Palearctic across space and time. History and chance events play a central role in a story that has its origins before the asteroid impact that finished off the dinosaurs. The author shows that the Palearctic avifauna significantly predates the glaciations of the last two million years, and that those species which survived until that time were equipped to deal with whatever the climate could throw at them. In his preface, Finlayson describes how he was influenced by Reg Moreau and his seminal work *The Palearctic-African Bird Migration Systems* from 1972. He was resident on Gibraltar, where he ringed Crag Martins in a cave where excavations revealed bones of the same species from 40,000 years ago, and also of the Azure-winged Magpie, thus proving that the latter had not been introduced from China. The opening chapters describe the events which impacted on the evolution of birds back to 65 million years ago. The bulk of the book comprises chapters which feature an introduction to the bird families and their history and relationships, sections on climate and habitat, a description of the fossils known from the Palearctic (and particularly Europe), and a genus-by-genus treatment of all the species, both extinct and extant. The book is completed with two comprehensive appendices, one listing the bioclimatic and ecological features of all the species covered, and the other showing the fossil record of European birds back to the beginning of the Pleistocene.

John Clark

**Hawks at a Distance - Identification of migrant raptors** by Jerry Liguori. Princeton. 2011. 190 pages, with colour photographs throughout. Softback £13.95.

North Americans love their 'hawks' and this book follows in the footsteps of others that address the sophistry required to name a tantalising airborne puzzle. Jerry Liguori attempts to do this the hard way. There is no discussion of birds at rest. His universe is targets on the wing - at a distance. Cutting his cloth this tight makes him the David Blain of raptor identifiers. Reading the back cover blurb, there would appear to be no better man when it comes to combining knowledge with a comprehensive set of photographs.

The number of images per species is impressive: 32 for Golden Eagle, 37 for Northern Harrier, 43 for Rough-

legged Buzzard and 78 for Red-tailed Hawk. Each account commences with a mouth-watering portrait (including probably the greatest flight shot ever of Rough-legged Buzzard) and a page or so of well-written identification overview. Next comes the parade of pictures, grouped under various headings, such as age or racial differences. Some books flatter to deceive by incorporating massive amounts of white space. In *Hawks at a Distance*, the unnecessary space is blue. Each image is not far short of a dot in the heavens. Yet, this approach is deliberate. The author feels that realism helps. I wish I could agree. Ironically - but usefully - the wee photos are pin-sharp and I found that, by using a magnifying glass, the detail was amazing. Only then could tail patterns on non-adult male Merlins be enjoyed or the underwing details of Northern Harriers scrutinised. Oh how I wish that the treasure-trove of images were bigger. Those on the cover look ideal. Had a larger format been used, detail would have been self-evident. To achieve Real World effect, readers could have been advised to squint or hold the book at arm's length. I would also have preferred side-by-side comparisons of difficult species and text tailored to suit. Maybe even pointers - or, these days, has Peterson's genius been relegated to a baby thrown out with the bath water? Tucked away at the back of the book are 19 magnificent expository pages of 'Shapes'. Each is devoted to a single species, in most cases laid out in a 7 by 7 grid of photographs. Setting aside a gripe preferring similar species in closer proximity, these layouts are revelatory. Especially in the digital age, I can imagine the benefit of holding 'Liguori' open at a computer screen on which a mystery raptor is portrayed. Then, using binoculars ...

Anthony McGeehan

**The Birds of Heligoland - Die Vogelwelt der Insel Helgoland** by J. Dierschke, V. Dierschke, K. Hüppop, O. Hüppop and K.F. Jachmann. OAG Helgoland. 2011. 630 pages, with colour photographs and histograms throughout, plus numerous maps. Hardback £75.00.

This is a mammoth work on the world's most famous bird observatory island (in the North Sea, off the coast of Germany, of course), with an illustrious history going back to the days of Heinrich Gätke (*Heligoland as an Ornithological Observatory: the result of fifty year's experience*, Gätke 1895). This is in every way a worthy successor to that seminal work. The main text is in German, but that should not prevent non German readers from both enjoying the book and finding it extremely useful on the subject of migratory birds in Europe. There are brief English summaries to each of the species accounts and there are maps and histograms of occurrence for most species which require no language to understand. There are high quality colour photographs throughout and the book has been produced to an extremely high standard. As well as the comprehensive species accounts (which include details of the many rarities recorded, as well as photographs), fascinating introductory chapters covering Habitats, History, Breeding birds, Migration, Rarities and Methods are each well-served with English summaries too, while the many colour photographs throughout these chapters have short but interesting captions in English. This book is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in bird migration.

Steve Gantlett

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