

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

EDITED BY WILLIAM E. DAVIS, JR.

BIRD LIFE OF WOODLAND AND FOREST. By Robert J. Fuller, illus. By Chris Rose. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England. 1995: 244pp. \$64.95.—Chapter 1 provides a background to British woodland. Since World War II the acreage of woodland in Britain has increased from 6.7% in 1967 to 9.4% in 1980, much of it through increased planting of coniferous forest in Scotland. Despite much conversion of broadleaved woodland to conifer plantation, “ancient woods” (those that have existed continuously since 1600) still form 23% of all woodland in England. Distinct regional patterns in woodland in Britain persist: mixed deciduous woodlands with beech, hornbeam and sweet chestnut in the south-east; other mixed deciduous thence to Wales and central England; elsewhere upland sessile oak and birch woodland, with pine and birch woodland and birch and birch and hazel forests in Scotland. These regional patterns are the outcome of a long history of land management in Britain that has had significant effects on bird distribution, the subject of chapter 2. Here Fuller draws on the rich literature on European forests and their avifaunas to describe the historical pattern of bird distributional changes as forests declined. Some of the observations from his own work in the primeval Białowieża forests of Poland will strike chords with students of tropical forests.

Chapter 3 turns to how birds use forests but essentially is a narrative description of seasonal changes in the composition and behavior of the bird assemblages present in woodland. American readers used to season-specific plot-oriented research accounts will be struck by the wealth of observational information available for all stages of the annual cycle of bird use of British woodlands. Chapter 4, although entitled “Abundance and distribution of woodland birds,” is a systematic and largely quantitative treatment of determinants of bird abundance. A point of relevance to the current revival of the Clementsian versus Gleasonian debate is Fuller’s baldly stated conclusion “There is no such thing as a ‘typical woodland bird community’.” This is the sort of statement one can make authoritatively only from decades of experience over the full spectrum of woodland types and is typical of Fuller’s writing here. The chapter discusses such environmental influences as geography, altitude and land productivity in similar narrative accounts, but presents quantitative analysis in relation to woodland area. American ecologists may be surprised by Fuller’s conclusion that there are few, if any, genuine forest interior species in European woodland, with the possible exception of the Capercaillie. Fuller concludes instead that birds are more often affected by area-independent attributes of woodland than by area-related ones. Americans inclined to dismiss Fuller’s conclusion as peculiar to Europe might note his comments about the Lynch-Whigham demonstration that Maryland forest birds are more closely related to regulation characteristics than to forest area. Other issues addressed in this chapter include woodland isolation, edge effects, forest growth stage and patchiness, and stand structure.

The following four chapters focus in turn on specific woodland types, including scrub, broadleaved forests, upland forests, and coniferous woodland. In general these chapters introduce the type in general terms, discuss a set of examples of particular variants, discuss how birds relate to the specifics of the habitat type, and provide discussion of relevant woodland management issues. The role of grazing in woodland features more prominently than would be the case in an equivalent work on American forests, in part because of a long tradition of grazing livestock in wood pastures. Indeed Fuller makes a case for reinstating grazing in certain scrub habitats types that are losing crucial conservation features to vegetation outgrowth. Points of interest in broadleaved woods include continuing increase

in abundance of some species as woods age even beyond 100 years; the rich bird life of oakwoods in association with the enormous densities of defoliating caterpillars on oak trees; and the significance of beech mast in the population dynamics of certain species.

The final chapter discusses woodland and woodland birds in the context of the sweeping changes in the British countryside. Brief reviews of the effects of air pollution, climate change, recreation and disturbance, and farm woodlots are followed by a more extensive discussion of the significance of natural woodland for birds. In contrast to the United States, conservation effort in Britain has concentrated on issues of management of the remaining semi-natural woodland since the extensive tracts of forest still present in the U.S. have long since been lost from Britain. In an interesting parallel to the Wildlands proposal for North America, Fuller advocates creation of a new natural forest—large enough to simulate the dynamics of a wildwood “arguably the single most exciting development that could occur in British conservation.” The book concludes with four appendices (the first two detailing the habitats and nest sites of British and (other) European woodland species, the third a useful glossary of terms in British woodland ecology and management, and the fourth a list of scientific names), an eighteen-page bibliography, and an adequate index.

The book is an excellent example of a genre of ecological writing still prevalent in Europe but uncommonly found in North America, one almost of natural history writing but without abandoning the rigor of ecology. One finds few statistical tests cited in Fuller’s book but his quantitative examples have origins in a technical literature rooted in statistical testing or are rooted in a magnitude of personal experience that precludes serious challenge to his conclusions: the insights of weeks and months and years in the field permeate this book. Occasional shortcomings are evident; on page 66 one is told “see Fig. 5.3” but in another work, not very helpful if one doesn’t have the work to hand! Fuller notes the importance of tree species richness for bird diversity but cites only some recent work, not Ulfstrand’s pioneering demonstration of the relationship! We are told on page 75 that rhododendron woods are poor for breeding birds but do provide good roosting sites, and then meet almost *verbatim* repetition of the point six pages later. A penchant for statements such as “Pied Flycatcher is a surprising absentee from most birchwoods” (p. 117) without explanation as to why it is surprising is evident on several pages. However, I doubt it is possible to write a book without a few such slips getting through. A more substantive criticism is the emphasis on coppiced woodland: although close to Fuller’s heart (he has authored multiple papers on this habitat), the habitat features here to an extent disproportionate to its overall importance for British woodland birds.

I suspect most of the North Americans who should read this book will not do so, with a chauvinistic “It’s about British birds and North American birds are different” serving as justification. But in this attitude lies failure to learn from an international expert in the field. Fuller’s systematic comparing and contrasting of the biology behind North American, British and European ideas about forest birds holds lessons worth considering. Most forest ornithologists should at least read this book in the interests of their general education; beyond that I expect that it will be in Europe that its real value will be evident.—RAYMOND J. O’CONNOR.

STOKES FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS: EASTERN REGION. By Donald and Lillian Stokes. Little, Brown and Company, Boston. 1996: xxiv + 471 pp., numerous color photos and range maps. \$16.95 (paper) and STOKES FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS: WESTERN REGION. By Donald and Lillian Stokes. Little, Brown and Company, Boston. 1996: xxiv + 519 pp., numerous color photos and range maps. \$16.95 (paper).—These photographic guides synthesize a tremen-



O'connor, Raymond J. 1997. "Bird Life of Woodland and Forest by Robert J. Fuller." *The Wilson bulletin* 109(1), 185–186.

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