

The Birds of Scotland

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The Birds of Scotland—a large (A4) format, two-volume set in a sturdy green slipcase—is the culmination of five years of intense work and the combined talents of more than 150 expert contributors and 200 photographers. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, the book's publisher, sees this mighty tome as the successor to two previous chronicles of Scotland's avifauna: Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul's (1953) *The Birds of Scotland* and Valerie Thom's (1986) *Birds in Scotland*. On its release, this historic new publication was immediately hailed as "Bird Book of the Year 2007" by *Birdwatch Magazine*, and it has since been awarded the Zoological Society of London's highly prestigious Silver Medal. And rightly so.

The Birds of Scotland features 12 introductory chapters, which immediately engage readers on a variety of subjects critical to the understanding of Scotland's avifauna, including geography and habitats, avian fossil records, ornithological history and changes, weather and migration patterns, surveys and research, and conservation. This section also includes particularly intriguing chapters on pioneering ornithologists and early bird photographers in Scotland. In my view, these two chapters could have received a little more room, but given the sheer scale of this project (>1,600 pages), I can certainly forgive the perceived need for brevity on these particular subjects.

The introductory chapters are followed by detailed accounts for all 509 avian species ever recorded in Scotland (as recognized by the Scottish Birds Records Committee), from the most common breeding birds to extreme rarities and even one-off vagrants. You can access sample accounts for White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and Evening Grosbeak (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) online at www.birdsofscotland.org.uk. Like these examples, every species account is informative and attractive, providing a wealth of details on taxonomy, habitat, distribution, population status, and trends, as well as placing Scottish populations in a United Kingdom, European, and global context, identifying current information gaps, and highlighting imminent threats. Once familiar with the layout, which does not take long, one can quickly and easily locate specific data or information on any of these subjects for a particular species of choice. Importantly, for researchers, specimen accession numbers and the name of the home institution (usually museums) are given for historically or otherwise significant material. It is also stated if the relevant specimen is known to be no longer in existence, or is untraceable, which underscores the comprehensiveness of this publication as an important ornithological resource.

Each chapter and species account is packed with just the kind of valuable information that will hold the fascination and fire the imagination of all, from professional ornithologists to active birders and casual naturalists. What sets this book apart is its extraordinary attention to detail, conjuring up more than 200 years of ornithology in Scotland with full reference to the original sources. In the Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) account, for example, we discover that the very first Scottish record was a bird shot by George Leith Buchanan, who mistook it for a Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*) during a snow storm on 24 November, 1882, at Loch Lomond. This exceptional vividness is found throughout the species accounts, including those of Nearctic vagrants, which will provide much of interest for readers in North America.

I am particularly pleased to see native Scots Gaelic names included throughout, as well as being presented alongside common

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The Birds of Scotland.—R. W. Forrester, I. J. Andrews, C. J. McInerny, R. D. Murray, R. Y. McGowan, B. Zonfrillo, M. W. Betts, D. C. Jardine, and D. S. Grundy, Eds. 2007. Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady. xvii + 1,632 pp., 900 photographs, 1,500 tables/charts/maps, 7 appendices. ISBN 978-0-9512139-0-2 (2-vol. set). Hardcover, £75 (~\$150).—Because of its location on the northwestern fringe of Eurasia, its proximity to Greenland and North America, and its relatively mild climate for such high latitude, Scotland has an amazingly diverse avifauna. Despite its modest size, it is one of only five European countries in which more than 500 avian species have been recorded. Its birdlife is as numerous, however, as it is varied. Scotland's rugged coastline, for example, supports 45% of Europe's breeding seabirds. As such, this rocky, windswept corner of the world deserves an authoritative and comprehensive avifaunal treatise truly fitting its ornithological stature.

English names in an interesting and enlightening appendix. The set actually includes a series of seven appendices, including a 2005–2006 update and a summary of population estimates. The 74-page bibliography, with more than 5,800 references, is a magnificent achievement in itself and is a clear indication of the enormous breadth and depth of this work.

Amazingly, every photograph in this handsome set, and there are 900 of them, was taken in Scotland, or features a specimen collected in Scotland. At least one photograph has been included for each species (where possible), with additional photographs of subspecies included where they show identifying features. For the handful of extreme rarities and vagrants for which no Scottish photograph exists, a fine black-and-white illustration by Tommy Daniels is featured. The artistic talents of John Busby, Chris Rose, and Keith Brockie—all well known for work truly evocative of the Scottish landscape and its birdlife—lend further eminence to this beautiful publication.

Just as the *Birds of North America* series did here, *The Birds of Scotland* sets a new benchmark for regional avifaunas. It is, without a doubt, the definitive word on the birds of Scotland and clearly will remain so for several decades to come. It will be a critical addition to the ornithological libraries of academic institutions and natural-history museums around the world, and an extremely valuable and pleasing addition to the personal collections of anyone with an interest in the birds of the western Palearctic. For the sheer immensity of information and quality of production, this set is an astonishingly good value at the price. It can be ordered directly from the United Kingdom through the Natural History Book Shop (www.nhbs.com) or Subbuteo Natural History Books (www.wildlifebooks.com).—IAIN J. STENHOUSE, c/o 7 Hutchins Road, Raymond, Maine 04071, USA. E-mail: istenhouse@audubon.org
