

and Aleutian islands, and Japanese crested ibis, probably now extinct in the USSR. There is a sketch of each bird and its distribution, with references to further literature, several photographs, and a list of contents in English.

The introduction refers to the Soviet Union's signature in 1973–4 to four conventions: the protection of wetlands; the restriction of trade in rare species of flora and fauna which specifies many of the birds in this book, for instance the hooded crane *Grus monacha*; the protection of the polar bear; and a Soviet-Japanese agreement on the protection of migratory birds, covering 287 species, 30 of them under threat of extinction, as a result of which a chain of protected areas was created in the Soviet Far East.

JOHN MASSEY STEWART

The Book of Birds: five centuries of bird illustration, by A. M. Lysaght. Phaidon Press, £20.

There are some books you take a quick look at and know they will be all joy—this is one. The joys then begin to multiply, as they should with all good art, when there is a chance to live with it. Dr Lysaght is as thorough a researcher as a zoologist, with an uncanny perception of where to look for what she wants to show. And the result is a cross-section of five very productive centuries of bird drawing in considerable depth and variety. Her own comments on each separate illustration touch on art, zoology, history, religion, folklore and personal conclusion, to make each statement varied and interesting as well as highly instructive.

But only her introduction deals with the distant origins of man's portrayal of birds. No examples are reproduced. The five centuries begin with the late Middle Ages and end with the 'greats'—Gould, Wolf, Audubon—probably the richest five hundred years if that must be the set limit. Without wanting to see a single page omitted, however, I must confess to a longing for some real primitives at the beginning and some late 20th-century liveliness from the generations following Wilbur Wright; with him aerodynamics lost its mystery and the essential difference of life style between birds and land animals became suddenly understood, even by artists, who were quick to draw inspiration from the new and even more exciting field.

Dr Lysaght mentions the passing of the big bird books, the ending of the era of the shotgun naturalists and the meticulously portrayed corpse. The future, both for birds and people calls for an involvement with the living, their behavioral study and their art. Perhaps this is the right moment to suggest two more books we would like to see from the same author—just as big, just as beautiful and in just the same format. Volume I would begin with the Lascaux Caves, and Volume III with Thorburn. Meanwhile 'Volume II', it must be said again, is all joy.

KEITH SHACKLETON

British Birds of Prey, by Leslie Brown. Collins, New Naturalist, £6.

Leslie Brown, whose experience of African birds of prey is unrivalled, here reveals a deep knowledge of the life histories of British birds of prey and the problems that face them. He begins with an explanation of anatomical functions such as visual acuity, wing slots etc. in relation to their way of life, and a review of their status in Britain and their classification. The next fifteen chapters, dealing with individual species, are some of the best in the book: in a succinct and very readable, almost conversational, style he describes the birds' appearance and status, what is known from ringing about their migrations, and their displays, nesting behaviour and nesting success, all in considerable detail. These life histories are remarkable surveys of the published literature and valuable too in their emphasis on the gaps in our knowledge and the failure of ornithologists to record or publish data.