

of the objective initial criterion of occurrence in under 15 10-km squares: many locally abundant and even some species such as *Koenigia islandica* and *Taraxacum pseudonordstedtii* are in no real danger. The crucial factor unsurprisingly appears to be habitat destruction, so that arable weed and wetland species figure prominently.

The book is neatly produced and not without its lighter moments—it appears that no botanist has braved the Surrey nudist colony where *Teucrium botrys* once grew to check its status.

ALASTAIR FITTER

Wildfowl of Europe, by Myrfyn Owen; colour plates by Hilary Burn. Macmillan & the Wildfowl Trust, £12.

Something that is different about this book is its apparent acceptance that people enjoy birds for their own reasons—individual, specific and varied, not all of them closely connected with ‘ornithology’, and it sets out to nourish all these interests with a well-rounded approach to the subject. Wildfowl themselves are a perfect choice for such treatment: a group many would say that runs favourite in the combined stakes of beauty, romance, spectacle, aviculture, and even, according to taste, gastronomy. And the book combines much of the detailed biology of a monograph with the visual illustration, comparative descriptions, and distribution maps of a good field guide. But there is much more besides. Since 1967 Myrfyn Owen has been working with the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge and not surprisingly has a strongly ecological attitude to waterfowl. The subject has not been chosen arbitrarily as a good excuse for a book, but as one that lends itself perfectly to a demonstration of where a specialised group of birds belongs in the scheme of things. Pressures for and against them are discussed, plus environmental threats past and present, migration trends, and the conservation of wetlands so vital to them and therefore to us.

In the same tradition Hilary Burn’s pictures achieve something rare in bird portraiture—a skill with detail that presents her subjects as live, well-understood working animals in their landscape rather than their glass cases. Joe Blossom’s line drawings share this harmony; clear and decorative and just what is needed to enhance the visual interest of the pages while ‘illustrating’ the text in the truest sense of the word.

KEITH SHACKLETON

Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: Birds of the Western Palearctic, Vol. 1, Ostrich to Ducks, edited by Stanley Cramp and others. Oxford U.P., £25.

Manual of Neotropical Birds. Vol. 1, Spheniscidae (Penguins) to Laridae (Gulls and Allies), by Emmet R. Blake. Chicago U.P., £30.

The closing months of 1977 saw two giant strides towards achieving that highly desirable aim of an up-to-date ornithological handbook for every zoogeographical region of the world. The Indian Sub-region was first, in 1974, thanks to the indefatigable labours of Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley. North America, which began with a flourish in 1962, did not manage its next two volumes until last year and is now challenged by two other regions: the Western Palearctic with the opening volume of a seven-volume set, and the Neotropical Region with the first of a four-volume set. This still leaves huge gaps. The Chinese part of the Eastern Palearctic is the most serious, but both the Oriental and the Australian need pulling together—there are already excellent handbooks to parts of these regions—while somebody must surely some time give us a conspectus of all the islands of the tropical Pacific Ocean.

For more years than we care to remember, British and European ornithologists have been looking forward to a revised edition of Witherby’s path-breaking *Handbook of British Birds*, in its promised expansion to include the whole of the western Palearctic, i.e. east as far as the borders of European Russia, Turkey and Iraq. Now at last we have