

REVIEWS

THE BIRDS OF SCOTLAND. By EVELYN V. BAXTER and LEONORA JEFFREY RINTOUL. Oliver and Boyd, 2 volumes, £3 3s.

This book is the outcome of many years of conscientious study of records and of patient observation in the field. It is a history of the occurrence and distribution of birds in Scotland gleaned from such varied sources as sixteenth-century chronicles and modern ringing records. That the authors know well both birds and country is clearly evident throughout.

The work begins with several chapters dealing with the subject in general terms. The "Description of Scotland" is a very good geography lesson, especially if followed on a good map, for the one provided is hardly adequate. "Some Factors Influencing Bird Life" tells of changes in the countryside, such as the growth and decline of forest and bog, due to climatic conditions. Great movements of sand are mentioned, as when in the seventeenth century the Culbin Sands buried 3,600 acres of fertile land. "The Composition of the Scottish Avifauna" shows the differences in the kinds of birds to be found in Scotland and England. Scotland, relatively lacking woodland and hedgerow, does not favour passerines, but makes up with duck, grebes, and divers. There follows a chapter on migration, compiled largely from the authors' own observations and information from ringing stations.

All this is in the nature of a preface to the main body of the book, which deals with the history of each species as related to Scotland. It is full of interesting information which should be invaluable to those living in Scotland or visiting it in search of birds. One wonders whether some of the dates, observers, and places where particular birds occurred would not have been better tabulated, as this sort of detail makes jerky reading. A good deal of prominence is given to races, for instance three races of the mealy redpoll are treated under separate headings, and similarly three races of the hedgesparrow. These distinctions, hardly ever perceptible in the field, are confusing to the general reader.

The coloured frontispieces by G. E. Lodge are delightful, and the photographs, mostly by Robert Adam and Eric Hosking, quite excellent.

T. R.