

REVIEWS

ROGERS, A. 1992. *Addicted to birds*. Published privately (340 Ninks-road, St Andrews, Victoria, Australia 3761). 217 pages, 85 colour photographs: softback.

Annie Rogers is one of the team that brought us *Banders' Aid* (the Australian Svensson-in-the-making) and continues to obtain much valuable information and enjoyment from ringing. For this, it seems, we have to thank the appalling weather on the Isle of Skye, where every season is the worst for thirty years. Had the climate been more civilised in that part of the world, then perhaps Scotland would have enjoyed the benefit of this enthusiastic family of ringers and birders.

But after sojourns in the drizzly north, in Iran (where they ringed some exciting species in equally exciting circumstances) and Korea, it was to Australia that this wandering clan finally migrated. Here they obviously found their niche, and what had been a keen interest graduated into an obsession. This was not altogether an inevitable progression, given the abundance of snakes and spiders, extremes of heat and the general scarcity of like-minded people (there are only some 500 ringers in the country). But the rich and fascinating birdlife and often spectacular scenery at their ringing sites combined to overcome any reservations. That's not to say that it was all plain sailing, of course. If you ever feel reluctant to forsake your home comforts of an evening and drive for an hour or so to mistnet waders, spare a thought for the team which made a round trip of 10 000 km to catch their Curlew Sandpipers on Eighty Mile Beach in the

northwest of the country. Australia is a big place! Not to mention the somewhat daunting task of counting waders to the tune of 564 000.

As ringers, we all (presumably) enjoy seeing and catching birds. But what is it that sparks this interest, and what keeps the flame burning (with, in some cases, the ferocity of a forest fire)? *Addicted to Birds* is one person's account of the phenomenon. As such, it is as much a book for non-ringers as it is for those already bitten (as it were). Indeed, ringers don't need to be told how and why to catch birds, but for those who have not yet experienced the thrill, this book will give an entertaining and useful insight into the proceedings.

There is also a healthy sprinkling of non-birdy anecdotes. Such as the observation that windscreen wipers in Iran are kept inside the car because those in the normal position invariably get swiped. So at the onset of rain, huge traffic jams result from hundreds of motorists stopping in the middle of the road to re-attach their wipers.

For the ringer, there are descriptions of expeditions and catches from flamingoes to fairy-wrens, pelicans to pardalotes. Of local interest is the account of a Ruff shot in the Caspian (sounds painful) eight days before it was ringed in South Africa – the combined result of a reward for reports of ringed birds and a stringently enforced hunting season.

The book strikes a blow for female emancipation in the almost exclusively male world of ringing and birding. The writer demonstrates that it is quite possible to run a home, raise a family

and, what is most important, ring birds as well. I don't think we are ever told what her husband does for a job, so absorbed is the writer in telling us how many birds they've caught and where and when. Obviously minor inconveniences such as earning a living should not be allowed to interfere with the important things of life.

Addicted to Birds is nicely produced, with pleasant pictures of birds, places and people (although Clive Minton will

have a good deal of explaining to do regarding his costume and posture; pl. 32). It is an easy, light read and will be enjoyed by others who find themselves suffering from the same addiction. You are not alone, but follow the example of Annie Rogers, and the more people you can infect with your interest and enthusiasm, the greater will be the benefit to birds and their conservation.

Liz McMahon and Mike Fraser will

UNDERHILL, L.G., PRŶS-JONES, R.P., DOWSETT, R.J., HERROELEN, P., JOHNSON, D.N., LAWN, M.R., NORMAN, S.C., PEARSON, D.J. & TREE, A.J. The biannual primary moult of Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus* in Europe and Africa. *Ibis* 134: 286-297.

This multi-author work is a fine example of what can be achieved when ornithologists in two continents pool data from 13 countries to provide insight into the moult pattern of a migrant.

The Willow Warbler is the smallest of the long-haul palearctic-African migrants and is very unusual in dropping its primary feathers twice in each annual cycle, once in Europe prior to migration to the south, and again in Africa before undertaking the return trip. In this paper the authors examine the primary moult component of the bird's annual cycle across its western European breeding and African wintering range, quantifying variation in the duration and timing of both the post-nuptial and pre-nuptial moults, and relate their findings to the breeding and migration phenology of the species.

Using techniques previously developed by Underhill, Zucchini and Simmons to estimate primary moult parameters (mean starting date, standard deviation of starting date, and duration) the authors find that mean durations of post-nuptial moult for the two Willow Warbler races *P. t. trochilus* and *P. t. acredula* are 36,5 and 38,3 days respectively, and further, that beginning and end of moult for the nominate race is about 3.5 days later for each degree of latitude northwards, whilst *P. t. acredula* starts and finishes moult some 10 days later than do the most northerly populations of *P. t. trochilus*.

Pre-nuptial moult in Africa takes longer than post-nuptial moult and is completed prior to northward migration.

The authors discuss the evolution of primary moult in the Sylviidae and pose some questions that ringers can answer. One of these is whether the Willow Warbler subspecies that migrates farthest, *P. t. yakutensis*, definitely has two primary moults per year.

Terry Oatley