

Reviews

Studies in the Life History of the Song Sparrow. By Margaret Morse Nice. Dover Publications, New York, 1964. Two volumes: 246 and 328 pages. \$1.75 each.

This latest title in the excellent Dover paperback series deserves a special welcome. A classic monograph on a single species, based on the intensive study of colour-ringed individuals, it has long been admired and quoted, but, as it appeared originally in the *Transactions of the Linnean Society of New York* and has been out of print for years, many modern ornithologists have not found it readily accessible.

The work is in two distinct parts. The first, which was published in 1937, deals with the population aspects of the Song Sparrow—its ecology, weights, migration, territorial behaviour, the relations between the sexes, breeding in all its aspects, and the survival of adults and young. The technique of colour-ringing has now become an essential part of any serious species study, but Mrs. Nice was the first to make use of it on such a scale and it is startling to remember that all this patient detailed work on a small rather drab little bird of suburban Ohio was done when she was a busy housewife,

Six years later she published the second half—a treatise on passerine behaviour, which drew both on her field experience with the Song Sparrow and on her hand-rearing experiments with this and other species. She wrote then that she hoped it would serve as a guide to the study of bird behaviour, showing the general pattern of development and broad outlines to be expected, and, though there have been many developments in this field since, it is still, because of its clarity and exhaustive treatment, stimulating and exciting to read, while it contains, in addition, an invaluable survey of the voluminous literature on passerine behaviour up to that time. Despite the rapid growth in professional ornithology in recent years, there is still ample scope for the keen amateur to advance our knowledge of many species, and these two reasonably priced volumes offer valuable hints on practical techniques and an outline of the problems needing an answer for all species, besides, it is to be hoped, serving as a spur to those with limited time to study the common and often neglected birds close at hand.

STANLEY CRAMP

Bird Taxidermy by James M. Harrison. Percival Marshall, London, 1964. xiv + 67 pages; 8 plates; 15 line-drawings. 10s. 6d. The art of preparing a good bird skin is best taught by practical demonstration, but an intelligent use of this little book should enable the complete novice to produce an acceptable result. Writing with the authority of long experience and an obvious enthusiasm for his subject, Dr. Harrison describes several ingenious instruments of his own devising and gives a wealth of practical tips for simplifying taxidermic procedures.

The author is at pains to point out that he is not advocating indiscriminate collecting. Indeed, the Protection of Birds Act 1954 strictly limits the species which are legally available to the amateur taxidermist. It is perhaps for this reason that Dr. Harrison has chosen wildfowl to illustrate many of the techniques which he describes.

A chapter is devoted to skinning and making up the cured skin; there are helpful line-drawings demonstrating several different methods. The beginner will also find instructions for the sexing of specimens anatomically and a note of the method devised by Dr. Jeffery Harrison for removing viscera for bird diet studies. For the more ambitious there is a chapter dealing with the complicated business of mounting skins and the ancillary tasks of producing cases, artificial habitats and backgrounds.

Dr. Harrison sounds a note of caution on the handling of birds which have been found dead and which may well have suffered from diseases communicable to man. At least as potentially lethal are many of the preparations—detailed in an appendix—which are essential for preserving skins from decay, deterioration and the ravages of a long list of pests. The book includes a glossary of taxidermic terms and a brief bibliography.

If the author appears to suggest, on page 47, that a hard-set egg could be found in the cloaca, this is a small lapse in a book where so much information has had to be compressed into such a sensibly priced volume.

GEORGE SHANNON

ALSO RECEIVED

- Bestänningsguide för Vissa Tättingar.* By Lars Svensson. Grafiska Institutets Press, Stockholm, 1964. Sw. Kr. 10.00.
- Birds.* By Bruce Campbell, R.S.R. Fitter, Guy Mountfort, Kenneth Williamson and others. Paul Hamlyn, London, 1965. 12s. 6d.
- But Hibou Was Special.* By Andrew McNeillie. Country Life, London, 1964. 18s.
- Die Brutvögel in ihren Lebensgebieten.* By Hans Noll. Wepf, Basel, 1965. Swiss Fr. 26.00.
- Flying Free.* By Reidar Brodtkorb. Methuen, London, 1964. 12s. 6d.
- Life Histories of North American Thrushes, Kinglets, and Their Allies.* By Arthur Cleveland Bent. Dover Publications, New York, 1964. \$2.75.
- Life Histories of North American Nuthatches, Wrens, Thrashers and Their Allies.* By Arthur Cleveland Bent. Dover Publications, New York, 1964. \$2.75.
- Paysages Cynégétiques de la République Populaire Roumaine.* A.G.V.P.S., Bucharest, 1964. No price.
- The Birds of Natal and Zululand.* By P. A. Clancey. Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1964. 84s.
- The Way of a Countryman.* By Ian Niall. Country Life, London, 1965. 25s.
- Wings of Light.* Compiled by Garth Christian. Newnes, London, 1965. 35s.

Margaret Morse Nice was an American ethologist and ornithologist best known for her long-term behavioral study of song sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*) and her field studies of North American birds. She was the author of *Studies in the Life History of the Song Sparrow* (1937). Nice devoted her career to the research in the fields of ornithology and psychology. Nice's first paper, which dealt with bobwhites, was published after more than two years of research (starting from 1915). Mostly confined to the house during the following years as her four daughters were born and she tended to them, Nice would not publish any more ornithological research until 1920. Frustrated by her inability to pursue her studies in this field, Nice began studying how her daughters acquired language. Margaret Morse Nice was a pioneering ethologist, bird-bander and ornithologist, who researched animal behavior for fifty years from the 1910s to the 1960s. "Territorial behavior" may be a common term today but, at the time, describing animals from the inside out was a radical departure from the "objective" methods of a dissection table or scientific lab. Seeing the world as animals do is impossible, yet scientists try to do it all the time. A song sparrow in the grasslands of Oregon. John Yunker/Shutterstock.com An ambitious scientist in a male-dominated field By any measure, Nice's career was astoundingly successful. This close observation, describing the territorial "ceremony" of two song sparrows, was made by a little-remembered scientist in the early 20th century. Margaret Morse Nice (December 6, 1883 – June 26, 1974) was an American ornithologist, ethologist, and child psychologist who made an extensive study of the life history of the song sparrow and was author of *Studies in the Life History of the Song Sparrow* (1937). She observed and recorded hierarchies in chicken about three decades ahead of Thorleif Schjelderup-Ebbe who coined the term "pecking order". After her marriage, she made observations on language learning in her children and wrote numerous *Studies in the Life History of the Song Sparrow*; Volume 1: A Population Study of the Song Sparrow Other Passerines and a great selection of related books, art and collectibles available now at AbeBooks.com. Volume 1 of the first re-publication of Margaret Morse Nice's classic 2 volume study of the life history of the song sparrow. This fabulous researcher of bird behavior had been lightly regarded during the early years of the original publication, and the re-publication indicates her rise in appreciation by the (mostly) male scientific community at this (1964) new edition. (pardon my bias) The book is in very good, unused condition, considering that this paperback book's age is 49 year. by Margaret Morse Nice. 0 Ratings. 0 Want to read. 0 Currently reading. 0 Have read. This edition published in 1964 by Dover Publications in New York. Written in English. This edition doesn't have a description yet. Can you add one? Subjects. Song sparrow. Read more. Read less. View 2 Editions. Overview. This Edition. Edition. Availability. 1. *Studies in the life history of the song sparrow*. Volume 1 was first published in 1937 as Volume 4 of the *Transactions of the Linnaean Society of New York*; Volume 2 was first published in 1943 as Volume 6 of the *Transactions of the Linnaean Society of New York*--T.p. verso. "T1219"-"T1220." Other Titles. Population study of the song sparrow., Behavior of the song sparrow and other passerines. Classifications. Dewey Decimal Class.