

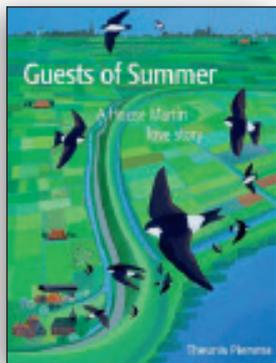
Romancing hirundines

“WHAT probably attracts me most about House Martins, apart from their physical beauty, are the mysteries that surround them.”

So writes the author of this book. Most good bird biologists like to watch their subject from an aesthetic point of view as much as anything else: Theunis Piersma simply loves House Martins. Hence the title. He has encouraged House Martins to recolonise his house after old nests were cleared away, and has studied his own little population for several years.

However, this book also refers to studies in the UK, Africa and elsewhere. It outlines the biology of House Martins in a series of short, simple, delightfully written chapters. It pulls no punches when linking population declines to the well-studied and proven effects of agricultural insecticide sprays, especially modern neocotinoids, abundantly used worldwide and long pronounced ecologically safe by governments, but clearly frighteningly damaging.

The book has been severely



criticised elsewhere for its ‘advice’ on how to care for grounded young Common Swifts: that is a shame, because there are just three pages – an account of an experience with a particular swift that was not handled well – but that was not, I think, meant to be given as advice. It is not clear, however, and it would have been better to omit it.

For the rest, the book is interesting and enjoyable, adapted for a British readership from the Dutch original, published by Bornmeer in 2014. **Rob Hume**

MORE INFO

- *Guests of Summer: a House Martin love story* by Theunis Piersma (BTO Books, Thetford, 2016) (First published by Bornmeer, 2014).
- 117 pages, 29 line drawings.
- ISBN 9789085815709. Hbk, £9.99.

Cuckoo classic

COMPARED with Piersma’s simple paperback with line drawings on House Martin, this is both a much more luxurious hardback book, full of colour and vibrant, remarkable images, and is partly written at a different level of complexity – although much of the text is equally simple, enjoyable and expresses a love of cuckoos!

It is a fascinating account of all things to do with Common Cuckoo and brood parasites in general, including the complex co-evolution of parasite and host. It also has bad news: Common Cuckoo is widespread and successful but, in huge

areas now, its population has crashed to unprecedented low levels across large parts of its European range. It is worrying to read that “The Common Cuckoo is the first habitat generalist whose populations now face massive threats, sending a clear alarm call to conservationists”.

Obviously, it is not conservationists who need to wake up, but governments. Millions of us watch wildlife programmes on TV, we all get the message, but it is people with the power to act who so often seem incapable of understanding or caring. Or perhaps the power to act has become beyond even our governments?

The problem – although compounded by shocking levels of persecution on Mediterranean shorelines – is, as so often,

largely to do with agricultural intensification, creating a landscape that gives us the food we all need, at the expense of all else.

But back to the cuckoos: this book is a classic, and the photography achieves a new level of excellence.

Rob Hume



MORE INFO

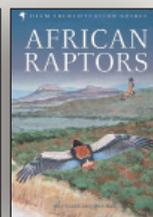
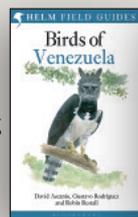
- *The Cuckoo – the uninvited guest* by Oldřich Mikulica, Tomáš Grim, Karl Schulze-Hagen and Bård Gunnar Stokke (Wild Nature Press, Plymouth, 2016).
- 160 pages, 232 colour photographs.
- ISBN 978099556730. Hbk, £21.99.

BOOKSHELF



Heather O’Connor previews several important new field and family guides to be released in the forthcoming year.

LOOKING ahead to some of the exciting new releases planned for this year, we start this month with the latest Helm Field Guide from Bloomsbury Publishing. Possessing the sixth largest national avifauna in the world and a very diverse range of habitats, Venezuela is a desirable destination and the subject of an important new field guide. *Birds of Venezuela* contains everything you would expect from the respected Christopher Helm series; an authoritative text, superb colour plates illustrating more than 1,400 species and detailed colour distribution maps.



Also planned for release later this year by Bloomsbury is the most comprehensive guide to African raptors ever published. Bill Clark’s *African Raptors* treats the amazingly varied raptors of the continent in impressive detail, with an emphasis on their field identification.

As well as Bloomsbury’s other releases – the first instalment of Hadoram Shirihai and Lars Svensson’s *Handbook of Western Palearctic Birds*, Klaus Malling Olsen’s *Gulls of the World: a Photographic Guide* and David Brewer’s *Birds New to Science: 50 Years of Avian Discoveries* – there will also be an impressive new guide from Princeton University Press based on the hugely successful *Collins Bird Guide* format. *The Australian Bird Guide* will feature the very finest specially commissioned illustrations and detailed text from Australia’s top ornithologists, and promises to be the guide all birders visiting Australia will need.

Look out for news of these great new titles over the coming year in the magazine or online at www.birdwatch.co.uk/store, where you can also browse hundreds of titles currently available at our special Bookshop prices. ■



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