Horace Alexander, a fine Quaker and humanist, would not have wanted a monument. But now he has two. The first is his own memoir, *Seventy Years of Birdwatching* (Poyser, 1974), a remarkable record of a lifetime’s interest in birds and bird recording. This new book, beautifully written by Duncan Wood, is a worthy second monument.

I first met Horace Alexander (‘H. G.’) in the late 1940s, when he was President of the Birmingham Bird Club, and renewed that acquaintance in the 1980s in Philadelphia. Duncan Wood, who knew H. G. far better than I, was pioneering, and is well covered in this book. H. G.’s real monument, however, is his work on his local patches (several in England, and in the USA, to which he retired) and his study of distribution. Armed with six-inch Ordnance Survey maps, he was the founder of bird mapping techniques.

Horace Alexander was an extraordinary human being, and a model for all birdwatchers. This splendid book, which includes appendices covering H. G.’s correspondence, extracts from his field notebooks, and his bird drawings, allows us all to share in a remarkable life.

*Michael Thomas*

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**HORACE ALEXANDER: 1889 TO 1989. BIRDS AND BINOCULARS.**


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**BIRDS BY BEHAVIOUR**


To quote from the introductory pages: *Birds by Behaviour* differs from other field guides in one very important respect. It ditches all discussion of plumage and plumage patterns and concentrates instead on shape, behaviour and ecology. In other words, this guide deals with jizz.

The captions and annotations to the copious all-colour paintings form the entire text. Not only are there no plumage details, but there are no distribution maps, and no mention of voice. *Birds by Behaviour* is, therefore, not a primary identification guide, but rather a companion to a more traditional field guide. The user is advised in the introduction to ‘check the plates carefully to find out all the information given for a particular bird. Many of the plates are very “busy”, meaning that some notes

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Water Pipits *Anthus spinoletta*, Willow Tits *Parus montanus* and the genus *Phylloscopus* was pioneering, and is well covered in this book. H. G.’s real monument, however, is his work on his local patches (several in England, and in the USA, to which he retired) and his study of distribution. Armed with six-inch Ordnance Survey maps, he was the founder of bird mapping techniques.

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*Michael Thomas*
can be fairly hidden away in all corners of the page.' This sums up the main drawback: you have to check the whole page carefully, as information on the same species can occur in several different captions and, unless you know your birds in the first place, it is sometimes difficult to associate the caption with the correct illustration.

Moreover, the only way to find all the information on a bird is to use the index, as a species may occur in more than one place in the book. Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*, for example, appears under ‘Larks, pipits and other small brown birds’, ‘Seed-eating bird families’, ‘Larks: song flights and habitats’ and ‘Larks: other larks’, while Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* appears on six different pages, and Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* on no fewer than eight pages! There are also 12 ‘General comparison’ pages, e.g. ‘Birds swimming on the sea’, ‘Birds flying over the sea’, and ‘Aerial birds’; these are scattered throughout the book so are not easy to find.

Nevertheless, given the subjective nature of the jizz approach, much of the text is, in fact, very good, and captures succinctly the feeling of a species, e.g. Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* is ‘pointed at all angles.’ The illustrations, too, are mostly useful and pleasing, varying in quality from excellent to average. It is unfortunate that none of the illustrations are attributed to artist, so we are left to guess which of the five artists – a mixture of well- and lesser-known names – painted what.

I looked out my copy of *Birds by Character: the field guide to jizz identification* (by Rob Hume, illustrated by Ian Wallace, Darren Rees, John Busby and Peter Partington; Papermac, 1990), which covers the same subject, but in a different format. I was impressed fresh by how good it is! Not only is all the information on each species presented together, with two or three species per page, but the illustrations are all excellent, and the text laid out as a series of bullet points which time and again capture the essence of a species. For me, *Birds by Behaviour* suffers by comparison with *Birds by Character*.

There is undoubtedly a good idea here, but I feel the end result is not entirely successful. Perhaps it is overambitious and tries to cover too much ground by including all the breeding birds of Europe east to European Russia and most regular visitors. Stripped down to a guide covering just garden birds and commoner species, and reorganised to allow better retrieval, it could be excellent for the popular market.  

*Ian Dawson*
FLIGHT IDENTIFICATION OF EUROPEAN SEABIRDS

I borrowed Anthony McGeehan’s copy of Sjöfågelboken: fältbestämning av sträckande sjöfåglar a few years ago, and he was lucky to get it back! Written in Swedish, it is an excellent collection of black-and-white photographs of seabirds in flight, and a great resource. Bertil Breif and Niklas Holmström were two of its authors, and now they have teamed up with Anders Blomdahl to produce the successor to that book, this time with colour photographs and written in English. Having coveted the first book, I certainly looked forward to the second.

The book has a soft, laminated cover designed for use in the field, although I would be too scared of getting the pages wet to take it out. It covers the expected divers Gavia, grebes (Podicipedidae), tubenoses and allies (Procellaridae), gannets ( Sulidae), cormorants (Phalacrocoracidae), skuas (Stercorariidae), gulls ( Laridae), terns (Sternae) and auks (Alcidae). It differs from those other two seabird photographic guides, Photographic Handbook of the Seabirds of the World (Eenticott & Tipling 1997) and Seabirds of the World: A Photographic Guide (Harrison 1987) in that wildfowl (Anatidae) are also covered in detail.

A helpful introduction includes basic aspects of identifying seabirds and a very useful table of seawatching sites across western Europe. Each group of species is preceded by a general overview of the key features of the group, while each species account is subdivided into several sections including size, silhouette, flight and flocking, plumage, and – where relevant – subspecies. The text is accompanied by a variety of flight shots illustrating various aspects of the birds’ appearance.

Seawatching is a unique discipline. Precise plumage details often take second place behind jizz, subjective impressions and briefly seen plumage ‘clues’. The tricky issues involved are well played out in, for example, the account of a possible Herald Petrel Pterodroma arminjoniana off Dungeness, Kent (Brit. Birds 95: 156-165). So how well does this book communicate these things?

The initial impression is of a fantastic collection of colour photographs, especially of wildfowl in flight. The text is fairly simple and full of information, with quite a few hints and tips which were new to me. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of seabirds which the authors possess is clear throughout. I decided quickly that this would be a useful reference book. My particular favourites are the information on flock shapes and individual silhouettes of the wildfowl, and the photos of the ‘darker’-rumped Leach’s Storm-petrel Oceanodroma leucorhoa and the flock of first-summer Ross’s Gulls Rhodostethia rosea.

Having said all that, I was ultimately a little disappointed. I wonder if many will miss the vital tips because they are buried away in the text. Moreover, photographs alone cannot convey the unique skills which seawatchers typically develop and have to sharpen continually. Take, for example, Sabine’s Gulls Larus sabini. The quickest way to pick them up is on their (almost) unique flight action, most often confused with Arctic Tern Sterna paradisaea. Rudimentary ageing of Sabine’s Gulls for me is: white collar = adults... no white collar and shorter-looking tails = juveniles. The rest is usually irrelevant unless the birds are very close. I had hoped for something like a series of vivid sketches to illustrate flight action, flight path and the little plumage clues which are just visible at long range, along with pointers and a short, pithy text. I could easily imagine a similar treatment for the skuas and the Pterodroma petrels. It is extremely difficult to convey in photographs alone the ‘seawatch experience’ and appearance of these birds. I wondered why some species – such as Bar-headed Anser indicus and Egyptian Geese A. aegyptiacus – were included. Pacific Diver G. pacifica is covered as a possible vagrant, but who would claim one on a European seawatch? Yet more pertinent vagrants, such as Capped P. hasitata and Herald Petrels, Yellow-nosed Thalassarche chlororhynchos and Wandering Albatrosses Diomedea exulans, are missing, and there is nothing at all on that prized seabird, the Grey Phalarope Phalaropus fulicarius.

This could have been an opportunity to be at the forefront of new identification challenges such as Cory’s Calonectris diomedea versus ‘Scopoli’s’ Shearwater C. d. borealis and the tricky black-and-white shearwaters. So a comment is made on the characteristic ‘head-lifting’ of Little Shearwater Puffinus assimilis, when in fact it is also a normal feature of Levantine Shearwater P. yelkouan (and illustrated in the published photos!). The photographs are mostly helpfully and accurately labelled, though the ‘first-calendar-year’ L. michaellis from Romania is, in fact, a first-year L. cachinnans.

So, we do not yet have the definitive European seabird guide. Nevertheless, I do want to emphasise that this is a great collection of photos with a useful text, and is a resource well worth having.

Martin Garner
Company Shell commissioned 81 paintings to appear in James Fisher’s scholarly *tour de force*, the classically misnamed *Shell Book of Birds* (1966). In the end, they only used 48 of the complete set and these appear at a size little bigger than a large postage stamp, with terrible colour reproduction. The present volume has brought them all together for the first time, at or close to their original size. They are a beautiful sample of the master’s work when Ennion was, in the words of Robert Gillmor’s introductory essay, ‘at the height of his powers as an artist’.

While they are representative of his talent, they are not – even his most ardent admirer must acknowledge – his best work. To use a somewhat elevated comparison, Ennion was the Leonardo da Vinci of bird art – a multi-talented man tempted from his main calling by a crowd of other interests. In his long life he was a founder of the Field Studies Council’s centre at Flatford Mill, the warden of a bird observatory, a keen ringer, a student of bird migration, an art teacher and a writer. Fortunately, this book reflects the other sides of Ennion by pulling together a selection of his articles from the 1950s and 60s. As with other bird painters, the laser-eye and sense of overall design were easily transferred to the written word and he produced natural-history essays of great insight and originality. The new book therefore delivers a double helping of the great man’s gifts, and I would heartily recommend it both to long-time admirers and to any who may never even have heard of him.

*Mark Cocker*

**Reviews**

**ERIC ENNION: A LIFE OF BIRDS**

Love him or hate him – and sadly some still doubt his great talent – Eric Ennion was one of the true originals of twentieth-century bird art. His particular genius was for capturing the free movement, dynamism and individuality of his subjects. As in real life, they are always doing something, which makes his paintings the antithesis of field guide plates: the birds are as they are, not as they should be.

Some people will have encountered his work only in the worst of all contexts. In the 1960s, the oil

**A CONCISE HISTORY OF ORNITHOLOGY**

This deceptively slim book contains about 95,000 words on the lives and works of the founding figures of ornithology. Over 350 people from all the continents are credited with some part in the development of the science and many of the 60 or so major contributors feature in 90 fascinating black-and-white illustrations. The bibliography lists about 450 references, dated from 500 BC to AD 2000. The appendices present 30 systematic orders constructed during the long ascent to an intelligent classification of birds.

Having recently become fascinated by the progenitors of my chosen hobby-cum-science, I opened the book with great expectation but, about 40 pages in, I faltered. The interruption to my enjoyment and learning was no fault of the author; it was entirely due to the small typeface used. This has allowed 800 words per page, but no easy track from line to line. I solved the problem by changing up to my painting glasses and ploughed on.

As the passages on early British ornithologists came and went, I felt some disappointment at the often brief treatment (or exclusion) of personal heroes, but full compensation for this came in a growing understanding of the contributions of the ornithologists of other countries. Some sense of the international web of ancient ornithology is available in other histories but, laudably, Michael Walters has defined many more linking strands. I read on with renewed interest, relishing particularly the occasional tales and snippets of verbatim exchanges.

Actually, I could have done with more of these to lighten what was increasingly apparent as the book’s main theme, the ‘critical path’ of avian systematics, also exhibited in the appendices but there with virtually no explanatory comment.

Having disclaimed any personal attempt to discuss its more recent developments, the author (or publisher?) nevertheless asked John Coulson to add a chapter on the ornithology of the twentieth century. In this, I found some fuller recognition of the diversification of its current disciplines, and even some asides on birdwatchers and their politics, but the abrupt change of style made for an awkward ending. People became many fewer; subjects radiated. I longed for some last resolving comments on the whole saga, but there was none.

In the case of the loyal *BB* reader and like souls, aged 50 years and counting, I recommend that this book goes straight onto their historical shelf. I also wish for it to catch the attention of those who watch birds through the current tunnels of attention, but sadly, somehow I doubt that it will.

*D. I. M. Wallace*
Horace Alexander is best known among Quakers for his work as a peacemaker. This book deals with his other major interest, the study of birds, in which he was already engaged as a teenager at the beginning of the 20th century. Most of our wonderful lectures and presentations are streamed live over the internet. We also record them for those who are unable to watch the live session. To view upcoming (live stream) and past (recorded) events on your computer, tablet, or smartphone, click on the button below. Horace Gundry Alexander (July 30, 1889 - September 30, 1989) was an English Quaker teacher and writer, pacifist and ornithologist. He was the brother of Wilfred Backhouse Alexander. Alexander was a life-long dedicated and gifted birdwatcher, keenly involved in the twentieth century movements for the protection and observation of birds. Alexander lived in England for most of his life but made his home in the USA for his later years. A Quaker and pacifist, he had a close friendship with Gandhi, and in 1984 was awarded the Padma Bhushan medal, the highest honour given to a non-Indian civilian. J. Duncan Wood - Horace Alexander: Birds and Binoculars ISBN 1850722897.

Horace Gundry Alexander (18 April 1889 – 30 September 1989) was a British Quaker teacher and writer, pacifist and ornithologist. In 1914 the First World War broke out, and he served as secretary on various anti-war committees. In 1916, as a conscientious objector, he was initially exempted only from combatant military service, but after two levels of appeal he was exempted on condition of teaching, which he took up via General Service with the Friends' Ambulance Unit: posts at Sibford School, Warwick School and Cranbrook School, Kent. By using Geni you agree to our use of cookies as identifiers and for other features of the site as described on our Privacy page. Disallow third-party cookies.