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**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORY OF
NORTH AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY**

By William E. Davis, Jr and Jerome A. Jackson (Eds)
1995. Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, No. 12.
501 pp., many black-and-white photographs. Hard cover.
US\$50

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORY OF NORTH
AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY. VOLUME II**

By William E. Davis, Jr and Jerome A. Jackson (Eds)
2000. Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, No. 13.
401 pp., many black-and-white photographs. Hard cover.
US\$50

The history of ornithology from different parts of the world is a fascinating and complex subject. Books on the subject have appeared infrequently and the coverage has been restricted. For a long time, the major work was 'A History of Australian Ornithology 1618–1850' from H. M. Whittell's *The Literature of Australian Birds* (1954). The subject has been augmented considerably by the recent publication of Libby Robyn's *The Flight of the Emu* (2001). Several books dealing with North American ornithology have also appeared in recent years, such as Mark Barrow's *A Passion for Birds* (1998). It is similar to *The Flight of the Emu* in its presentation by adopting the approach of focusing on major themes, built around a more or less chronological, episodic development. In contrast, the two volumes edited by Davis and Jackson have chosen a different format. Instead of the roughly sequential approach, these comprise a series of essays on particular, well-circumscribed topics. In most chapters the subjects are organisations (museums, forest service, wildlife service, ornithological association), but there are also sections devoted to geographic areas and other themes. Volume I contains 16 contributions from 20 authors, and Volume II, 10 chapters by 13 authors. Although there is a diversity in the coverage, it is dominated by museums, 14 from the United States and two from Canada, including many of the largest and best known institutions, such as the American Museum of Natural History, the United States National Museum of Natural History, the Academy of Natural Sciences and the Royal Ontario Museum. There are also accounts of the US Forest Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service and the famous Hawk Mountain Observatory. The remaining chapters are more eclectic: two ornithological associations, regional histories of ornithology in Canada and in Nebraska; a biography of the influential ornithologist, Alexander Wilson; the development of North American avian biogeography; and an extensive, annotated presentation on the literature of North American ornithology.

The chapters have been written by people intimately involved with the topics, usually by being employed at the organisation or in the field in question, and frequently knowing or having known many of the principal figures that

feature in the text. This provides aspects of events that do not appear in formal presentations of research results, as well as details and insights unlikely to be found in more general, broad-brush historical coverages. Because multiple authors are involved, there is variation in the approaches to the topics, the aspects that are emphasised and the manners in which these are presented. Most chapters summarise the history, workers and major contributions of the institution under discussion and several expand on the areas of research emphasis and collection strengths. Some authors have been rather straightforward in their approaches, while others have augmented their narratives with anecdotes and more detailed biographical notes.

Although the topics are strongly North American in scope, there is much here to interest readers from this part of the world. The emergence of ornithology as a profession has a local relevance, while the situation there makes an interesting contrast with that in Australia, with its far more limited number of workers, institutions and professional associations. The glimpses into the personalities of the people responsible for the organisations and collections are particularly interesting, showing both the similarities and differences across the range of people who entered the field and their institutional approaches. It is intriguing to meet the people who have named many species or for whom species have been named, and the photographs of these pioneering ornithologists in the field and lab, suggesting that some early undertakings were not for the faint-hearted. Among the museums discussed are several of special relevance to the Australasian region. The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, houses many of John Gould's Australian specimens. The American Museum of Natural History has the extensive Australian collection of Gregory Mathews, as well as those originating from the Archbold and Whitney expeditions to New Guinea and the southwest Pacific, respectively; it was also the working place of Ernst Mayr, who contributed so much to the ornithology of this region.

The approach of these historical contributions nicely complements Barrow's more chronological work. They have not exhausted the topic, leaving considerable scope for further volumes on North America. Likewise, a similar volume of this type could be usefully compiled for Australasia. It would fit very nicely on the shelf next to *The Flight of the Emu*.

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