

## Reviews

**An Australian Animal Book.**—The Director of one of our museums has stated that "Charles Barrett has done more to popularise natural history than any other person in Australia," and, although there may be other aspirants who would not agree, a reasoned consideration of the matter will leave no doubt of that truth. Mr. Barrett's books have not been claimed by him as scientific treatises, but they are pleasant reading and interesting to the public. *An Australian Animal Book* well exemplifies this statement. There are 374 pages, of which 177 are devoted to birds, 17 pages of colour and 48 of half-tone plates.

This review note deals with the bird portion only. There are occasional matters where the author has overlooked recent papers, for, in referring to the Noisy Scrub-bird, he says "all the few extant specimens . . . are males," and he confines the Carter Desert-bird to its 'original' range and does not mention the recently-recorded extension into Queensland. And a few scientific names—bane of operators and proof-readers—have gone unchecked. But these are items for passing reference only, and do not detract from the general attractiveness of the publication. The text is representative, and offers the salient points of the story of Australia's birds, with many an intriguing fact to interest the man in the street. The author has not endeavoured to give the impression that he is the only birdman in the field, and refers to numerous notes from other observers, including, we are pleased to see, Belcher, whose admirable field-notes are too often ignored. On the other hand Mr. Barrett's own wide travels have enabled him to include many of his own interesting records and the combination results in a well-balanced whole.—C.E.B.

**Correlation of Bill and Foot Colouring with Age and Season in the Black Duck.**—Terence M. Shortt, in an article titled as above and published in *The Wilson Bulletin* (vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 3-7, col. pl.), throws new light on a subject that has provoked lively discussion over many years among American ornithologists and game shooters—that is whether or not there are two geographical races of the Black Duck—a red-legged race (*Anas rubripes rubripes*) and a green-legged one (*A. r. tristis*). Shortt points out that the significance of the colour variation has been obscured by the difficulty in reliably identifying juveniles and adults. He outlines indicators whereby reliable identification can be effected, and, from a series of freshly-collected specimens, shows that "the foot and bill colors of adult and juvenile birds agrees entirely with the respective characteristics attributed to the supposed races." A coloured plate (by the author) showing bill and foot colouring for both sexes, through three juvenile stages to adult breeding and eclipse stages, sets a diagnostic example of illustration that should be more frequently followed.

The bill colouring of the American Black Duck is apparently a reliable indication of sex, as the bill of the female is blotched and spotted to a marked degree compared with the male. I have frequently noticed that with the Australian Black Duck many birds have clear olive-coloured bills without any spots, whilst others are well blotched. This characteristic may prove to be a useful field guide to sex of *Anas superciliosa*; behaviour and voice are the only other field indications available at present.—J.J.

**Spiders and Birds.**—Under the title 'Vertebrates captured by Australian Spiders' (*Proc. Roy. Soc. N.S.W.*, 1942-43, Aug. 25, pp. 17-30), Keith C. McKeown amplifies and extends his paper in *The Emu*, vol. xxxix, pp. 111-124), and deals also with instances of mammals (mice, bats), reptiles, fish and crustacea taken by spiders.

The bird examples cover an early *Emu* account of a chicken killed by a ground spider (*Selenotypus*), a White-fronted Chat captured by

a trap-door spider (*Aganippe subtristis*), P. A. Gilbert's record of a Rufous Fantail enmeshed in a web of (probably) *Epeira productus* (*Emu*, vol. xxxv, p. 24), a swallow (? *Hirundo neoxena*) similarly caught, a young domestic turkey the leg of which was securely gripped in a tunnel of a trap-door spider, and a Brown Thornbill snared and dead in a *Nephila* web.

A letter by W. S. Macleay in the *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* (1842, vol. VIII, pp. 324-5) denying that he (Macleay) had retracted his disbelief in Merian's account dealing with the capture of birds by *Mygale*, but limiting the retraction to his expressed disbelief in the existence of any bird-catching spider, is included.—C.E.B.

**The Family Prionopidae.**—Prionopidae as a family name does not figure in the current R.A.O.U. *Checklist*, but it is familiar in the older books on Australian birds as the family grouping for the Magpie-Lark and Shrike-Thrushes—birds first placed there by Bowdler Sharpe in volume III of the *Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum*. Mathews still retains the name for the latter group. In a recent note by Dr. Ernst Mayr ('What Genera belong to the Family Prionopidae?,' *Ibis*, 1943, pp. 216-218) the status of this family is examined and he considers that at best only two genera of African birds can now be allocated to it. Of the former Australian components of the Prionopidae Mayr considers that *Grallina* certainly deserves the family rank which was given to it in the R.A.O.U. *Checklist*, and that *Colluricincla* and *Myiolestes* are members of the subfamily Pachycephalinae of the family Muscicapidae. With regard to the problem of the taxonomic placing of difficult genera, Mayr appeals to field naturalists "to conduct comparative behaviour studies and to pay increased attention to the habits of birds which belong to genera of uncertain taxonomic status."—D.L.S.

**Subspecific Races of the Black Duck.**—Dean Amadon, using specimens collected during the Whitney South Sea Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History, has published, in the *American Museum Novitates* (no. 1237), 'A Revision of *Anas superciliosa*.' In all 273 specimens were examined. He recognizes three races: *A. superciliosa superciliosa* Gmelin—New Zealand and adjacent islands; *A. s. rogersi* Mathews—Australia, Tasmania, Louisiade Archipelago, Vogelkop and southern coast of New Guinea, Moluccas, Celebes, Lesser Sunda Islands, Java, Sumatra; *A. s. pelewensis* Hartlaub and Finsch—Pelew Islands eastward to northern lowlands of New Guinea, Bismarck Archipelago, Solomons, New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Fiji Islands, eastward to Society and Austral Islands. *A. s. perena* Riley, a race recognized by other taxonomists (in particular J. C. Phillips and J. L. Peters), has been merged into *A. s. rogersi*. Amadon comments that sexual differences in colour of *Anas superciliosa* are restricted to the elongated inner secondaries; "in females these (always?) have buffy longitudinal streaks in addition to narrow buffy margins." However, in worn plumage the streaks disappear.—J.J.

**Western Australian Sea-birds.**—An annotated list of marine birds washed ashore on the beaches near Perth is given by L. Glauert, Curator of the Western Australian Museum in a paper, 'The Ocean Birds of Perth Beaches,' *Journ. Roy. Soc. W.A.*, vol. xxvii, 1943, pp. 219-228. An interesting record, that of the Pomarine Skua, *Stercorarius pomarinus*, not hitherto known from Western Australia, is based on sight observations by the author in Gages Roads, between Fremantle and Rottneest.—D.L.S.