If, however, E. P. Ramsay did not leave any standard publication, it remains true that his broad knowledge, his collecting zeal, and his extensive correspondence made him a dominating figure in Australian zoology, and particularly ornithology, during almost 30 years.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Nenagh, Milson Road, Cremorne Point, N.S.W.

# Reviews

**The Sea Swallow.** Under this title the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society publishes its annual report, a well-printed journal that is growing in size and importance year by year. Formed originally to stimulate an interest in sea birds amongst Royal Navy personnel, the RNBWS now has, in addition, many experienced observers in the merchant and fishing fleets and enjoys a unique potential for gathering and co-ordinating distributional data, both specific and quantitative, from all the oceans.

The various report sheets used by observers are designed to ensure accuracy, and considerable cross-checking through correspondence is often undertaken to establish the validity of unusual records. A systematic analysis of these reports, expertly prepared by Dr W. R. P. Bourne, appears under specific headings in *Sea Swallow*, together with his informative comments on field identification. This last aspect is, naturally enough, given due prominence and field characteristics, including flight and behaviour, are inevitably becoming more reliable as a result of accumulated experience. All sightings are precisely located geographically.

Contributions from eminent ornithologists often enhance the report, e.g. Dr. E. G. Franz Sauer's "Star Navigation of Nocturnal Migrating Birds" and Dr Bourne's "Petrels of the Indian Ocean" is an excellent comprehensive summary containing much new information. In publishing the ocean reports however *Sea Swallow* probably performs its most important function and it is up to those interested in a particular area or species to extract that which is relevant. In the most recent issue, Vol. 16 published March 1964, references to Australian waters include May reports of concentrations of Black-browed Albatrosses between Sydney and Melbourne, Shy Albatrosses off Cape Everard and Cape Howe, a Yellow-nosed Albatross off Sydney and a Grey-headed Albatross and Pomarine Skua outside Port Phillip Bay, prions (probably *P. turtur*) from Cape Howe to Bermagui, Great-winged Petrels (over 500 in two hours) east of Evans Head, White-headed Petrels 70 miles off Sydney, a Brown-headed Petrel and five Wilson's Storm-petrels 40 miles off Evans Head.

*Sea Swallow* is taking its place amongst the recognized regional journals as a source of avian data for the world's oceans which still remain, in many respects, the "dark continent" of ornithology.—J. D. GIBSON.

**The Taxonomy of Australian Owls.**—It was a fortunate day when G. F. Mees was appointed to the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee and assigned the owls, for it has resulted in 'A revision of the Australian owls (Strigidae and Tytonidae)' (*Zool. Verh.*, no. 65, 62 pp. + pl., Leiden, 1964). In preparing this valuable work, Mees examined most of the material in Australian collections and many series in overseas museums. The subspecific characters, distribution (amplified with excellent spot-maps), and material examined, are listed for each Australian taxon and also for extralimital races of *Ninox rufa*, *N. novaeseelandiae*, *N. connivens*, and *Tyto tenebricosa*.

Five races are recognized in *N. rufa*, three of them Australian, including the newly described *marginata*, which is confined to the rain forests of northeast Queensland south to Cardwell, and is separated by a small gap from the unique *queenslandica* of Mackay, and by a much larger gap from the nominate race of far northern Western Australia and the Northern Territory. *Ninox strenua* which replaces *N. rufa* in southeastern Australia is undivided.

*Ninox novaeseelandiae* is split into sixteen races of which the following

are Australian: *melvillensis* (Melville Island), *halmaturina* (Kangaroo Island), *leucopsis* (breeding in Tasmania and migrating to Victoria and New South Wales), *rufiventer* (southwestern Australia, north to North West Cape and east to Kalgoorlie), *boobook* (southeastern Australia, west to Spencer Gulf and north to Mackay), *lurida* (forests of northeast Queensland), and *ocellata* (the remainder of the Australian continent, i.e. most of the north and centre, and the western parts of South Australia). Like previous workers, Mees has had much difficulty in delimiting the continental races; and his arrangement, which differs considerably from Mayr's (*Emu* **43**: 12-17), will doubtless prove no more durable. Species whose distribution is continuous and variation is clinal do not lend themselves to trinomial classification; moreover the Boobook Owl is subject to much individual variation, well depicted in the fine coloured plate by Olive Seymour of two birds from Tambrey in the northwest of Western Australia.

Three of the five races of *Ninox connivens* are Australian: *connivens* in southwestern Australia (north to Perth and east to the vicinity of the Stirling Range) and from Adelaide east and north to Inkerman, Queensland, north and west of which it intergrades respectively with *peninsularis* of Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait islands and with *occidentalis* of northern Australia between the Ashburton and Leichardt Rivers.

All Australian populations of *Tyto alba* are placed under *delicatula*. The Barn Owl shows a decided preference for more arid and lightly wooded habitats than those of the Masked Owl.

The Australian populations of *Tyto novaehollandiae* are grouped in five races: *castanops* (Tasmania), *novaehollandiae* (southern Australia from Perth to Rockhampton), *galei* (Cape York Peninsula), *melvillensis* (Melville Island), and *kimberli* (the remainder of northern Australia, from west Kimberley to Mackay). There are no records of this species from the greater part of the interior or from the arid west coast.

Despite its enormous range from southern Africa through southeastern Asia to Australia, *Tyto longimembris* is extremely rare in collections. All but two of the Australian records are from near the east coast (Torres Strait to Melbourne); the others are from the Victoria River (N.T.) and Cranbrook (W.A.). Previously known as *T. l. walleri*, the Australian birds are lumped by Mees with the nominate race of Asia. The African race must be called *T. l. punctata* because *Strix capensis* Smith is a junior homonym of *Strix bubo capensis* Daudin.

*Tyto tenebricosa* of New Guinea and eastern Australia is divided into three races, including *tenebricosa* (from South-central Victoria to southeast Queensland) and *multipunctata* (northeast Queensland, from Cooktown to Cardwell).—G. M. Storr.

**Taxonomic notes on Western Australian birds.**—In a short paper, 'Geographic variation and distribution of some birds from Western Australia' (*J. Roy. Soc. West. Aust.* **47**: 91-96, 1964), G. F. Mees discusses ten species of passerine birds. Briefly his findings are that (1) some individuals of *Coracina novaehollandiae melanops* winter within the range of *C. n. subpallida*; (2) *Acrocephalus stentoreus carterae* Mathews is probably a synonym of *A. s. gouldi*, which itself needs confirmation; (3) *Pachycephala pectoralis* extends inland in southwestern Australia almost to Coolgardie (a map gives location of inland records); (4) *Pachycephala lanioides bulleri* Mayr is a synonym of *P. l. carnarvoni* Mathews; (5) *P. l. fretorum* De Vis is separable from nominate *lanioides* by its slightly smaller size; (6) *Colluricincla brunnea julietae* Mathews, though based on a single specimen, seems to be a valid subspecies of *C. harmonica* (in which Mees would merge *C. brunnea* and *C. rufiventris*); (7) *Melithreptus lunatus whitlocki* Mathews is a synonym of *M. l. chloropsis*, the only race occurring in Western Australia (8) *Meliphaga virescens lewisi* Mathews is a synonym of *M. v. forresti*; (9) *Meliphaga leucotis novaenorciae* Milligan can be used for southwest Australian birds, which are slightly smaller than nominate *leucotis* of eastern Australia; (10) *Artamus cyanopterus* is indivisible into subspecies (the grounds used by Keast and others when setting up *A. c. perthi* are invalid); (11) the extension of *Cracticus n. nigrogularis* into the extreme southwest of the Kimberley Division is probably recent.—G. M. Storr.