

BOOKS, AND PAPERS LITERARY NOTES

Edited by ALLAN MCEVEY

Reviews

Books

A Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand by R. A. Falla, R. B. Sibson and E. G. Turbott, for the Ornithological Soc. of N.Z. Inc., 1966. Collins, Lond., Pp. 254, 17 colour plates, numerous line drawings by Chloe Talbot Kelly, 7 1/2" x 5", 45/- (N.Z.).

New Zealand now joins that select group of regions that can boast a Collins Field Guide. In all about 275 species or forms are described under the headings description, voice, habitat and range, and breeding. This is bird lore *par excellence*, for the book goes far beyond the scope of the usual field guide and is highly informative. Under silvereye for instance we may read a condensed history of the arrival of the birds in N.Z. and subsequent spread throughout the country, their food and behaviour. Under bellbird we read "food is the same as the tui-insects, fruit and nectar". The text now goes on to describe in "handbook" style its feeding habits, with no fewer than 12 lines on the sources of the honey and fruits it eats. The little whimbrel is said to be "a very rare visitor to N.Z." which for a field guide is all you would expect, but there follows "which has been reported from Lake Ellesmere at scattered intervals since 1900 and at Farewell Spit in 1961, and four times from the North Island, Napier 1952; Manakau, Firth of Thames. Himintangi, 1964". Such actual records are given for a great many species and must be regarded as arising from the editor's predilection for waders.

The illustrations are excellent and birds are portrayed in life-like attitudes. Particularly striking are the line drawings of the kiwis, harrier and fantail (but hardly the skua!), the tui in colour and of course the penguin heads.

However, everything one writes cannot be favourable. The valuable detail brings its own problems; much is already out of date, and resetting of type will be considerable as new editions are envisaged. In any critical assessment one must inevitably express disappointment that the book does not give the real assistance that a field guide ought to give. As there is no key one needs to know what families to seek; or, with petrels what genus. One is not told for example how to distinguish between *Pachyptila*, *Puffinus*, and *Pterodroma* to narrow the search. Many important points are overlooked. The description for skylark includes "whitish eye-stripe" and "outer tail feathers pure white" two of the characters of the pipit with never a mention that these species could be confused. Useful comparisons of plumage differences are given for the red-billed and black-billed gulls but the generally thinner looking bill and flatter head of the black-billed are ignored, although these are what one first looks for in a mixed roosting flock.

Quite the most glaring fault however, is the ridiculous treatment of the (introduced) game birds. If one were to see a plump bird with a prominent "V" on its breast, how could one know it may be a chukor? Certainly not by reference to this "field guide". Nine species are listed in 27 lines and no descriptions are given at all. What if these birds are bred in game farms for liberation? So are mallard ducks, given 61 lines. Countless thousands are completely feral all over the country and have much more claim to inclusion than say the hundred or two takahe surviving in the Fiordland fastness where they will never be seen by amateur ornithologists without a hard-to-get entry permit.

There is much evidence of lack of liaison between the authors and this is evident not only in the unevenness of treatment but in the easily found errors. The "shag" of plate 9 is presumably the bronze phase of the Stewart Island shag: the pied shag of plate 8 does not show the diagnostic black flanks, nor unfortunately does the text emphasize this feature. The sex symbols are reversed in plate 15 (black teal). Under brown kiwi we read "there is a sex difference in size (all three species)". Does this mean the

three subspecies of the brown kiwi, or does it really mean the three species of kiwi? If so, this should surely be mentioned not under only one of the species but in the preamble to the kiwi family—or each species. For simplicity the authors have in general used binomials, using the subspecific name as a specific name for “strong” races. This is contrary to the O.S.N.Z. Checklist procedure and can only cause confusion. Hence we find the North and South Island tomtits submerged as one species whereas the North and South Island “bush canaries” are described separately as full species. And yet we have the blue penguin described as three unnamed subspecies, one for the first time in a definitive work. The diagram of penguin under-flippers is useful but it is an anomaly to show the two subspecies of *Eudyptes crestatus* when they are not mentioned in the text.

Despite the foregoing, one must rate the field guide very highly indeed even if the title is to some extent a misnomer. It is written in a scholarly and pleasing manner and can be read with enjoyment from cover to cover—particularly the preamble to each family. It is obviously a necessity for any student of Australasian birds and its undoubted future impact on the area's ornithology is the justification for this critique.—J. M. CUNNINGHAM (Not in R.A.O.U. Lib.).

The Birds of Kentucky by Robert Mengel, 1965. Ornithological Monographs No. 3. The American Ornithologists Union. Pp. 581, 43 text figs, 4 col. plates. Price \$10.00. This is a most attractively produced contribution giving very detailed information of the occurrence of 296 species (including 153 breeding forms) that have been recorded for the “40,000 odd square miles” covered by the State of Kentucky, from earliest times to December, 1960. Although above all else a “local avifauna” or “state book”, the monograph considers many topics of general interest. For instance, the Introduction includes a discussion and definitions of terms used to denote manner of occurrence, e.g., “resident”, “transient”, “vagrant”, “visitant”, as well as other terms which consider the “conspicuousness” and “spatial requirements” of the species, such as “abundant”, “common”, “rare”, “casual” and “uncommon”, with reference to numbers recorded per unit area of available habitat. Thus “a species may be common in an area in a valid ecological sense, but still present there in very small numbers because of restricted habitat”. There are many Australian examples of this: to name one, the Western Whipbird, *Psophodes nigrogularis*, which has been declared “rare” by an Act of Parliament in South Australia, but can only be regarded as “fairly common” where it survives in its chosen habitat near Port Lincoln and on Kangaroo Island in that State.

In addition to very detailed appraisals of the environment and bird distribution, which are subjects that will appeal to the general reader as much as the Kentucky ornithologist, there is an important discussion on geographic variation in breeding birds.

Variation in birds in the eastern United States (including Kentucky) tends “in large part to be clinal”. The trends are from paler, less intense coloration in the north to darker in the south with a corresponding trend from large to small size. There are a few east-west clines in which usually a decrease in saturation of colour occurs towards the west. Because of the absence of effective isolating areas and uniformity of vegetation and climate, the author concludes that “the picture of geographic variation in birds in Kentucky is one of very slight and gradual change in populations from one region to another, with a scarcity of discontinuity or areas of accelerated change”. He questions the validity of some local subspecific taxonomy and points out that “there can be no zone of intergradation (as might be expected between subspecies—H.T.C.), properly speaking, in a cline”.

In North America, three systems have been employed for grouping distributional data in connection with terrestrial animals, including birds. The first of these was the Life-Zone System of Merriam (1890), using temperature phenomena as a basis. This system was found difficult to apply in Kentucky, whereas the second, the Biome System, which stresses the important relationships between birds and the type of vegetative cover or physical surface frequented, is “of considerable usefulness” in expressing distributions. The term biome is “approximately equivalent to the botanical formation”. The third system in vogue is the Biotic Province or Faunal Region concept, which is discussed at some length in relation to the avifauna of Kentucky.

Various subdivisions, or faunal regions, based on the avifauna, are arrived at. These are defined as areas "which will sustain the maximum number of generalizations not applicable to other faunal regions".

A fairly detailed account of the history of ornithology in Kentucky is supplied, beginning with the year 1750.

The too few illustrations of birds, painted by Robert Mengel, are beautifully done. This is an important contribution, which should be studied by ornithologists everywhere. However, as the author points out, in future, works such as this, which took about 30 years to compile, should be written by a committee rather than one man because of the work involved as a result of the tremendous expansion of areas of interest in birds and the need for exact and careful preliminary planning.—H.T.C.

Birds of New Zealand by Gordon R. Williams, 1966. A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington. Second edition, pp. 108, 50 colour plates, 7½" × 6½". £12.6, (N.Z.), \$A2.79. This book gives a compact authoritative background to bird research in New Zealand and to appreciation of some typical New Zealand birds and their habits. Its author has spent many years working on the giant flightless gallinule, the Takahe, and other rare birds. This work was first published in 1963, but now appears in a second edition with an index and key to geographic localities. The pagination and the text, except for a few small changes in the latter, follow the first edition, but several colour plates have been replaced by better ones and there is a change in design of the dust jacket.

An introduction treats the origin of New Zealand birds, their present status, their future, and factors which affect migration and nesting. The colour plates are based on high quality transparencies, the work of expert bird photographers. These plates illustrate typical native New Zealand species, arranged in taxonomic order, from ratites to passerines, and mostly according to the Checklist of New Zealand Birds, 1953. The explanatory texts discuss distribution, haunts, food, nesting and other habits.—H.L.S. (Not in R.A.O.U. Library).

Fair Isle and Its Birds by Kenneth Williamson, 1965. Oliver and Boyd, London and Edinburgh. Pp. 331, 8½" × 5½", \$5.15. The appearance of this book at a time when the first observatory is being opened in Australia is most opportune. The author was the first warden of Fair Isle, the best known of the British observatories, a small island situated where the Atlantic and the North Sea meet.

The major contribution of the observatories has been to show how utterly dependent migrants are on weather conditions. In this field Williamson has made a major contribution and in the second part of this book he relates how his ideas grew from his experiences on Fair Isle. Some of his theories, particularly those of active down wind flight or cyclonic approach and of dispersal, are still controversial. A comparison of his theories with the results of radar studies would have been instructive but perhaps this was not really to have been expected in such a personal narrative.

The first part is of less interest to Australian ornithologists being an account of Fair Isle and its breeding birds. There is also a systematic list of birds by Peter Davis, Williamson's successor as warden, which if we have to have such things is a model of its kind.

If all interested in migration were to read this book we should be spared many of the rash, indeed at times fanciful, statements that appear in Australian ornithological literature concerning the local migrants.—D. THOMAS.

In brief . . .

(It is not possible for the Review Editor to check the bibliographical accuracy of all titles and references supplied by contributors)

Australasia

Bibliography. "Gracius Joseph Broinowski: His Books and His Prospectuses" by K. A. Hindwood. *The Aust. Zool. Vol. XIII-4-1966*, pp. 357-369 + 3 plates. The devious complications involved in the production of Broinowski's historically interesting works on Australian birds and mammals is the subject of this valuable paper. Of particular interest is the attention given

to literary prospectuses—a much neglected aspect of natural history bibliography.—A.McE.

Palaeornithology. "A Pelican in New Zealand", by R. J. Scarlett. *Notornis*, December 1966, pp. 204-217. The discovery of sub-fossil Pelicans in New Zealand is reviewed, and the conclusion reached that, owing to their considerably larger size than the Australian form (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*), the New Zealand birds were a distinct subspecies, which is named *Pelecanus conspicillatus novaezealandiae*.—D.G.M.

Miscellaneous. "Breeding of Song Thrushes and Blackbirds at St. Arnaud, Nelson." By J. E. C. Flux. *Notornis*, September, 1966, pp. 142-149. The most outstanding feature of a study of a breeding population of Thrushes and Blackbirds living mainly in native vegetation and at a relatively high altitude (2000') was their extremely poor survival rate.—D.G.M.

The Australian Bird Watcher, June 1966. Vol. 2, No. 7: Notes on northern Territory Birds by Alan Lendon. Various Bird Notes—Parrots and wattle blossom; Bower-bird puzzles; Mimicry by the Shrike-Tit; Nesting of the Grey Swiftlet; Oriental Cuckoo, by A. H. Chisholm. Dispersal of the Satin Bower-bird by Reta Vellenga; Waders in the Gulf Country by R. K. Carruthers. December 1966, Vol. 2, No. 8. The distribution of the Australian Plovers, by Roy P. Cooper. New distributional records of the Spur-winged and Masked Plovers, and new breeding records without hybridizing. A probable record of the Ruff in Tasmania, by D. G. Thomas and L. E. Wall. The Yellow-tailed Pardalote in Melbourne's suburbs, by Roy P. Cooper. A first record of this species outside of the mallee areas. Wader Records and Observations in Mid-Southern Victoria, 1963-1965, by F. T. H. Smith. The first part of a series of detailed observations spread over two seasons on the migratory waders.—R.P.C.

Overseas

Morphology, Taxonomy. "A Numerical Analysis of the Modifications of the Appendicular Muscles in Various Genera of Gallinaceous Birds" by G. E. Hudson, R. A. Parker, J. V. Berge and P. J. Lanzillotti. *Amer. Mid. Nat.* 76 (1): 1-73. An important study. Results are interpreted as justifying recognition of the Cracoidae for the families Megapodiidae and Cracidae. The family Phasianidae is considered to include the Odontophorinae, Phasianinae, Meleagridinae, Numidinae and Paponinae.—J. L. McK.

Photography. "Photography in ornithology" by J. Warham. *Br. Jour. Phot. Ann.* 1963: 93-114. A review of the use of still and cine photography in ornithological research.—J. L. McK.

Procellariiformes. "Subfossil Petrel bones from the Chatham Islands" by W. R. P. Bourne. *Ibis*, 109: 1-7. The breeding community of Petrels on the Chatham Islands has previously seemed curiously poor. Examination of subfossil deposits from Chatham, probably dating from the early stages of human colonization which occurred within the last few hundred years, reveals remains of at least 20 petrels, all of which except one may well have bred in the past without including storm petrels.—J. L. McK.

"Discovery of Nesting Place of *Puffinus pacificus* (Gmelin) off West Madagascar" by Otto Appert. *L'Oiseau et la Revue Française d'Ornithologie* Vol. 35, 1965, p. 135. This account in French extends the known breeding range of this shearwater in the Indian Ocean.—H.L.S.

Ethology. "Agonistic behavior in the male Starling" by Charles R. Ellis, Jr. *Wilson Bull.* 78: 208-224. Ethological descriptions of the agonistic behaviour of wild and captive *Sturnus vulgaris*. Illustrated with striking drawings.—J.L.McK.

Regional. "On the avifauna of Australia" by R. E. Moreau. *Bull. Br. Orn. Club.* 85: 54-60. A preliminary account of some interesting points about the Australian avifauna.—J.L.McK.

Literary Notes No. 7

Some Questions: The kind of information for which "Literary Notes" was initiated as a documentary medium has been illustrated in issues Nos. 1-6. It is hoped that readers acquainted with other items that can be regarded as belonging here will feel more than welcome to share them and, in fact,

be persuaded to send brief contributions to this end.

The recent explosive growth of interest in Australian and local history has become established. A parallel field exists in Australian ornithology offering a pursuit rich in potential as well for the pleasure and satisfaction of discovery as for the addition of significant detail to science and to its literature.

Who will begin a catalogue of the Australian bird paintings done by the elder Cayley? Some are already overseas. How many at present "unknown" artists drew or painted Australian birds and where is their work? Who will produce a bibliography of Robert Hall (Whittell is not complete) whose Siberian trip is already a subject of historical research in U.S.S.R.? Who will provide a guide to early Australian expeditions touching ornithology? When will Leach be fully and properly described from the advent of Circular of Information No. 12 to the end of the 7th edition? Who will produce an account of natural history columnists (e.g. Donald Macdonald and others) including those of N.Z. and States other than Victoria.

It is not an exaggeration to say that one could fill a page with such queries—nor to suggest that any reader could become "the authority" upon any one topic of this kind. The R.A.O.U. needs many sources of authoritative information, preferably from among its members. The splendid bibliographical and historical work already done, for example, by Whittell, Chisholm, and Hindwood, would not be regarded by its authors as the last word. Perhaps new and younger members will not have realized how wide are the opportunities remaining.—A.McE.

A Pocket List of Australian Birds

The A.C.T. Branch of the R.A.O.U. has recently published a handy little pocket list of Australian Birds with appropriate spaces for keeping basic records. This useful piece of Ornithological stationery is available at six copies for \$1.00 plus five cents for postage or single copies for twenty cents plus five cents postage.

Orders and enquiries should be addressed to Mr S. Marchant, 36 Arthur Circle, Canberra, A.C.T. 2603.—Hon. Ed.