

LITERATURE

Edited by A. R. McEVEY

BOOKS

Pigeons and Doves of the World by Derek Goodwin. Illust. by Robert Gillmor. 1967. Trust. Brit. Mus. (N. H.) Lond. Pp. vi + 446. Line drawings, 3 col. plates. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". £6 6. (S).

This book is a very useful review of information on pigeon taxonomy, behaviour and ecology. All the species of the world are treated. The confused nomenclature of the group has been reviewed and set out in the light of the author's own opinions. Not all will agree with some of the arrangements, nevertheless they are on the whole logical and the attempt is very commendable. The number of genera recognized is reduced to 40 and the concepts of species groups, super-species and tribes are used to clarify the relations of species in large genera.

The book provides a section on general biology (50 pages), including discussion on nomenclature, adaptive radiation, plumage coloration and sequence, clutch-size, feeding habits, drinking and other movements, voice, display and social behaviour, pair formation, nesting and escape behaviour. The treatment in most cases is descriptive.

The bulk of the book, however, consists of the life histories of the separate species. Although the literature has been well covered and faithfully summarized the accounts emphasize the meagreness of available information on most species. This is particularly noticeable in those of Australasia. It is to be hoped that the numerous gaps shown in knowledge will stimulate future workers to further research.

The illustrations by Robert Gillmor are variable; several of those of Australasian species are crude and have little resemblance to the bird depicted. The distribution maps are as accurate as are usually found in general works of this nature, but they are crudely drawn. One appreciates the difficulty of showing the distribution of a bird that is restricted to one or two small Pacific islands but even so these islands would have been more readily located had a recognizable continent been included. If space precluded this some co-ordinates round the few small spots that constituted the map would have helped. The Australian student will be surprised to find that the vertical axis of Australia is shown to vary from north-north-west to north-north-east (eg. page 152, 161, 188, 195).

Despite these short-comings in draughtsmanship the book is the first compilation of data on the whole pigeon family and for this reason will constitute a valuable reference. On the whole it is very well done.

—H.J.F.

Australia and the Pacific Islands by Allen Keast, 1966. Random House, N.Y. Pp. 298.

This profusely illustrated book is one of a series concerning 'The Continents We Live On'. Whether the reader entertains an interest in zoology, botany, geography or history of Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea or the numerous archipelagos of the Pacific Ocean, he will undoubtedly find much of interest in any of the fourteen chapters of this volume. Dr Keast has travelled extensively throughout this vast area, a fact clearly emphasized by many personal experiences and observations.

Following a Foreword by Alan Moorehead and the Introduction—Australia: Island Continent—nine chapters deal with Australia (South-eastern Forests and Highlands, South-west Corner, Tasmania, Southern Coasts and their Hinterland, Murray-Darling Basin, Eastern Queensland and its Tropical Coasts, Great Barrier Reef, Tropical North, Desert Center of Australia), three sections cover the Pacific (Volcanic Islands, Atolls, New Guinea and Melanesia), and two chapters concern New Zealand. Both in the text and in the illustrations ornithological interests are prominent.

The maps have been prepared with care (it is odd that Oodnadatta has been mis-spelt in the map of the arid Australian centre) and clearly depict the area discussed in each chapter. The illustrations are a delight; well selected, excellently reproduced, and many are in natural colour.

—A.R.M.

A Portfolio of Australian Birds. Plates by William T. Cooper; text by Keith Hindwood. 1968. A. H. & A. W. Reed, Sydney etc. Pp. 64, plates 25. Printed and bound Kyodo Printing Co. Ltd., Tokyo. 14" x 11". \$9.95.

Beautiful colour plate books, as distinct from illustrated works, for economic reasons have too long been rare in ornithology and, in Australian bird literature, almost non-existent. Modern techniques and in some quarters cheaper printing are producing mid-twentieth century counterparts of earlier splendours. The present work provides a fine example covering twenty-five Australian bird species. Though not quite with the weighty quality of a 19th century volume, it is nevertheless well produced (it would have been of interest to know the name of the heavy paper used) and the reproduction of the coloured plates, so far as one who has not seen the originals can judge, appears to be excellent.

The full page of text by Keith Hindwood on each species, developed round range, feeding, nesting, eggs and general habits, is authoritative, as one would expect, and is rich in observational detail reflecting his wide knowledge. Documentary sources for such interesting items as the Kite plunging into water, the Woodswallow carrying fallen fledglings to a branch, and many others, are doubtless available in the author's files, but it might have been wise to say so. Quite apart from such extras, the text has the high merit of carrying general appeal and being usable as a trustworthy reference for each species it treats.

Of the plates one can say that through them Australia has reached world standard in bird illustration and that the artist, in one leap, has placed himself in the forefront of Australian bird illustrators. There is, in the reviewer's opinion, probably no one else in Australia achieving his consistently high standard in draughtsmanship, technique, naturalism, and in capturing species character. His work is thus worthy of close, serious and critical attention. That his draughtsmanship is not faultless is revealed, for example, in the wrong angle of the Whipbird's tail, unless the bird has just come off the nest. He can capture the hard metallic look of Lorikeets, and his rendering of the feather texture of 'softer' birds, as in the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, achieves a notable realism. His handling of birds' eyes, in shape, colour and lustre, provides a model for others and the birds' feet are extraordinarily good, except for the left foot of the Green-winged Pigeon. Feather tracts are neither ignored nor overdone and his ability to portray the character of a species with authority is revealed in various plates, perhaps nowhere more clearly than in those of the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, Powerful Owl, and Black-shouldered Kite.

His obvious pleasure in colour shows in the selection of habitat that is both ecologically sound and aesthetically pleasing in its colour harmony. Composition however is not his strong feature and, in general, the design of the plates does not match their ornithological excellence. Are the pictures more than illustration? If they are, then not as much as they will be when Mr Cooper learns to reveal something more of what the bird in nature means to him. He has concentrated on learning to draw the bird first, an approach not common to all bird painters, and he obviously knows that it is a continuing process.

The treatment of settings is uneven and it is at this point that one comes to question what the artist is trying to do, and the extent to which the paintings are purely illustrative. Some surrounds, e.g. that of the Woodswallow, have a stiffness, and, generally speaking, they are noticeably small. To portray a bird in a limited setting and attain more than 'species dominant illustration' requires something further from the artist. He achieves the feeling of complete setting, of naturalism, and of art as well as illustration perhaps only in the Squatter Pigeon. The beautiful Quail-Thrush plate calls for very little more. The work of the overseas artist, James Lansdowne, could, one feels, help Mr Cooper in this regard. Mr Cooper obviously has a great deal to contribute in this field as a painter of birds. The interesting question is whether he will remain a bird illustrator or become a bird painter as well. Let us hope he will choose the latter course.

—A.McE.