

LITERATURE

Edited by A. R. McEVEY

BOOKS

The Shell Bird Book by James Fisher, 1966. Ebury Press and Michael Joseph, Lond. Pp. 344, 20 colour plates, 135 figs., 9 maps, 5" x 8". \$2.50 (A).

This is the ideal bedside book for the bird-lover interested in the literature and history of birds. It contains a good deal of information chiefly appealing to the British reader, e.g. fossil and other records of every bird on the British list, a bibliography of regional bird lists and guides, lists of local societies and nature reserves, all of which provide a comprehensive companion to bird study in Britain. But even when this section of the book is discounted, there remain some 230 closely printed and copiously illustrated pages dealing with birds from many unexpected points of view. Every reader's understanding of birds, and of the study of birds, will be deepened and enriched by even the most casual browsing in these pages.

'Britain's only known Pliocene bird is an albatross.' 'Geoffrey Chaucer . . . knew at least 43 of the wild birds of Britain.' 'John Ray . . . was the greatest field naturalist that has ever lived.' 'The observation of wild birds has two streams, the literary and the investigative that, depending on the climates of times, flow now together, now separate.' 'I do not know a top ornithological scientist of today who does not live in love with his subject.' 'Part of our present riches in Britain of wild, rare birds, is the direct consequence of protection.' 'In 1622 . . . Olina of Italy first realized the connection between song and territory.' (Of John Clare) 'Of all our major poets he was by far the finest naturalist'. 'The western European bird fauna has been the common inspiration of composers . . . at least since the sixteenth century.' 'Few nineteenth century bird artists shine outside Gould's ample shadow.' 'There is nobody like Newton today, in ornithology.' 'The latest generation of ethologists is happily mining the nuggets from Selous.' This selection gives an impression of the range and variety of fact and comment which this book contains. James Fisher has endless industry, combined with a lightness of style not always possessed by the assiduous collector of facts. He is always readable and always stimulating.

This book is worth a great deal more to any lover and student of birds than its absurdly low (and no doubt subsidized) price.

R. A. Balmford.

Seabirds of the Tropical Pacific Ocean by Warren B. King, 1967. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Pp. 125, 36 maps, 10 b. & w. plates of silhouettes and line drawings, 7½" x 10".

This identification manual, companion to a similar one for the tropical Atlantic Ocean which appeared in 1965, covers the region roughly bounded by Hawaii, Easter Island, Kermadec Island, New Caledonia, Bismarck Archipelago, and Bonin Island. Thus Australasian waters are outside its sphere, but more than half of the species dealt with are regularly or rarely seen round our shores and offshore islands. For anyone crossing or visiting the Pacific this manual is clearly of immense value, but even for the watcher ashore it will be of help in identifying albatrosses, shearwaters, petrels, skuas, and terns. The introduction deals with seabird distribution and preservation of specimens, and also lists important published papers on the region and each seabird group. The silhouettes and line drawings, after the manner of Alexander, emphasize identification features, and each group is preceded by a key to the species which are then described in detail including remarks on flight, food, habitat, and distribution. Some pelagic species have maps showing oceanic range and the known breeding islands. An appendix lists the island groups and the species to be found there, as breeders or non-breeders, together with information on abundance (or presence or absence) at different times of year. Although described only as an identification manual, this is an excellent up-to-date compilation of hitherto scattered knowledge.

D. F. Dorward

The Sunbirds of Southern Africa also the Sugarbirds, the White-eyes and the Spotted Creeper by C. J. Skead, 1967. A. A. Balkema, Cape Town. Pp. viii + 9-351 + gramophone record in endpaper, 10 colour plates of paintings, 12 pages containing 91 photographs, 41 line drawings, 25 maps. 9½" x 7¼". R 8.50 (SA).

This study of 26 species of southern African birds is a book like Frith's *Waterfowl in Australia* which is perhaps the best Australian example of a comprehensive account of the present state of knowledge of a bird or group of birds, giving the information required by the specialist in a manner appealing to the interested general reader. The paintings of each species, the habitat and nest photographs, distribution maps, text figures illustrating behaviour and a record giving 13 minutes of the songs and calls of 14 species (introduced on the record without superfluous commentary) serve to expand the details given in the text. Each bird is there described and discussed in a standardized manner which does not conceal the author's enthusiasm for the birds, their habitat, and for the flowers in which they find their food.

Australian readers will perhaps find most interest in the examination of the three southern African *Zosterops* spp. and will appreciate the author's statement, in introducing this group, that 'a bird which lives on the very doorstep of almost every home, both in town and in the country, is still very much of an unknown quantity in the more intimate circles of science'. The author frequently compares the African and Australian members of the genus, but the extensive banding of the forms in Australia which has gone some way towards solving problems relating to plumage and movement has apparently not occurred with the forms in southern Africa. These questions also arise about what the author calls the Cape-and-Green White-eye *Zosterops virens*. The work of Australian banders (see *Aust. Bird Bander, passim*) may well be of assistance to African ornithologists in this field.

R. A. Balmford.

SHORTER NOTICES

It is not possible for the Editor of 'Literature' to check the bibliographical accuracy of all titles and references supplied by contributors.

Overseas Publications

Species

BOURNE, W. R. P. 1968. Notes on the diving-petrels. *Bull. Br. Orn. Club* 88: 77-85.

Pelecanoides (urinatrix) exsul has now been found breeding beside *P. georgicus* in South Georgia. *P. magellani* has also been collected several times in the Falklands, where it may breed beside *P. (u.) berard*. A specimen of the nominate form of *P. urinatrix* has also been traced from Chatham Island where the form *P. (u.) chathamensis* (probably identical with *P. (u.) dacunhae*) is known to breed. If nominate *P. urinatrix* also breeds at Chatham Island it seems likely that the '*urinatrix*' assemblage will have to be divided into two distinct species, subtropical *P. urinatrix* and subantarctic *P. berard*, in addition to currently recognized divisions.

—J.L.McK.

Ecology

KIKKAWA, J. 1968. Ecological association of bird species and habitats in eastern Australia. *J. Anim. Ecol.* 37: 143-158.

In order to assess the applicability of the structural classification of vegetation to the description of avian habitats in eastern Australia, species lists (presence and absence) of birds were subjected to similarity analysis. The results, while interesting, indicate that a great deal more work is needed before this subject can really be said to be assessed.

—J.L.McK.

Morphology

BANG, B. G. 1968. Olfaction in Rallidae (Gruiformes), a morphological study of thirteen species. *J. Zool. London* 156: 97-107.

The design of the nasal fossa for the efficient function of the olfactory membrane is reviewed. Rallidae have an average olfactory bulb to hemisphere ratio of 23%, about the middle of the scale of relative olfactory ratios in birds. The ratio in Turnix is 12.5%.

—J.L.McK.