

# LITERATURE

Edited by A. R. McEVEY

## BOOKS

**Nightwatchmen of Bush and Plain. Australian Owls and Owl-like birds** by David Fleay, 1968, Jacaranda Press Aust. Pp. xii + 163, pll. 120 (17 col.), 255 mm. x 190 mm. \$A5.50.

In appealing if somewhat colloquial style, David Fleay's writing characteristically presents accurate observation and the present example reflects not only his passion for his subject but a portion of his life story and patriotic pride in his country's fauna. These give it distinction and individuality for which there is ample room in the literature of Australasian natural history.

Discursive but packed with information including items of interest about naturalists assisting him, and on animals other than birds, the book treats all Australian owls, giving excellent field notes and comments on most species in captivity. Emphasis is given to habitat, voice, and nesting, and in taxonomy recent workers are followed. Lists of egg sizes are included and the end papers provide a distribution map of the four *Ninox* species. The saga of Fleay's endeavour to find and breed the Powerful Owl was crowned with success after 43 years (as an insert joyfully records) by which time, he says he had very nearly the outlook of a Powerful Owl himself. Equally impressive is his description of being attacked by one, expressed with a naturalist's sympathy for the small mammals that are its more orthodox prey. Species other than owls included are the Frogmouth, two Nightjars, and the Owlet-Nightjar. The high quality photographs carry useful data, and a fine painting of *N. strenua* by the author's mother is reproduced in colour.

A delightful acquisition in itself this book will also be valued as a reference by workers on virtually any aspect of this fascinating group of birds. Only one with extensive knowledge and something worth saying can achieve this in a book of such general appeal. I. Watson

**A Distributional Survey of the Birds of Honduras** by Burt L. Monroe, Jr. 1968. AOU (Ornithological Monographs No. 7) Pp. 458, figs. 28, col. pll. 2, 260 mm. x 180 mm. \$US9.00.

AOU monographs have an established tradition as substantial and well produced contributions to ornithology. The current one preserves this standard and must add greatly to knowledge of Central American birds.

The account given for each of the 663 species known to occur in Honduras includes details of specimens examined, sight records, distribution, and a paragraph on geographic variation. In taxonomy the retention of *Casmerodius* as distinct from *Egretta* is noted. Introductory and closing chapters deal with physiography, geology, soils, climate, habitats, the history of Honduran ornithology, migration and avifaunal analysis. A gazeteer is provided and the bibliography is extensive.

An interesting section is devoted to 'Derivation of the Honduran Avifauna'. To the evolution of this avifauna both Central and South America have contributed, but it is clear that its complexities (the degree of endemism varies in the different habitats and is high for example in the cloud forests) will require much study—a not unexpected situation for a country which in 1958 'was the only one of the Central American republics for which there was no comprehensive ornithological work either in print or in preparation'. It is not likely to remain unstudied and this book represents an interesting stage in the growth of a country's ornithological knowledge. Australian associates of the author who was in the field in this country in 1960 will be pleased to see him playing an early and prominent role in its documentation. It is a solid work. J. L. McKean

**What Bird is That?** by Neville W. Cayley, 1968. 5th ed. revised and enlarged by A. H. Chisholm, K. A. Hindwood and A. R. McGill. Angus & Robertson Ltd., Sydney. Pp. xv + 348, col. pl. 37, b & w pl. 8, map 1, 243 mm. x 160 mm. \$A5.95.

Most Australians interested in birds are familiar with this standard field reference, first published in 1931. Numerous alterations to scientific and common names were made in the 4th edition, and this nomenclature stands, except for substitution of 'Large Pied' for 'Yellow-faced' Cormorant. The plates are identical. Additional information affecting more than 100 species includes details of extended distribution, clutch size, food and general behaviour. A postscript lists thirteen species (including residents and rare migrants) only recently recorded for Australia. It is interesting to note that there are still thirteen species breeding in Australia for which we lack descriptions of nest and eggs. Also the breeding of one migrant, the Oriental Dotterel *Charadrius veredus*, is not yet recorded. Reference to the nesting of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* (Emu 68: 252) has been omitted.

Overseas visitors, used to systematic field-guides, criticize the book's arrangement in which the adoption of habitat as an aid to recognition sometimes separates closely related species. Whether one agrees with this or not, 'Cayley' stands as one of the most comprehensive and useful of Australian bird books.

E. M. McCulloch

**Birds of Brisbane and Environs** by Donald P. Vernon, 1968. Queensland Museum Booklet No. 5. Brisbane. Pp. 131. Ill. by Mary McKenzie and Susan Hiley. 243 mm x 182 mm. \$A0.50.

This booklet has been produced mainly for school children, teachers and laymen who visit the Queensland Museum and desire additional information on the commoner birds of Brisbane. Of the 345 species recorded Vernon has selected 102 for detailed treatment. A whole page has been devoted to each of these birds under the headings of range and habitat, measurements, calls, food, field notes and breeding, followed by a black-and-white drawing in which colours of plumage, bill, etc. are indicated by labels. A further 61 species are illustrated, usually showing the head only, on the pages dealing with their closest relatives. The letterpress is authoritative, pertinent and free from jargon; and the drawings are refreshingly practical.

G. M. Storr

**Birds of the Soviet Union** (Vol. III) by G. P. Dement'ev, N. A. Gladkov and E. P. Spangenberg, 1969. Israel Programme for Scientific Translations, Jerusalem. Pp. 756, line drawings 169, b. & w. pl. 4, maps 118, 253 mm. x 175 mm.

With the Handbook of British Birds this volume, originally published in 1951 and now translated into English, has been a standard reference for all who are seriously interested in waders. Following a key to identification of birds in the hand, information for each species is given under the following headings: distribution (range, habitational status, biotope, numerical status); ecology (breeding, moult, diet); field marks and description (size and structure, coloration). A distribution map showing summer and winter ranges, and a line drawing are included. Many of the maps are out of date concerning winter ranges in Australia; this is hardly surprising in view of the original date of publication. The nomenclature is modern, and based on large genera. Being literal translations from the Russian the vernacular names used make interesting reading; Icelandic Sandpiper (Knot) and Pouter Shorebird (Pectoral Sandpiper) are examples. The translation is good with only occasional lapses; gulls and rails are included in this volume. It is a useful reference book.

D. G. Thomas