

LITERATURE

Edited by A. R. McEVEY

BOOKS

Birds in Bass Strait by Ken Simpson, 1972. Sydney: A. H. & A. W. Reed (for BHP). Pp 112, b. & w. pll 26, col. pll 70, maps 4. 300 x 210 mm. \$A4.95.

For Victorians and northern Tasmanians, the shores of Bass Strait are a natural summer habitat, and people at leisure on beaches have time to contemplate and to enquire. So, it is when one is on holiday that interest and curiosity about the natural world are often aroused. Mr Simpson, in a book that covers a wider field than the title suggests, is concerned only in part to satisfy. He aims also to stimulate further the interest and curiosity awakened.

Australian ornithologists, despite the prolific writings of a few (see Marchant, *Emu* 72: 64-65), have traditionally been concerned with the birds of the bush rather than of the coasts and seas. They have turned their backs on the crowded beaches and headed inland. Recently, however, perhaps as ornithology has become less the province of a few guardians of mystery, more people have combined the Australian's love of the beach with ornithology. Members of the Albatross Study Group in New South Wales, of the Victorian Ornithological Research Group, of ANARE (hardly beach lovers), of CSIRO, and others, have felt the fascination of albatross, dotterel, penguin, gull or shearwater and of the habitats that they share. This growth in interest was confirmed in 1972 with the formation of the Australian Seabird Group. Mr Simpson has written for these people as well as for those whose curiosity has only recently been stimulated.

The book is thus directed at two audiences, the informed and the less knowledgeable. The question must be asked: have both these audiences been successfully catered for in one volume?

The occasionally conversational style may irritate some specialists, but it illuminates for the layman what might be regarded as arid data. Again and again he is led to think and to realize that he can contribute to knowledge in this field—the ultimate excitement of ornithology. 'Bird watchers who never read comparative ornithological works never become more than just bird watchers. So please read—then go out with a large picnic lunch and feed it to the local seagulls. Compare, contrast, keep notes and sketches of posture and behaviour'—and so on.

Species are not dealt with in systematic order, but are classified into breeding seabirds, 'freshwater seabirds', regular summer migrants, regular winter migrants, shorebirds and others. This classification has its own logic, but though it does not help the experienced reader of bird-books to find his bird, it is arguable that it assists the layman even less. Once your bird is identified as a tern, it may be found in any one of four chapters.

A writer for general readers who uses trinomials ought to assume that he will have readers interested in the justification of his trinomials, who will also be interested in his solutions to problems of nomenclature (*Catharacta* or *Stercorarius*; *Sula* or *Morus*). Decisions on these points must be made, but the reader of a work

at this level deserves some explanation of the basis upon which they are made.

The problem of competition between Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* and White-faced Storm-Petrels *Pelagodroma marina* is mentioned. The author does not discuss the moral issue of whether measures should be taken to control the apparently dominant gulls or whether two competing native species should be left to work out their own fate.

Detailed descriptions are given; these can be of value even to the laymen in that dead seabirds are conspicuous on beaches and identification of birds in the hand thus becomes important. But the descriptions and other technical information could be more intelligible for the layman with the addition of a glossary.

For the serious worker on seabirds, this book's greatest value lies in its vivid anecdotal material, based on the wide experience of the author and his many colleagues in the field, and its copious references.

The photographs are magnificent and well annotated; it is unfortunate that the same cannot be said of the maps. Clear and diagrammatic as they are, they omit many places mentioned in the text. More maps, even at the expense of some of the pictures, would make the second edition more useful. At the same time, some diagrams, as found in field guides, of terns' heads in various plumages and of albatrosses' underwing patterns would help in their identification. It is need for identification that so often prompts the purchase of a bird-book.

These however are small things. As a bridge to lead the increasingly curious layman to the fascinations of ornithology and as a stimulus to further enquiry by the knowledgeable reader this book has a purpose and goes a long way towards achieving it.

R.A.B.

A Natural History of Australia: 2 Australia's South East by Stanley and Kay Breeden, 1972. Sydney and London: Collins. Pp 256, b. & w. pll 183, col. pll 106, drawings by KB 59, map. 350 x 250 mm. \$A16.00.

The first volume of *A Natural History of Australia*, reviewed in these columns (71: 145), treated Tropical Queensland. The area covered by this volume is the country east of the Great Dividing Range, from Rockhampton in Queensland to Portland in Victoria, and all Tasmania. Like the first volume the book consists of several chapters, each devoted to a habitat. Its limitations become evident when it is seen that the chapter dealing with swamp and stream does not mention fish. In fact the book deals only with plants, vertebrates, excluding fish, and some arthropods. These are pictured, mainly by coloured and black-and-white photographs generally of high standard, though a very few rather poor ones, e.g. the indefinite *Caladenia alba*, seem to have crept in. The delicate marginal drawings by K. Breeden are outstanding and enhance the book.

Birds illustrated by excellent photographs include the Pied Oystercatcher, Hooded Dotterel, Australian Goshawk, Boobook Owl, Blue-winged Parrot, Turquoise

Parrot, Musk Lorikeet, Brown Treecreeper, Spotted Pardalote and Regent Bowerbird. The title page is printed over a delightful seascape of Crested Terns on an ocean beach.

There are many photographs of rare and seldom-seen mammals, striking shots of reptiles and excellent views of insects, spiders and plants.

In these days of increasing awareness of the total environment by scientist and layman alike, it is perhaps a truism to say that we cannot understand the creatures we study without knowledge of the other animals and plants associated with them. Books such as this widen our knowledge and help us towards a truer understanding of ornithology.

It is to be hoped that when the Breedens complete their first broad survey of the Australian environment they will go on to cover many other aspects of our natural history, on which we need knowledge so urgently if we are to preserve the original character of this country.

J.H.

Birds of Victoria: Inland Waters by A. J. Reid, N. J. Shaw and W. R. Wheeler, 1972. Melbourne: Gould League, Victoria. Pp 72, b. & w. pll 4, col. pll 30, figs 26, map. 170 x 115 mm. \$A1.50.

The fourth volume in the Gould League series of field guides continues the successful style of the first three, already reviewed (70: 39, 71: 185 and 72: 190-1). The habitat here is wetland away from coastal oceans and bays but excluding mountain-gully sections of streams, which are covered in *Birds of Victoria: The Ranges*. As in the earlier volumes, the ecological background of the habitat is clearly expounded, and with contributors such as Miss Aston on water plants and bird-life we know that we are being advised by experts. The scene is set for the detailed accounts of individual species.

It is satisfying to note that the hope expressed in EMU review of the third volume, that subsequent volumes would include reference to more elaborate and ambitious

field guides, has been fulfilled, by the provision of a most appropriately selected list.

The paintings by Mrs McInnes are less stylized and more naturalistic than those in earlier volumes. These birds are alive and active — feeding, hunting, calling or caring for their young.

The introduction to the index and bird-list describes it as referring to 'mountain areas' rather than inland waters and transposes the second and fifth columns. These minor errors will no doubt be corrected in subsequent editions, which it is hoped will be called for.

R.A.B.

The Fiat Book of Common Birds in New Zealand. Town, Pasture, and Freshwater Birds by Janet Marshall, F. C. Kinsky, C. J. R. Robertson, 1972. Wellington and Tokyo: A. H. & A. W. Reed. Pp 94, pll 41, ring-bound with embossed polythene dustjacket. 120 x 185 mm. \$NZ1.75.

This small book of simple design is recommended as an aid to the identification of common New Zealand birds. The species are in taxonomic sequence, and most are illustrated with colour plates from paintings by J. Marshall. The brief descriptive accounts cover field characters, habitat, distribution, including Australia, and breeding. Of the forty-five species described thirty-one are found also in Australia. The plates please, both scientifically and aesthetically, but among the species found in Australia those of the Black Swan, Coot, Welcome Swallow, Black-backed and White-backed Magpies will appeal the most. In the plates some minor faults are poor printing of the background of the Little Owl *Athene noctua*; misleading presentation of the wing and nuchal plumage of the Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, and the Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, for which only the juvenile female is shown. In New Zealand the clutch-size of the House Sparrow is 3-7, not 5-7 as recorded in the text.

H.L.S.

This is the last issue of 'Literature' for which Mr A. R. McEvey will be responsible as Review Editor. Pressure of work has forced him to give up that part of the Review Editor's work that covers books and major articles. He is, however, continuing to provide the lists of contents of Australasian journals that appears as 'Australasian Ornithology', and which can hardly be done by anyone without easy access to a comprehensive library. Dr G. W. Johnstone of the Antarctic Division of the Department of Science has kindly agreed to replace Mr McEvey as Review Editor.

We are grateful to both gentlemen. Mr McEvey has been Review Editor for ten years, with a break of three years, during which the review section has undergone various changes in an attempt to find the most suitable means of dealing with this important aspect of the journal within the restrictions of our finances and the practicalities of one man's time. The results may not have pleased everyone and certainly Mr McEvey has been the first to deplore the shortcomings imposed on him by our limited space and his own limited time. However, he has never thought that what is being, or has been, done is necessarily the best; he has always looked for improvement and been the foremost critic of present performance. The Union owes him thanks for all the careful and thoughtful work that he has put into what at times has been an irksome task.

Ed.

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