

LITERATURE

Edited by G. W. JOHNSTONE

BOOKS

Proceedings of the XVth International Ornithological Congress, 1972. Ed. K. H. Voous. Leiden: E. J. Brill. Pp viii + 745, numerous b. & w. pll and figs. 255 x 180 mm. Dfl. 136.00.

Collections of scientific papers are difficult; no reviewer can profess competence in every field represented, and even intensive and critical reading in one speciality need not relate to others. This volume, edited by Professor K. H. Voous, contains thirty-two contributions in six symposia, the Presidential Address (on arctic birds) by Dr F. Salomonsen, abstracts only of 148 papers presented in sectional sessions, reports of various committees and a list of members attending. The full text of papers and ensuing discussion are included for each symposium: 'Population dynamics and ecology of tetraonids', 'Environmental physiology in birds', 'Development of behaviour in birds', 'Evolution of pairing behaviour in birds', 'Causal zoogeography' and 'Man and birds: the mounting threat of chemical pollution.' Of special interest to Australian ornithologists are papers on aspects of zoogeography by Drs D. L. Serventy and A. Keast. Of course, other papers may be relevant to the Australian environment; the symposium on physiology contains many ideas that could be examined in this country.

In perusing the abstracts I found that many of the unpublished papers might have been more significant or interesting to me than some of those published, and presume that other readers will react similarly. I think that the very organization of scientific symposia in some respects inhibits scientific progress. To organize a symposium, a chairman generally invites contributions from authorities in their field; he knows them as authorities usually from their published research. Though many contributions to symposia are stimulating, exciting and novel, many others are highly repetitious of published work, often presenting virtually nothing new in idea or fact. It can be a wasteful cycle because publishing space is highly sought and contributors are guaranteed space. It can be destructive because papers are not subjected to the usual scrutiny of editors and referees, being invited rather than selected in the first place. Many collected current variations on ancient themes are now being sold at high prices by various societies and institutions. However, the proceedings of this XVth International Ornithological Congress contain many excellent and original papers, and a few thorough reviews of knotty problems are especially valuable.

Editing in places lapses from English usage and construction common to natives and expatriates of even several generations (e.g. 'unwealthy ornithologists'). This can hardly be avoided by a non-English editor—I wish I could do half as well in Dutch.

Australians will doubtless be wondering about the next Congress, to be held in Canberra. The atmosphere should be quite different without the magnificent facilities of the Netherlands Congresgebouw in the Hague. How can we possibly match the cries of oystercatchers, ringing throughout the building, summoning ornithologists to scientific session; or begging owlets inviting them to meals; or a rattling nightjar knell announcing the impending closure of the bar?

D.D.D.

Australia's National Parks by Michael Morcombe, revised edition 1972. Melbourne: Lansdowne. Pp 243, col. pll 121, figs 65, maps 38. 320 x 260 mm. \$A12.95.

Like so many others of its kind, this book is an excuse for publishing a number of spectacular photographs, chiefly of landscape. The discovery in the fine print that the photograph on the jacket was not in fact taken in a national park serves to confirm this view. Colour reproduction is often lurid; the desert scene on page 71 is a particularly unnatural example.

The text is chatty and general; some areas clearly interest the author more than others. The classified list of national parks and reserves is informative for some areas, but conveys no more information for many than would be derived from intelligent reading of a map. Lawrence Rocks Faunal Reserve is off Portland, not Portsea.

The ornithologist will find birds featured in a few photographs and in some less than successful drawings; the information as to what birds are to be seen in which parks is usually too general to be of assistance.

R.A.B.

In Search of Birds in New Zealand—How and Where to Find Them by Ross McKenzie, 1972. Sydney: A. H. & A. W. Reed. Pp. 256, b. & w. pll 54, many maps. 230 x 160 mm. \$A7.95.

This book will be used widely by birdwatchers and others who travel speedily by motor car and boat to find interesting species of birds on the New Zealand mainland and its coastal islands. It is better designed as an aid for finding birds than a similar work by John Gooders, *Where to Watch Birds in Britain and Europe* (1972). However, emphasis is put upon the art of finding birds; so, except for inclusion of a list of broad habitats occupied by common species and advice to consult other references for identification and habits, users may get a wrong impression from the work that bird-listing is the sole aim of ornithology. This reaction is predictable from oral comments made on its contents by a librarian and others.

The text, in addition to other advice, lists by sections 46 districts from north to south, each illustrated by maps. The sections give details (as at date of publication) of the local accommodation, useful maps available, explicit directions about routes to the places of interest and the species of note to be seen there. The details given about the best places to visit are full. However, exact spots where to find very rare birds (Takahe in Fiordland, Orange-wattled Crow in bush behind Nelson and Picton, and Orange-fronted Parrot) are not given; similar omissions are the precise locations in the South Island of the nesting colonies of the Westland Black Petrel and Hutton's Shearwater, possibly because none of these birds can be watched readily from a motor vehicle in those places. Nevertheless the ornithologist able to traverse bush in mountainous country might wish to look for these species. The birds of the islands of the Hauraki Gulf, Auckland, get more space than those found on islands of Foveaux Strait and Marlborough Sounds, though the two latter areas have claims to be places of equal scientific interest; also their access might not be so difficult as implied.

Although the index is complete it refers the reader to sections of the text, not to actual pages; thus references to particular species cannot be found quickly. This limitation is clearly the result of a laudable wish to avoid excessive repetition of references to names of birds which occur throughout the 46 sections. However, the resulting inconvenience could be avoided in future by a modified form of this index system, now widely used in commerce for quick reference.

Vernacular names are used in the singular, usually as collectives. In English this is normally the speech of sportsmen or cooks but it is well suited to the style and purpose of the book. Ornithologists dedicated to biological research projects may deplore the frequent comment and anecdote about scenery, types of agriculture and Maori legends and practices relating to birds. However remarks of this kind may interest readers other than birdwatchers.

H.L.S.

Tasmanian Bird Report 1971 No. 1. Ed. O. M. G. Newman. Pp 15; **1972 No. 2.** Ed. O. M. G. Newman. Pp 12. Hobart: Bird Observers' Association of Tasmania. 230 x 150 mm. \$A0.50.

Ever since being involved with the former RAOU branch in A.C.T., I have wondered whether regional societies are wise to spend their resources in producing small periodical publications, usually by ink-duplicator, often of inconvenient size and generally with an ephemeral aspect. In the nature of things the supply of material for such a periodical is usually small and editors must have difficulty in finding enough substantial copy for a reasonable issue regularly. In consequence much of its content tends to be trivial. I am convinced that a better policy is to use local funds for one substantial annual report, perhaps printed professionally and thus more likely to survive than mimeographed sheets, on the lines in fact of annual county or regional reports in Britain, the invaluable function of which is to provide a permanent record of changes in the local avifauna and not to record mere incidents of bird life. To a large extent BOAT is doing this in its annual reports and deserves congratulation.

These reports are printed by offset, stapled in covers, with a drawing by Mr Milledge on the outside and of normal size for storage. The bulk of each is a systematic list of records that 'enhance the ornithological knowledge of the Tasmanian region' and 'bridge the gap between the last major Tasmanian publication "Tasmanian Birds" by Michael Sharland (3rd ed. 1958) and the present time'. In consequence the list tends to be of the exceptional and many species that occur in Tasmania get no mention. This is understandable because it may seem pointless to say that Silvereyes or Yellow Wattlebirds are common; also it is obviously very difficult to make an assessment of status annually throughout an area as large as any Aus-

tralian State, which would have much value objectively. The problem is in fact totally different from that in an English county. Nevertheless it could be useful to make a flying guess at the status of common birds, even if this is no more than a statement that so far as known their status is unchanged, plus a mere list of species to which this applies. Not only would this provide a clue for the future, when it is suddenly realized that the Yellow Wattlebird has been shot out, but it might alert observers who disagree with the assessment locally so that a decline or an increase would be brought to light sooner than might have happened.

Tasmania is, of course, not the only State to produce an annual report on its birds, and observers there have an outlet for other contributions on birds in the *Tasmanian Naturalist*; but BOAT in my opinion is certainly adopting a commendable policy of concentrating effort into the production of an annual report, for which future ornithologists will be grateful.

S.M.

The Avifauna of the Kakamega Forest, Western Kenya, including a Bird Population study by Dale A. Zimmerman. 1972. Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History 149 (Article 3): 255-340.

Censuses of birds in tropical forest are notoriously difficult. In this account of the avifauna of the Kakamega Forest, Zimmerman discusses the techniques and problems of censusing birds in rainforest. Conventional 'spot-mapping' methods were combined with mist-netting for banding and retrapping and the use of tape-recorders to obtain a detailed census of a single 20-acre plot within the forest. Certainly this is the most interesting part of the paper and provides some interesting ideas and advice on census methods.

The remainder of the paper is along the standard lines of an avifaunal survey with an annotated checklist, a brief ecological classification of species and a comparison of the avifauna of the Kakamega Forest with those of other forests in East Africa. Five black-and-white plates usefully illustrate the habitat, and there are three photographs of species captured during the study. Zimmerman's comments on the destruction of African forests and the need for conservation have considerable relevance to current problems of conservation of rainforest in northern New South Wales and in Queensland.

Unfortunately, little use is made of the detailed census data obtained from the principal study-area. Consequently, the part of the discussion concerned with the diversity of species weakly concludes that there may be a 'rough correlation' between the numbers of species of birds and of woody plants 'at least in tropical African lowland evergreen forest'. The data have more potential than that and are interesting to compare with rainforests in Australia and South America.

H.R.

AUSTRALASIAN ORNITHOLOGY

*A continuing and selected catalogue of papers
compiled by A. R. McEVEY*

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