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THE MEGAPODES**by D.N. Jones, R.W.R.J. Dekker and C.S. Roselaar***1995. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Pp. 262, Colour plates 8, 254 x 197 mm. A\$90.00.*

The production of this attractive volume is well timed. Megapodes, or incubator birds, as they are sometimes known, with their fascinating breeding strategies, are very much at the forefront of current studies of avian behavioural ecology. In recent years, studies by a number of Australian researchers, including Darryl Jones, have produced some interesting and, in some instances, exciting insights into the complex issues of mating systems and resource guarding. What is especially exciting is that not only are these birds predominantly Australo-Papuan in their distribution but that they are also primarily tropical forest inhabitants. And there are so few good studies of tropical forest species.

Oxford University Press (OUP) continues to impress with the excellence of their monographs on the bird families of the world. Hopefully they will maintain the high quality of production and content, illustrated in *The Megapodes*, by continuing to seek out true experts on particular bird groups. The combined skills and experiences of the three authors has resulted in a remarkably thorough coverage of what until now, (with the exception of Harry Frith's studies of the Malleefowl) was a rather inconspicuously known group, despite its fascinating biology.

From a personal perspective it is especially pleasing to see the publication of this book and particular the rising eminence of Darryl Jones's contribution to the field of ornithology. In late 1979, during one notably wet monsoon, Darryl and two other students accompanied me on a expedition to the Nakanai Mountains of West New Britain (Papua New Guinea) in an effort to learn more about the distribution of the Melanesian

Megapode. Subsequently, in the hot, steamy lowland forests of Garu, we visited the extraordinary volcanic nesting grounds of these birds. Despite the rigours of the field work I was delighted to later learn that these experiences, far from putting Darryl off, nurtured an absorbing interest in these birds, most notably with the Australian Brush-turkey.

Jones' coauthor, Rene Dekker, has pioneered similarly exciting work on the equally exotic Maleo of Sulawesi. The Maleo, the largest of the megapodes, is also one of the most threatened and Dekker's work provided in addition a critical conservation component. Although I do not know Cees Roselaar personally, I am familiar with the thoroughness of his taxonomic studies. This quality is again evident here. The family Megapodiidae has long been in need of a taxonomic review, especially the genus *Megapodius*. Roselaar has achieved an admirable job and as a result reveals a much more compelling understanding of the distributional evolution of the group. Observations I recently made in the wild, including sound-recordings of the distinctive voice of the little known Tanimbar Megapode appear to confirm treatment of this taxon as a separate species. Conversely, however the treatment of Forsten's Megapode as a full species clearly requires much more field work.

The first part of the book contains chapters on taxonomy and relationships, distribution, biogeography and speciation. General biology and behaviour, eco-physiology and adaptations, reproductive behaviour and mating systems, the evolution of megapode incubation strategies and finally conservation. This should be compelling reading for anyone with an interest in Australasian birds and the range of adaptations in birds. The bulk of the book is devoted to notably thorough and clearly presented species accounts and each species is attractively and accurately illustrated by the artist Ber van Perlo. In addition, maps depict the range of each species. What an ideal world it would be in which all such publications produced similarly clear and informative maps. I was especially interested to see the documenting of Brown-collared Talegalla on the south side of New Guinea's central ranges, within the range of the generally allopatric Black-billed Talegalla. The ecological separation of these two species and in other instances *Megapodius* and *Talegalla* would surely be a worthwhile study. And that really is in some ways the heart of the book. By presenting what is known of these fascinating birds the authors have opened a galaxy of seemingly endless questions and potentially a host of

studies. I have long pleaded with academics to forget esoteric studies in the ease and comfort of their home countries and get out to the tropics before the tropical rainforests are gone forever. Unheeded words I fear.

I have thoroughly enjoyed wandering through this book and have few quibbles. However, I am not happy with the use of 'Megapode' instead of the well established 'Scrubfowl' for the genus *Megapodius* and 'Talegalla' instead of 'Brush-turkey' for *Talegalla*. In this reviewer's opinion the adage of 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' would have been well to adopt. Also, Dekker's interpretation of which sex produces which vocalisation, within certain species of *Megapodius* is, in my opinion incorrect. Despite the difficulty of identifying the gender of most members of *Megapodius*, observations made in The Moluccas, New Guinea and New Britain clearly indicate to me that the male utters the low crowing call, while the female answers with the muted whinnying cry. Yet another question to test.

This excellent book should be on every ornithologist's and evolutionary biologist's bookshelf and perhaps even used as a text book for first degree students. All in all a very valuable contribution.

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