

REVIEWS

Edited by J.M. PENHALLURICK

Parrots, Their Care and Breeding by Rosemary Low. 1980. Poole, Dorset: Blandford Press per ANZ Book Co. Pp xiii + 654, col. pll 91, b. & w. pll 24, figs 3. 155 x 225 mm. \$71.50

Low's book emphasizes aviculture, with only brief details on parrots in the wild. It would thus appeal chiefly to readers concerned with managing captive birds. However, the price may well put the book beyond the budget of many aviculturalists. This is unfortunate, as the book is a useful compendium of information.

Part I deals with the general topics of management, aviary design, feeding and breeding. It ends with a useful chapter by G.A. Smith on common diseases of captive parrots. Part II gives detailed descriptions of individual species, with relevant information on husbandry. This part suffers from a rather confusing arrangement and, like the book as a whole, is somewhat repetitive and anecdotal.

The book is clearly aimed at readers in the northern hemisphere, as there is extensive discussion of problems related to climate. Low refers frequently to Australian parrots, which are extremely popular among aviculturalists. She suggests that Australian species in open aviaries should be kept away from trees, on the grounds that predation of eggs and young by goannas causes the birds to become disturbed if they are housed near trees. This may be true but I am unaware of any field data to support her claim.

The book suffers from a lack of illustrations. More photographs of species discussed would be desirable and line drawings of equipment would reduce the need for long descriptions. Particular information is often hard to find, notably in the general sections. More subheadings and cross-references would help here, as would summaries of such topics as diet. Tables of various recipes and quantities would be a useful addition, perhaps in an appendix.

Although the author states several times that information is lacking for many species, she does not stress sufficiently the importance of keeping records. Because the main aim of serious aviculturists is to breed birds, they should be strongly encouraged to keep detailed records of breeding. Of course, many people disapprove of the unrestricted keeping of birds, particularly rarer species, in captivity. But we must face the fact that aviculture has become increasingly popular in recent years and, if it is accepted that certain controls and standards must be applied to keeping any wildlife in captivity, then as much information as possible must be gathered to help define those standards.

Low stresses the importance of beginning with easier species, before going on to keep rarer and more difficult birds. She also stresses the value of specializing in particular birds, as opposed to general collecting.

Everything should be done to discourage the 'stamp collector' attitude, all too common among aviculturalists.

The author tends to over-generalize when referring to birds in the wild, probably because of a lack of information, specially in Australia. References to an abundance of food throughout the year in tropical areas only reinforces the assumption that there is little seasonal variation in the availability of food in such areas.

I find Low's comments on the free flying of exotic species disturbing. We read on page 317, on the release of cockatiels in the Lake District: 'However J. Strutt, from an unspoilt area of the Lake District, found them to be highly satisfactory at liberty because they look wonderful in flight and have considerable range. Not only were they aerobatic when on the wing but they seemed to enjoy pursuing wild birds.' One hopes that the release of birds not native to an area will be strongly discouraged.

In summary this book would be a useful, if overpriced, addition to the libraries of serious aviculturalists. For ornithologists and people interested in wild populations of parrots, it probably has only little appeal.

C.E. Cannon

Seabirds of New Zealand by Elaine Power. 1979. Auckland, Sydney: Collins. Pp 48 (unnumbered), col. ill 22, b. & w. ill 14. 283 x 224 mm. \$NZ10.95.

This is Mrs Power's fourth book of paintings of New Zealand birds. Not having seen the other three, I cannot compare this with them but it is an attractive production. Thirty-one of the commoner species of seabirds are illustrated by clear reproductions of water-colour paintings and pencil drawings. These are pleasing pictures and provide enough accurate detail to enable beginners to identify most of the birds that they are likely to see round the New Zealand coasts. The pictures show the birds in natural settings and so are not drawn to scale but the length of each species illustrated is given. The text provides enough information to answer most questions a beginner would probably ask.

This is a book which a stranger to New Zealand would be delighted to find in seaside accommodation. Likewise, any New Zealander living within easy reach of the coast (and that must apply to most) would find this a most useful book for occasional reference and for answering visitors' awkward questions. The ornithologist is unlikely to find anything new in it but the pictures may well stimulate his aesthetic appreciation of everyday coastal birds. Furthermore, the price is quite reasonable.

G.W. Johnstone

Checklist of Birds of the World. Volume VIII. Edited by Melvin A. Traylor, Jr, 1979. Cambridge: Mus. comp. Zool. Pp xv + 365. 160 x 235 mm. US\$25.00.

The publication of the penultimate volume of the checklist begun by James Lee Peters in 1931 is sure to be welcomed by many ornithologists. When published, Volume XI will complete the series, fourteen parts of which have appeared irregularly since publication was resumed with Volume IX in 1960; the previous volume (XIII) was published in 1970 and the present volume was published jointly with a revised Volume I. Volume VIII concludes the coverage of the suboscine groups of the Passeriformes and has had a long incubation period. Before he died in 1952, Peters asked John T. Zimmer to prepare the manuscripts for the families of the New World Tyrannoidea, to which the bulk of the text is devoted. When Zimmer died in 1957, the work was almost completed. In 1971 Melvin Traylor was asked to prepare a revision of the tyrant flycatchers, Tyrannidae, and to edit the entire volume; a task he has completed most successfully. He was fortunate in enlisting the help of David Snow, who revised the Cotingidae and Pipridae.

These recent revisions were mostly concerned with the genus, including the discussion of various problematic genera and the authors' rationale for genera accepted has been treated in some detail by Traylor for the Tyrannidae (1977, Bull. Mus. comp. Zool. Harv. 148: 129-184) and Snow for the Cotingidae (1973, Breviora 409: 1-27) and Pipridae (1975, Bull. Br. Orn. Club 95: 20-27). Zimmer chose to follow Hellmayr's generic classification in the *Catalogue of Birds of the Americas*. Zimmer's forte was the study of subspecies and, unless questioned by more recent workers, he has been followed uncritically. A statement concerning treatment of species was not provided in the Introduction but this would presumably also follow the meticulous and scholarly foundation laid by Zimmer, to whom this volume has been dedicated. Traylor concludes the Tyrannoidea with the small families Oxyruncidae and Phytotomidae. The decision to postpone the publication of Volume VIII pending modern revisions of this large and diverse assemblage was wise in view of the active research in these birds over the last two decades, with much new information supplementing Zimmer's original work.

The manuscripts of the few Old-World suboscine families that conclude the volume were originally completed by 1960, with subsequent revision: Pittidae, Acanthisittidae, Menuridae and Atrichornithidae by Ernst Mayr and Philepittidae by Dean Amadon. Thus only twenty-seven of the 336 text pages are concerned with the Old-World suboscines, excluding the broadbills, Eurylaimidae, covered at the beginning of Volume VII (1951). Small as they are, these families represent interesting systematic and evolutionary problems, some controversial. However, though Traylor has pointed out (p. ix) that this volume is not the place to discuss problems of the higher classification of the Passeriformes, he has retained the Wetmore order of families but has supported recent studies by placing the Pittidae, Philepittidae and Acanthisittidae together as *Incertae Sedis*. Menuridae and Atrichornithidae have been retained as Suborder Menurae and Traylor has pointed out that this is after Wetmore because recent studies would place them in either the Oscines or the Suboscines. Some authorities would support the recognition of an order Tyranniformes because some evidence

suggests a biphyletic origin of the Passeriformes (Feduccia, 1975, Misc. Publ. Univ. Kansas Mus. nat. Hist. 63: 1-34). Feduccia (op. cit.; 1975, Wilson Bull. 87: 418-420) would also include the Menurae and the Acanthisittidae in the Oscines but the Philepittidae appear to be suboscine (1976, Auk 93: 169-170). It is worth mentioning here that the term 'Deutero-Oscine' is preferred by Voous (1977, Ibis 119: 224) because 'suboscine' is more correctly restricted to the Menurae, as a substitute name for Sclater's 'pseudoscine' (cf. Newton and Gadow, 1893-96, *A Dictionary of Birds*: 524, 743, 921). The Pittidae appear to occupy a somewhat isolated and enigmatic position but many problems with their systematic affinities remain to be solved (Bruce in press, Pitta, in *New Dictionary of Birds* Rev. ed.). One distinctive character is their possession of the largest olfactory ratio among the Passeriformes (cf. Bang, 1971, Acta Anat. 79, suppl. 58: 1-76). However, the relationships of the few Old-World suboscines to each other remain rather speculative.

The treatment of the lyrebirds and scrub-birds in Menurae reveals only that Mayr's sequence of species for each family is the reverse of that of Schodde (1975, *Int. List Aust. Songbirds*). There are no surprises in the New Zealand Acanthisittidae and the Madagascan Philepittidae, with the latter divided into two subfamilies to accommodate its two very distinct genera.

As regards the Pittidae, Mayr has pointed out that there is no adequate revision and that many subspecies may have to be synonymized eventually. The final tally of species is twenty-six, which represents a correction on the oft-repeated figure of twenty-three but up to twenty-nine species could be recognized. The most contentious matter concerns the *Pitta brachyura* group, including three of the four species recorded for Australia. Three species are lumped in Mayr's conservative treatment. *Pitta megarhyncha*, the mangrove representative of the Blue-winged Pitta *P. moluccensis* (a straggler to Australia), is placed with *moluccensis* but is distinguished in parentheses as a very distinct form. Of more significance to Australian ornithologists, the Noisy Pitta *P. versicolor*, the Rainbow Pitta *P. iris* and the Elegant Pitta *P. elegans* of Indonesia are treated as subspecies groups of one species under the oldest name, *versicolor*. Mayr had originally indicated such an arrangement in 1944 (Emu 44: 120) when the Australian forms were listed as probably conspecific with the Indian Pitta *P. brachyura* but this arrangement has not been generally accepted in Australia. From my own examination of a large number of specimens, particularly concerning the numerous races of *elegans*, I favour the retention of three species, representing part of a superspecies within the *Pitta brachyura* species-group. However, the entire group needs to be reviewed before a final conclusion can be made. Mayr has recognized three subspecies for the Noisy Pitta: the northern *simillima*, the southern nominate form and *intermedia* for the Atherton area. I do not think that *intermedia* ought to be recognized and, when defining the ranges of the smaller northern birds and the larger southern birds, as well as the migratory movements of both forms, I think it expedient to retain two subspecies although the variation appears to be clinal. Moreover, I do not agree with the inclusion of *P. superba*, *P. maxima* and *P. steerii* in the *brachyura* group. They are best placed in the *Pitta sordida* group. Lastly, Mayr has separated the dark-crowned forms of

the Garnet Pitta *P. granatina* as *P. venusta*. The supporting argument, with which I agree, is that though the crimson- and dark-crowned forms are known to interbreed in Borneo, their geographical representation on Sumatra is poorly known.

In conclusion, this volume is a worthy addition to a most valuable series. The cut-off date for the manuscript was 31 December 1977 but a few later items are included. Much appreciation must be extended in particular to Melvin Traylor and David Snow for their completion of the large and difficult Tyrannoidea and specially to Ernst Mayr, who, more than any other, has been the force behind the slow but sure progression towards the completion of this very important reference series.

Murray Bruce

The Island Waterfowl by Milton W. Weller 1980. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State U.P. Pp x + 121, figs 27. 160 x 235 mm. US\$10.95.

Remote oceanic islands are best known for their large numbers of breeding seabirds but they also have small and unique populations of landbirds and waterbirds. This book deals with many aspects of the biology of waterfowl that have strayed to and become isolated on islands. The islands discussed vary from Heard Island with no waterfowl, through several with only one or two species, to the Falkland Islands with eleven that regularly breed there. The diversity of species of waterfowl on islands was found to be related to the size and remoteness of the islands. On islands waterfowl survive by adapting themselves to different and broader niches than those they originally occupied on the mainland. The birds are helped by less fluctuation in temperature and humidity and by the nutrients brought in from the surrounding seas by marine birds and mammals.

On islands some waterfowl have reduced or even lost their powers of flight as has also happened with insular forms of rails, pigeons and cormorants. On many islands waterfowl are threatened or have been eliminated by introduced mammals, birds and even fish. Weller deals well with these and other aspects of island life for waterfowl, with first-hand experience of most of the islands and birds he discusses. What is less satisfactory is his nomenclature, which is based on a modification by Johnsgard of that of Delacour. Most of the island forms are treated as subspecies of a presumed, and still extant, ancestral continental species. As Weller points out, problems arise when there are disagreements about which species an island form is derived from. The review of the island forms in Chapter 1 is not helped by the lack of a systematic sequence. The genera are split and scrambled; and the austral teal of the *Anas gibberifrons*-*castanea*-*aucklandica* complex are split into two sections separated by treatments of other species of *Anas* and species of *Aythya* and *Tachyeres*.

Subspecies are given English names and an American spelling is used in Gray Teal for *Anas gibberifrons* and New Zealand Gray Duck for *Anas s. superciliosa*. *Aythya australis* is called Australian White-eye, a name that could cause confusion with several species of *Zosterops*. Auckland Island Teal is changed to Auckland Flightless Teal but the closely related and equally flightless Campbell Island Teal retains its English name. A systematic list of the species discussed in the book would have been a help to readers. There are also no lists of figures, illustrations and tables nor is there a summary or abstract.

All in all the book is attractively illustrated and contains many stimulating ideas and concepts, apparently assembled from lecture and field notes with little editing. It is definitely well worth reading.

G.F. van Tets and P.J. Fullagar

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