

## REVIEWS

Edited by J. M. Penhallurick

### BOOKS

**A Field Guide to the Seabirds of Britain and the World** by Gerald Tuck and Hermann Heinzel, 1978. London: Collins. Pp xxviii + 292, b. & w. ills c. 56, col. pll 2 + 48, maps 314. 130 x 200 mm. £5.25.

**A Field Guide to the Seabirds of Australia and the World** by Gerald Tuck and Hermann Heinzel, 1980. London: Collins. Pp xxviii + 276, b. & w. ills c. 56, col. pll 2 + 48, maps 300. 130 x 200 mm. \$A 19.95.

**A Guide to Seabirds on the Ocean Routes** by Gerald Tuck, 1980. London: Collins. Pp 144, b. & w. ills 58, maps 2. 130 x 200 mm. Approx. £4.50.

Comparison of the first two of these books reveals a ridiculous discrepancy in price, which is about the only important difference between them. Otherwise, an account of seabirds of the British Isles by John Parslow (pp 261 – 285) in the British edition with maps showing the breeding distributions of the twenty-five species that nest in Britain and Ireland, is replaced in the Australian version by an account on the seabirds of Australia by D.L. Serventy. This occupies pages 261 – 271 and includes a map of the main areas of mortality for seabirds in Australia and ten maps of the general breeding distributions of thirteen species that nest in Australia. It is claimed on the covers of these books that the contents make it possible to identify any of the nearly 300 species of seabirds in the world and that the text is a systematic guide to all species and distinct sub-species of seabirds.

Nomenclature and sequence of species follow with only minor variations W.B. Alexander's systematic list in his *Birds of the Ocean* (1954), which this new guide claims to replace. The only major additions are the two species of sheathbills, *Chionis alba* and *C. minor*, which provide an additional family, the Chionidae. A few species have been lumped and even fewer have been split. Some new species have been found or rediscovered and some sub-species that could have been considered species have been lost or omitted in the text and the distributional maps. By following Alexander's order we find, for example, *Chlidonias albostrigata* five pages removed from the other marsh terns. In fact, Alexander placed this species in *Sterna*, a move recently supported by Lalas and Heather (1980, *Notornis* 27: 45 – 68) with the suggestion that it is probably closely allied to *S. virgata*. The index of scientific names in Tuck gives a transposed map number for *albostrigata*. The indexes to English and scientific names do not cover the preliminary pages nor such terms as 'mollymawk' in the first and 'jaeger' in both books, although they are used in the introductions to the families. There are some curious letters inserted at several places in the species accounts (e.g. p. 17), which have no function. They seem to be editorial corrections to indicate the proper order of text segments.

An inconsistency in the English names is the use of White-breasted Cormorant by Serventy (p. 264) and Black-faced Cormorant by Tuck (pp 75, 174 and 247). 'Black-faced' has been used by Serventy and Whittell in *Birds of Western Australia* since the second edition (1951). The term 'White-breasted' is the name used in Southern Africa for *Phalacrocorax (carbo) lucidus* (cf. McLachlan and Liveridge 1978, *Roberts' Birds of South Africa* 4th ed, and the 1969 *Check List of the Birds of South Africa*). Tuck uses Pale-footed Shearwater for *Puffinus carneipes* and Serventy

is consistent in the text (pp 264 – 5) but uses Fleshy-footed (a better name) in the map (p. 270).

Parslow does not use scientific names and his English names follow the British custom of dropping the locally superfluous adjectives. Thus his names are Leach's Storm-Petrel, with a hyphen, and Storm Petrel, without a hyphen; and then the Fulmar, the Gannet, the Cormorant, the Shag, the Kittiwake and the Puffin. On page 44 we find also Storm Petrel but elsewhere *Hydrobates pelagicus* is called the British Storm-Petrel.

A fourth variation in names occurs on page xxv for seabirds on the danger list of the Red Data Book, where Macgillivray's Petrel is a *Pterodroma* but on page 44 it is a *Bulweria*. *Phalacrocorax c. carunculatus* is given its New Zealand name King Shag but elsewhere in the book it is called the Rough-faced Cormorant. Devilliers and Terschuren (1978, *Gerfaut* 68: 53 – 86) have shown that *albiventer* is a sub-species of *P. atriceps* and have recommended that their English names King Shag and Blue-eyed Shag be replaced by Emperor Shag, thus leaving King Shag free for New Zealand usage.

Sheathbills fail to get a mention in the introduction (other than a drawing of a head to show a sheath). They are omitted from the family listings of food and identifying features.

Some curious bits of unnatural history have managed to creep into the introduction. Thus by implication on page xv frigate-birds, cormorants and Sooty Terns have inadequate preen glands and petrels use oil from their nostrils to waterproof their plumage. On pages xv, xx, xxiii and 58 it is stated that pelicans plunge-dive for food but there is no mention that this behaviour is almost entirely confined to the Brown and Chilean Pelicans and is extremely rare in other pelicans. What species 'the Pelican' on page xv refers to is not clear as pelicans have been extinct in Britain since prehistoric times. On page xx squid and crustacea have been omitted from the diets of gannets, boobies and cormorants; crustacea, from the diet of pelicans; and fish, starfish and sea urchins, from the diet of gulls.

In the diagrams of topography on page xiv, the toes of the left foot are labelled 'legs'; and the first secondary is included among the 'primaries' and labelled 'greater coverts'. In the diagrams on page xvi showing bills of seabirds, almost all the lines indicating nostrils do not reach them and in that of a phalarope do not even point to the nostrils. A line leading to the sieve-like lamellae of a prion is labelled 'pouch'. The gonyx of a gull is labelled 'under mandible often with a red spot' but the illustration shows a gull with a subterminal black bar and not one of the *Larus argentatus* super-species that do have a red gonyx spot. On pages xviii and xix the convergences are mapped as straight latitudinal lines and not in their average geographical positions. On page xv it is stated that cormorants use their hooked bills to pierce the gills of the fish they catch. We have seen no evidence of this on fish taken by several species of cormorant. The gills of fish are protected by a hard bony plate that would be difficult for the horny tip of a cormorant's bill to penetrate. Also on page xv penguins do not have 'caruncles' but deciduous horny teeth or spikes on their tongues and palates, for holding fish and other slippery prey.

We doubt whether seabirds are far more numerous than landbirds in the world as stated on page xxiv. When one feeds hawks and owls, it is quite wrong to feed them raw meat without giving them some roughage in the form of fur, feathers or wool, so that they are able to make and regurgitate pellets, and some broken bones, shell grit, egg shells or chalk for calcium. Freshly shredded fish or crushed food pellets for cats are good for feeding many land and waterbirds including those that feed on insects and a lot less messy aboard ship than culturing mealworms as suggested on pages xxvii and xxviii.

Many of the distributional maps are inaccurate. A simple exercise is to compare those of Tuck (pp 232 - 260) with those accompanying the text by Serventy (pp 270 - 71). The latter are more reliable. Then, look at Fluttering and Little Shearwaters, White-faced Storm-Petrel, Australian Pelican, most of the Australian cormorants and the Blue-grey Noddy, to select a few that are obviously incorrect. Our impression is that errors in the text and illustrations are far too numerous for a book of this nature. A glance at text and plates, mainly concentrating on the species most relevant to the Australasian region, provided the following selection of misleading information.

Rockhopper Penguins do not breed at the Bounty Islands as stated on page 9. In the text on page 10, but not on map 12, the Chatham Islands and the North Island of New Zealand have been omitted from the breeding range of the Little Penguin. On pages 16 and 17 no hint is given that Wandering and Royal Albatrosses in some plumages can be difficult to identify at sea. The text and the illustration on Plate 3 of Short-tailed Albatross do not tally; the illustration of an adult of this rare species differs markedly from any plumage pattern known to us but the earliest stage of immature plumage is shown reasonably well. The bill in this Albatross is pink in immatures but is probably more correctly described as yellowish with a blue-grey tip in older birds. Nowhere is there any mention of the two forms of Black-browed Albatrosses. Despite what is said on page 21 juvenile Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses are distinguishable from Sooty Albatrosses because they still have the body plumage distinctly lighter than the head, wings and tail. On page 19 and map 25 Tuck appears to have overlooked the distinctive sub-species of *Diomedea cauta: salvini* that breeds on the Snares and Bounty Islands and *eremita* that breeds on Pyramid Rock in the Chatham Islands. However, there is an illustration of *eremita* at the bottom of Plate 4 marked 3c.

Shearwaters and petrels do not spend most of their life on the wing without sleep as implied on page 23; they can be encountered frequently in large flocks resting at sea and they rest ashore often at their breeding islands. Only a few species of shearwater forage by diving and swimming underwater.

We find *Daption capensis* instead of the correct *capense*. The measurements given for prions are muddled, so that what appears to be a reasonable treatment of this difficult group is unreliable (see Harper 1980, *Notornis* 27: 235 - 286 for an excellent review of characters to use at sea and in the hand).

How do we fare if we try to identify any one of the four most common shearwaters to be seen off the eastern coast of Australia? Using Tuck, we should probably recognize the Pale-faced (= Fleshy-footed), though its legs are not yellowish flesh. Bill colour would be a major criterion but Plate 8 does not show it as straw-coloured. Wedge-tailed is a bit more difficult, because the text suggests tail shape as the main character of the dark forms. The tail is usually folded and therefore seldom seen clearly as a wedge-shape. The slender elongated body and the characteristic attitude of the wings

most readily distinguish this lightly-built species. Tuck says the Pale-footed has 'long narrow wings' and the Wedge-tailed has 'long broadish wings'. In fact they are almost exactly the same in size and shape and far better described by the latter statement. Problems continue with the Sooty and Short-tailed. For these shearwaters 'long narrow wings' is correct but emphasis on a pale chin in Sooty, which is supposed to be lacking in Short-tailed, is definitely unacceptable. The greater size of Sooty is stressed and the underwing pattern is mentioned but is not illustrated correctly on Plate 8, nor for that matter in most recent books (Harper and Kinsky 1978, *Southern Albatrosses and Petrels*, come closest). The bill and leg colorations of Sooty and Short-tailed do not differ and are not well described by blackish or dark (bills) and bluish grey (Short-tailed) or bluish (Sooty) for legs. Plate 8 is again inconsistent with the text. The maps for these species show a useful feature in which months of occurrence in different parts of the migratory range are indicated. Some other seabirds are given this treatment. Many Short-tailed Shearwaters are back in Australian waters by October and this ought to have been shown on the map. The breeding distribution shown for Short-tailed (map 56) is not entirely accurate (see earlier comment). However, the migratory loop looks a much more likely version than is traditionally represented for this species.

The account of the Cookilaria petrels is equally depressing. Both the colour illustrations (Plate 12) and the figures (pp 41 - 42) are incorrect for nearly every one of the species concerned; most are grossly incorrect. Incidentally, the Black-winged Petrel, a species very easy to identify at sea, has a much wider breeding range than indicated by Tuck. Because the underwing patterns are important characteristics in many petrels it is disappointing to find little help in the text on how to use them along with other features to untangle a group such as these Cookilaria petrels. Similar problems occur elsewhere in the *Pterodroma* petrels with barely sufficient information to identify most of them positively.

A taxonomic innovation by Tuck (p. 72 and map 141) and Serventy (p. 263) is the inclusion of the Australasian populations of *Phalacrocorax carbo* in the nominate sub-species, which all previous workers have considered to be confined to the maritime shores of the North Atlantic Ocean, with Sweden as an embarrassing type-locality; but Sweden was then somewhat bigger when in 1758 Linnaeus named this bird *Pelecanus carbo*. On page 72 and map 142 the distribution of *P. c. sinensis* is given but the distributions of the intermediate forms between *sinensis* and *lucidus* are omitted and not mentioned in the text (cf. Cramp and Simmons [Eds] *Birds Western Palearctic* 1:200 - 207). Similarly on page 76 Tuck, following Alexander, treats *campbelli* as a sub-species of *Phalacrocorax carunculatus* but fails to mention or figure *chalconotus*, *onslowi*, *ranfurlyi* and *colensoi*. Their distribution is included in that of *P. carunculatus* on map 155 but not in the text.

*Gabianus* is retained as a genus of *scoresbyi*, the Magellan Gull (pp 94, 190 and 206), but is not used for its type species *pacificus*, the Pacific Gull. *Leucophaeus* is the generic name that should have been used for *scoresbyi*. Serventy (p.264) does retain *Gabianus* with *Larus* in brackets for *pacificus*, although he has used *Larus* with *Gabianus* in brackets in his and Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia* from the 3rd (1962) to the 7th (1976) editions. Taxonomically the latter version is more correct.

There are many problems with the illustrations, some of which have already been mentioned. The black-and-white figures are neither numbered nor indexed. Some even lack a legend and it is not always clear which species is figured. We are not aware of any cormorant that looks like the one on page xvi. On Plate 2 the Fiordland Crested Penguin is

drawn smaller than the Rockhopper Penguin, whereas the reverse is true as indicated in the text on pages 8 and 9. The mantle pattern of the Wandering Albatross, as shown on 3a, looks improbable and 3c, as illustrated, could also be an adult female. On Plate 20 and page 73 there is no indication of the white throat-feathers of the Japanese Cormorant extending much further down the neck than in the Common Cormorant. On Plate 22 the Black-faced Cormorant is given a red face; the Spotted Cormorant and the Pitt Island Cormorant, a blue instead of a grass-green face. Many Campbell Island Cormorants do have white wing-patches, a character that is individually variable in sub-antarctic shags and does not vary with season as indicated for the Blue-eyed Cormorant. On Plate 23 the Reed Cormorant has been given a red instead of a yellow face and there is no mention of its close marine relative, the Crowned Cormorant, which is more likely to be seen from a ship. On Plate 41 the black subterminal bar has been omitted from the bill of the Caspian Tern.

The use of the British or Australian volumes to identify seabirds will be frustrating and even misleading for most observers. It is probably safer to rely on Harper and Kinsky (1978, *Southern Albatrosses and Petrels*), Falla *et al.* (1979, the new guide to birds of New Zealand), Slater (1970, *A Field Guide to Australian Birds*) or Pizzey (1980, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*) for the identification of seabirds in the Australasian region. Tuck and Heinzel undertook a massive task and it is sad to have to say that a lot of tidying up will be needed to make it at all reliable. As a last comment, if you do want to buy a copy, buy it through an agent in the UK and save yourself half the price it sells for in Australia. There is not a sufficient difference in the versions to bother with the local product. There is, by the way, a third version, a South African edition, which we have not examined.

The third book, *A Guide to Seabirds on the Ocean Routes*, is a companion to be used with one of the versions of the field guides reviewed above. The cover claims that it gives an account of all the seabirds likely to be seen on twenty-five of the world's most frequently travelled ocean-routes. There is also an account of the birds of Antarctica but not of the sub-antarctic islands. The breeding distribution of birds in the central Pacific Ocean is given but not those of birds in the other oceans. Seabirds that are to be seen in the harbours at the end points of a few of the twenty-five ocean-routes are mentioned. The harbours include for Australia only Fremantle and for New Zealand only Wellington. Ocean-routes 16 and 17 to Australia start on the map from Hanoi and in the text and on the map legend in Hong Kong. A map on page 135 shows correctly the positions of the Sub-Tropical and Antarctic Convergences, which are incorrectly shown on a map on pages xviii and xix in the field guides.

Scientific names are explained in the introduction but are not used in the text where only English names are given for species and sub-species. These English names are a mixture of world, British and other usages and are not always the same as in the field guides. Generic names are provided in the index but of those used in the field guides, *Bulweria*, *Chionis* and *Rhynchops* are omitted. *Rhynchops*, the skimmers, is mentioned only in the introduction and the index refers only to the ocean routes and Antarctica. Plate numbers in the field guides are given in brackets after most names of seabirds in the chapters on the ocean-routes and Antarctica. Bounty Island and Chatham Island Albatrosses are mentioned on page 101 for Route 20. Presumably they are *Diomedea cauta salvini* and *D.c. eremita*, which were omitted from the text of the field guides. The sheathbills are omitted from the introduction of the Guide as they are from the introduction to the field guides. However, the Yellow-billed Sheathbill does rate a mention in Route 25

and Antarctica. Omitted from the Guide are: Abbott's Booby and Christmas Island Frigatebird from Route 13; Ascension Island Frigatebird from Routes 6 and 7; Southern Giant-Petrel from all routes and Antarctica; Black-faced Cormorant from Routes 11 and 17; Grey Pelican from routes 15, 16 and 17 and Hutton's Shearwater from Routes 11, 17 and 20.

Whereas in the field guides *Phalacrocorax carbo* in Australia is considered to be the nominate sub-species, in this guide it reverts to being the Australian race of the Great Cormorant in Bass Strait at the end of Route 17.

The drawings of seabirds in flight by Norman Arlott in this guide are considerably better than those by Hermann Heinzel in the field guides. Heinzel, however, is better at drawing frigatebirds and neither appears to be able to draw giant-petrels.

The Guide does not usually distinguish between the species of giant-petrel, of prion and of Cookilaria petrel nor does it recognize the occurrence of the South Polar (MacCormick's) Skua north of Antarctic waters. In the Guide the table of contents does not include the figures. All figures have a legend but maps do not. The number of illustrations per family is as follows: penguins 2, albatrosses 5, petrels and shearwaters 21, storm-petrels 4, diving-petrels none, tropicbirds 2, pelicans 2, gannets and boobies 7; cormorants 1, frigatebirds 2, phalaropes 1, skuas 2, gulls 5, terns 10, auks 3 and sheathbills none. The Northern Gannet is illustrated on three figures and the Fulmar on two. Two forms of Audubon's Shearwater are illustrated.

In summary, the *Guide to Seabirds on the Ocean Routes*, is a useful book to consult before embarking on one of the longer ocean voyages.

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**Field Guide to the Birds of Western Australia** by G.M. Storr and R.E. Johnstone, illustrated by Martin Thompson, 1979. Perth: Frank Daniels for the Western Australian Museum. Pp 211, col. p11 38, b. & w. p11 2, figs 8, map 1, diagram 1.221 X 147 mm. \$19.95.

This is a neat and compact book and its low cost tends to offset any lack of sturdiness in standing up to wear and tear in the field. It treats some 475 species and covers the whole of Western Australia north to the Kimberley Division. In that sense it is more comprehensive than Serventy and Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia* and serves a rather different purpose.

It fulfils the first main aim of a field guide (of identifying a bird for the user) with simplicity and professionalism. The bulk of the text consists of four-to eight-line descriptions of each species, defining features of male, female and immature birds, where they differ, and stressing characteristics that distinguish the species being discussed from others. Descriptions are followed by brief but accurate accounts of distribution and main habitat, both within and without Western Australia. There are no maps of distribution, but a double-page map of the climatic zones of Western Australia appears inside the front cover. It is easy to read and is labelled with the main places mentioned in the text. The species are arranged in a sequence resembling but not conforming to that in other standard lists, such as Peters' *Check-list of Birds of the World* or the RAOU Checklists (Pt I and Interim List of Passerines, 1975). The account of each family is introduced by a thumb-nail description of the family, written

in a simple style that avoids difficult technical terms. In summary, the text scores in its concise precision. For those who require more in a field guide, Graham Pizzey's *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* would provide the more complete reference.

All species, or at least their diagnostic parts, are illustrated in colour, and black-and-white silhouettes of all Anatidae in flight are added to aid identification. Taken as a whole, the illustrations are soundly executed and achieve another objective of a good field guide: that of enabling ready identification. Martin Thompson's figures are more life-like than those in Peter Slater's *A Field Guide to Australian Birds* (if not quite up to the standard of Roy Doyle's in Pizzey's), but they are smaller, particularly in the case of dull honeyeaters, warblers and wrens that are difficult to identify. Some of the plates in my copy, (e.g. Plate 32) seem to have become washed out, so that colour and therefore diagnostic characters are lost; it is almost impossible to distinguish between the figures for the Dusky and Thick-billed Grasswrens. Moreover, the Grey-fronted Honeyeater (called Yellow-fronted here) is not illustrated with its narrow grey frons, even though the figure of its head is large enough to show it. These, nevertheless, are minor blemishes in illustrations that are generally of a high standard for a field guide.

A third objective of a field guide (that of following standard taxonomy and using familiar or standard names for all species) is not realized so well. Indeed, Storr and Johnstone tend to chart their own course here. This may satisfy their own professional views of taxonomy and nomenclature, for which there is often much to be said, but it is misplaced in a field guide. The users of field guides are mostly students, novices and visitors from overseas. Unfamiliar with the finer points of systematic ornithology in Australia, they can be confused and misled by names that do not match those in the main reference texts on Australian birds.

Changes in scientific names are not too serious in a field guide; few use them and those that do usually have some inkling of their synonyms. There are nevertheless at least three taxonomic changes that I found surprising. One is the combining of all Australian corellas under a single species; another is the lumping of Eastern and Western Bristlebirds; and the third is the inclusion of the scrub-robins *Drymodes* in the family Orthonychidae.

Vagaries in English nomenclature are less easy to follow. Names come from various sources. Some, such as those for the egrets, fairy-wrens, hylacolas and Calamanthus, follow the RAOU's *Recommended English Names for Australian Birds*. Others, the Torres Strait Pigeon, Australian Crow, Golden-headed Fantail-Warbler, flyeater (for gerygone), and Yellow-fronted Honeyeater, are kept from older lists and handbooks. There are even some innovations: Australian Sittella for the already well-established Varied Sittella and Grey-breasted White-eye for the familiar Silvereye.

These departures from current RAOU nomenclature might be thought to presage new standards, were it not that few of them agree with alternative names used elsewhere. Pizzey, for example, sticks in his field guide to the RAOU'S Singing Bushlark, Varied Sittella, Golden-headed Cisticola and Eastern and Western Yellow Robins but prefers instead only one Wedgebill, heath-wren for hylacola, White-tailed Warbler, Lilac-crowned Wren and White-rumped Miner. Storr and Johnstone's position on these names is precisely the opposite. Unfortunately, such lack of unanimity obstructs rather than clears the road for a stable nomenclature, bemuses the average naturalist and upsets the work of support institutions like zoos and museums, which need standard names to

communicate with everyone.

Richard Schodde

**Guide to Living Birds** by J.E. Webb, J.A. Wallwork and J.H. Elgood, 1979. London: Macmillan. Pp XII + 291, many b. & w. drawings, figs & maps. 215 X 135 mm. \$12.50

The accounts of each order and family are kept to a single page and take the form of a sequence of one- or two-sentence entries itemizing structural and behavioural attitudes, distribution and the number of component genera and species (for families only). The entries are simply and concisely written and are accompanied by maps, showing world distribution, and sketches of species typical of each family. Both format and information duplicate to some extent the description of the families of birds in Van Tyne and Berger's *Fundamentals of Ornithology*. Here Webb *et al.*'s accounts lose mainly by omitting a bibliography for each family.

For its price, this paperback must be one of the handiest and easily read compilations of the characteristics of birds ever published. It is, in reality, a desk guide to the families of living birds, summarizing their salient features and introducing them with a succinct summary of the form of the birds, the broad functions of their plumage and limbs, their internal structure and organs, their patterns of geographical distribution and the state of their phylogenetic classification. These sections are backed up by simple diagrams of the type of bills and feet, the form of feathers and feather tracts, and the structure of the head, brain, skull, wing, pectoral and pelvic girdles, hind limb, heart, lungs, syrinx and eggs. One figure even illustrates the structural action of flight.

The families are arranged in conventional sequence, beginning with the ratites and ending with the oscines but within that series they are grouped in an ecologically instructive way. The early families of ground birds are followed by the water birds, both sub-divided into flightless and flying groups. After these come perching birds, broken into carnivorous predators, non-passerine aerial feeders, non-passerine arboreal birds and passerines. Here the general connexion between precocial young and a terrestrial or aquatic mode of life and between altricial young and an arboreal existence is made specially clear.

Classification (the limits of families and the number of genera and species within them) is based on E.S. Gruson's *A Checklist of the Birds of the World*, a rather unreliable source. *Reference List of the Birds of the World* by J.J. Morony, W. J. Bock, and J. Farrand, Jnr, would have provided a sounder foundation. But the essential purpose of the text is to summarize the characteristics of each order and its constituent families and it is on this basis that it must be judged.

The accounts in both manuals suffer often, moreover, from being too general and superficial. In Webb *et al.*, the differences between strigid and tytonid owls in length of toes, slotting of the primaries, shape of eggs and form of defence are not given. Nor is mention made of the primary character of honeyeaters (their fimbriate quadrifid tongue) or of the thick downy plumage of cuckoo-shrikes. The map of Climacteridae, furthermore, shows treecreepers absent from the whole of Western Australia and the Varied Sittella has been left off the world map of Sittidae. As so often happens in compilations brought together in other parts of the world, Australian groups are treated with less per-

ception than those of regions closer to Europe and North America, e.g. fairy-wrens *Malurus* are aligned with monarch flycatchers and fantails in the Muscicapinae. Such short-comings will be recognized immediately by Australian ornithologists, which indirectly makes the book more useful to them than to workers overseas.

Some errors, omissions and superficialities are inevitable in a book of this scope and level. What makes up for this is its general comprehensiveness, simplicity and readability. It is pitched at the level of general ornithologists, ecologists and non-taxonomists and for their purposes it is one of the most reliable and certainly most convenient references to the world's families of birds today.

Richard Schodde

**Islands of South-west Tasmania** Gary White, 1980. Sydney: Published by the author. Pp XII + 63, b. & w. p11 10. \$A4.50

The author is to be congratulated on his enterprise in gathering and publishing the information contained in this booklet. Although much of the text is in the form of annotated plant and animal lists, it nevertheless makes enjoyable reading for ornithologists and others with an interest in Australia's small coastal islands. The author's enthusiasm for this remote group of islands, an integral part of one of the Southern Hemisphere's three major temperate wildernesses, comes through strongly and his pioneering effort has established an excellent baseline from which Tasmanian wildlife authorities can begin to formulate plans of management for the islands of the area.

Five of the major islands, De Witt, Maatsuyker, Flat (Mutton Bird), Louisa and Flat Witch, are dealt with in separate chapters and a further chapter summarizes information on ten of the smaller and lesser known ones. However the coverage of the area is not complete, with approximately twenty small islands and rocks omitted because they are yet to be investigated by students of natural history. There are black-and-white photographs of all the major islands except for Flat Island, and also of the Mewstone and Ile du Golfe. The oblique aerials are of excellent quality but most of the others are mediocre. Perhaps the main criticism that can be made of the booklet is the lack of maps. It would be useful to have a general map of the area showing the islands listed and their locations with respect to the Tasmanian mainland. Maps of the larger islands showing physical features, landing sites and the extent of seabird colonies would also be helpful.

In each of the chapters dealing with a major island, an introduction details all known landings concerned with biological observations. A physical description of the island is given together with recommended landing and camping sites and any past human settlement or other activity is discussed. The vegetation is described and an annotated list of flora is given for some islands. Birds, mammals and reptiles are treated in much the same manner. Birds and breeding seabirds, in particular, receive the most attention because they are the most important group. A discussion of factors affecting the population densities of vertebrates is given at the end of each chapter together with conservation problems likely to require future attention.

Ornithologically the islands of south-western Tasmania are important breeding grounds for Fairy Penguins, White-capped Albatrosses (two colonies), Short-tailed Shearwaters, Common Diving-Petrels, Fairy Prions and Australasian Gannets (two colonies). Other breeding seabirds are Black-faced

Cormorants, Sooty Oystercatchers, Silver and Pacific Gulls. All known colonies of these species are described in detail and the author has made a number of important findings at some. For example his descriptions of 'pack attacks' on the eggs and young of Short-tailed Shearwaters on De Witt Island by the largely vegetarian Swamp Rat *Rattus lutreolus* have not been previously made.

The lists of birds for each island have been carefully prepared with only confirmed records accepted. The numbers of land birds, particularly passerines, make interesting comparison and the presence or absence of species such as the White-browed (Brown) Scrubwren, Scrubtit, Tasmanian Thornbill and some of the honeyeaters pose interesting questions. Perhaps in a revised edition some space could be given to an application of the theories of island biogeography to these island avifaunas.

In conclusion, this booklet is recommended to all ornithologists interested in seabird breeding islands, land birds on small islands and the avifauna of Tasmania generally. It ought to stimulate further awareness of Tasmania's south-western wilderness and the importance of the area for wildlife conservation.

David Milledge

**The Birds of Oman** by Michael Gallagher and Martin W. Woodcock, 1980. London: Quartet Books. Pp 310, frontis., col. p11 XII + 12), figs 3, tables 10: 312 x 220 mm. £Stg37.50.

Few readers of 'Emu' are likely to be interested in Oman; still fewer in its birds, at this price. Yet I have found that most people, except the rudest mechanicals, once exposed to the deserts of Arabia Felix and their inhabitants, man and beast, fall under their spell for ever. Naturally, poorly known corners such as the Crucial Toast and Oman are the most fashionating, to use Ludwig Koch's immortal corruption. And Oman at the meeting place of three zoogeographical regions is importantly placed. There has been no comprehensive guide to its birds till now.

The book is conventional, perhaps traditional, with an introduction of forty-six pages, giving the background of climate, physiography and avifauna with some practical tips for birdwatching. The main part is an annotated list of species (world range, occurrence and status in Oman, descriptions of plumage and some field notes) plus a simple checklist and appendixes for doubtful and possible occurrences, introduced species and banding recoveries in the country. All species recorded in the country and a good many that can be expected because they occur nearby (e.g. in South Yemen) are shown in good clear coloured plates.

So, to what does it all amount? If one is honest, the book contains not much more new and useful information than a field guide or even a competent faunal paper in a journal, most of the illustrations being already available elsewhere. It is not going to fit into an ordinary shelf comfortably, let alone into a rucksack or hip-pocket. In short it is the sort of book at which it is now fashionable for reviewers to sneer (coffee-table). However, believing that there is more to life than microfiche and silicon chips, I give it three hearty cheers. Any naturalist lucky enough to visit the eastward parts of the Arabian peninsula will be well advised to get it into his baggage instead of a lot of assorted gadgetry because I am sure that he will find it

as invaluable as I found Meinertzhagen's *Nicoll's Birds of Egypt* forty years ago. It is a fine book and I suppose that we get it at all thanks to the generous and enlightened patronage of H.M. Qaboos bin Said. I cannot see much support coming from western sources for this sort of en-

deavour, which raises the sobering thought that perhaps the Arabs are set to become the custodians of western culture, just as they were for 800 years after the Hejira.

S. Marchant

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