REVIEWS

Edited by J.M. PENHALLURICK

Nocturnal Birds of Australia by R. Schodde & I. J. Mason, illustrated by J. Boot, "1980" [=1981]. Melbourne: Landsdowne Editions. Pp 136, col. p11 29, 6 drawings and 10 maps, 406 x 305 mm, bound in leather. $A350.00.

This is a beautiful book. The scholarly yet readable and stimulating text, almost free from jargon, the quite remarkably beautiful plates and the high quality of production, have resulted in an outstanding work that can be unreservedly recommended to everybody able to pay the very stiff price.

A foreword by David Fleay is followed by an introduction with a discussion of zoogeography and geographical barriers, and a good historical account, especially of the "Watling Drawings". In the main part, the Australian representatives of the nocturnal families Strigidae, Tytonidae, Podargidae, Aegothelidae and Caprimulgidae are treated, as well as four nocturnal members of mainly diurnal families: Rufous Night Heron (Ardeidae), Letter-winged Kite (Accipitridae), Bush Thick-knee (Burhinidae) and Night Parrot (Psittacidae). The choice of these four was not an easy one, as several other species might have qualified. Although I should not have liked to miss these four species, it would have been more logical to restrict the book to the five nocturnal families.

For each family there is an introduction giving its characteristics and general biology. This is a particularly valuable part of the book as in many handbooks family characteristics are only sketchily dealt with, if at all. The text on each species is subdivided into sections on morphology (description), distribution, routines (in which much interesting detail on life-histories appears), food, voice, breeding, subspecies in Australia and relationships. Perhaps the section on subspecies could better have been called geographical variation, to which the actual acceptance or rejection of subspecies is subordinate. The book is concluded with a short chapter on problems and prospects in conservation, a glossary of technical terms and a comprehensive bibliography.

I enjoyed reading this book, and I learned much from it. The fact that in some places the text invites questions is a virtue. Some minor criticisms and queries I jotted down: perhaps birds find it easier in the dark to hunt for moving prey than to locate fruit (p. 9), but the many species of fruit- and nectar-eating bats do not appear to have this problem, and it seems more likely that certain bird species have become adapted to the daily rhythms of their prey, a pattern of activities that itself may have developed under the influence of factors such as predation, competition and climatic conditions. "Measurements of the wings were taken from the shoulder" (p. 9); yet no ornithologist measures wings from the shoulder, but from the wrist. The remark on finding one hitherto unrecognized owl, the Lesser Sooty (p. 9), is somewhat misleading, a point I shall discuss later. Not being very familiar with the intricacies of the English language, I was amused to find a reference to "rookeries" of herons (p. 17), although on a previous page (p. 13) the name "heronries" is used for the same. Would it also be legitimate to write of "heronries" of Rooks? The glossary did not inform me of the meaning of "the advanced AXY pelvic muscle formula" which herons have (p. 13), as opposed to the "unspecialised AXY pelvic muscle formula" of the nightjars (p. 113). A propos of the statement that hawks and eagles have no obvious close relatives, mention might have been made of the Falconidae which are usually, albeit perhaps incorrectly, placed in the same order. The discussion of the Accipitridae (p. 19) applies more to the large species of the family than to its smaller members.

It is suggested that the Australian *Elanus* might have acquired its black underwing patch independently (p. 24), but the distribution of this characteristic amongst members of the genus makes it seem more likely that it is an original character and that its reduction and virtual disappearance is derived. The discussion of the systematic position of the Night Parrot (p. 36) states that classification should not reflect degree of similarity or difference, but relationship. This sounds reasonable enough as a philosophical principle, but usually degree of similarity is the only information we have to judge relationships, and the conclusion presented without further explanation, that Night Parrot and Ground Parrot are particularly closely related, appears to be based exclusively on degree of similarity! Road kills are mentioned (p. 53), but not in the concluding review of hazards, where one would have expected to find an assessment of their significance. The eyes of Tytonidae are stated to be proportionally smaller than those of Strigidae (p. 61); does this generalization hold for *Tyto tenebricosa*, which has such remarkably large eyes? It is noted that wing-tail proportions are correlated with hunting environment (p. 77), but in the case of *Ninox novaeseelandiae* such differences are used for specific separation. Under *Podargus papuensis* (p. 95, 99) there is some historical/ecological speculation, but the recognition of two apparently well-differentiated subspecies conflicts with the suggestion that Australia has been recently colonized. It would be surprising if there were no "minor geographical variations in diet" (p. 103), as birds can eat only what is available. One of the characteristics of *Eurostopodus* is said to be that members of this genus lay only one egg, against *Caprimulgus* two (p. 113); but there are several species generally placed in *Caprimulgus* which lay one egg, and in other species of nightjar there is geographical and even individual variation. What is the basis for the observation that older individuals of *Eurostopodus mystacalis* are less distinctly marked than younger birds? Misprints are scarce. I noted that both in the text and in the bibliography the name of the South Australian ornithologist F.R. Zietz is misspelled.

In a normal review this is about the place where I would conclude with a few words of praise and congratulation for the authors and the artist, but there is another aspect of this book that will have to be mentioned. As the authors state, their particular metier is systematic ornithology (p.10). Both in matters of pure nomenclature and in classification there are numerous deviations from current use as codified in the "official" list (Condon 1975, *Checkl. Birds Aust.* I).

Every ornithologist who becomes interested in the systematics of Australian birds will very soon be confronted with the massive contribution of G.M. Mathews and his secretary, T. Iredale, to this field. Initially there may be plain disbelief; this is likely to be followed by various stages of indignation, and only much later by unemotional acceptance. The duo arouse strong feelings not because they have made errors – we all do: the only way to avoid making errors is not to publish anything – but because it is very difficult to believe in their good faith; or as Serventy (1949, Emu: 262) put it so aptly, Mathew's: "startling role as an upsetter of names almost gives one an impression that he adopted any principle of taxonomy or nomenclature which gave promise of further name-changing or name creation!" Mathews died over thirty years ago, but his influence will be felt until well into the next century. Everything he has done has to be checked.

Schodde & Mason are in the second stage of reaction to Mathews, that of indignation; even in their first chapter

they get their teeth into him, showing that his arguments for rejecting *Falco axillaris* Latham as the oldest name for the Black-shouldered Kite were false. Under *Nycticorax caledonicus* they argue that the Australian subspecies ought to be known as *N. c. novaehollandiae* (Vieillot, 1817), not as *N. c. hilli* Mathews, 1912. Although they may be right about the identity of *novaehollandiae*, in both 1817 and 1823 Vieillot described the upperparts as being "d' un joli gris", and in spite of Pucheran's (1851: 566) statement that the types in Paris represent *N. caledonicus*, Vieillot's description suggests that he had no proper idea of the appearance of these specimens and in his mind mixed them up with *N. nycticorax*. Of course, actual type-specimens were never indicated in those days. Pucheran gives much weight to certain corrections written in the copies of Vieillot's publications in the library of the museum in Paris, but he does not say that these corrections are in Vieillot's handwriting and therefore they might have little value. Schodde & Mason have used the name *novaehollandiae* in spite of the fact that—as their synonymy proves—they are aware of the existence of an earlier *Ardea novaehollandiae*. *Ardea novaehollandiae* Vieillot, 1817, is a junior primary homonym of *Ardea novaehollandiae* Latham, 1790, and as such, under the International Code (art. 59a), has to be permanently rejected. Therefore the name *N. c. novaehollandiae* used by Schodde & Mason is invalid; if Vieillot's descriptions are considered identifiable, the name to be used would apparently be *N. c. australasiae* (Vieillot, 1823), but as mentioned above, sufficient doubt can be cast on Vieillot's names to justify retention of the current nomenclature.

Schodde & Mason are perfectly correct in their discussion of the nomenclature of the Burhinidae on the basis of art. 24 of the Code, and there are additional reasons for calling the Australian Bush Thick-knee *Burhinus grallarius* and not *B. magnirostris*. But contrary to their statement (p. 12), the substitution of *grallarius* for *magnirostris* will not automatically save for use the junior name *Oedicnemus magnirostris* Vieillot, 1817, for the Beach Stone-curlew, if the genus *Esacus* is united with *Burhinus*, as the earlier *magnirostris* will continue to preoccupy in the genus *Burhinus*. It must be remembered that early in this century, when page-and line-priority became fashionable, there was an orgy of name-changing in violation of the present art. 24 of the Code. An example that comes to mind is *Anas boschas* (based on Mallard ♂), which after almost a century and a half of unchallenged use was replaced by *Anas platyrhynchos* (based on Mallard ♀). The great Linnaeus had described drake and duck of the Mallard as different species, and the duck happens to have page-priority. It would cause more confusion to change all this back than it is worth at this late date. We may regret all these unnecessary name-changes in the past, as indeed I do, but I cannot see that any good purpose will be served by changing all of them back. Incidentally, Schodde & Mason ascribe authorship of *Aegotheles cristatus* to Shaw, and not to J. White, as in my opinion they should have done (cf. Notornis 16: 215).

The last species in the book, the Spotted Nightjar, has also undergone a change of name, and is listed as *Eurostopodus argus* Hartert. The change is based on a reexamination of the type-specimen of *C. guttatus* in the British Museum (by Mr. I.C.J. Galbraith), and the conclusion that it is not a Spotted Nightjar but a fledgling of *Eurostopodus mystacalis*. The case is presented convincingly, and ought to be accepted.

More important than the preceding purely nomenclatural changes is a series of changes based on the authors' own revisional work. It has led to a re-evaluation of the status of certain species and subspecies. One is the specific separation of the Australian Boobook Owl from the New Zealand *Ninox novaeseelandiae*, with the consequence that the former's specific name has been changed to *Ninox boobook*. The subspecies inhabiting Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands have apparently been left with *N. novaeseelandiae* (cf. p. 53) but are not discussed. The arguments for the division are a slight difference in shape of the wing, and darker face mask and under-wing coverts in the New Zealand birds. These points do not prove much either way. I do not think that there can be much doubt that *N. novaeseelandiae* has colonized New Zealand from Australia and also that its only possible close relative in Australia is the Boobook Owl. My personal preference is to express this close relationship in nomenclature and to continue to treat them as one species.

The same pertains to the Sooty Owl *Tyto tenebricosa*: this species consists of three well-differentiated subspecies, one in New Guinea, one in North Queensland, and one in south-eastern Australia. Schodde & Mason have decided that the Queensland form, *multipunctata*, is so distinct morphologically that it has to be regarded as a separate species, the Lesser Sooty Owl, which leaves the two other subspecies, retained in *tenebricosa*, widely separated. They bolster their case by relating an experiment by David Fleay, who crossed a *tenebricosa* ♀ with a *multipunctata* ♂ and as far as I can make out proved complete infertility. The difference in size (wing-length of *mutipunctata* ♂ *c.* 73% of that of *tenebricosa* ♀) is not more than that between the largest females and the smallest males in different subspecies of *Tyto novaehollandiae*. It should be possible to draw attention to the distinctness of *mutipunctata* without taking this form out of the species *tenebricosa*. This is also more in agreement with the authors' principle, referred to on a previous page, that classification should not reflect degree of similarity or difference, but relationships.

It is only logical that as more material becomes available to fill out the ranges of widely distributed species, it becomes more difficult to maintain all the subspecies previously described. Populations may be perfectly distinct at the opposite ends of the range, but the change from one into the other may be so gradual that drawing a dividing line becomes an arbitrary, and therefore an artificial matter. The number of subspecies one wants to recognize is under such circumstances subjective, largely guided by personal taste and philosophy. In the cases of two species, the Boobook Owl and the Tawny Frogmouth, Schodde & Mason have retained a south-eastern subspecies, but have united the populations of the South-West and the North under one name. This classsification implies that birds from south-western Australia are more closely related to birds from northern Australia than to birds from the South-East. This may well be true, but their morphology suggests that actually the closer relationship exists between South-West and South-East, as in the species *Ninox connivens* and *Tyto novaehollandiae*.

Amongst Australian ornithologists, an opinion seems to have developed in recent years that geographical variation due to influence of environment should not be expressed in nomenclature, *cf.* Schodde & Mason (p. 104): " . . . to see how much of the variation has been influenced by environment", and (p. 105): "ecophenotypic" (a term not explained in the glossary). It could easily be argued that all geographical variation is influenced by environment, but surely, in the great majority of cases this variation has a genetic base, being the product of a long period of selection. There is now a tendency in Australia to dismiss moderately differentiated subspecies as "ecophenotypical", but on the other hand to upgrade well-marked forms to species, a

partial return to a binomial nomenclature.

I want to mention one other point where further investigation is needed. Mason & Schodde (1980, Emu 80: 143) state that the type specimen of *Ninox rufa queenslandica* Mathews from Mackay does not differ from material from the Cardwell-Cooktown area. In this they differ from Mees (1964; Zool. Verh. 65: 9–10) who found this specimen "strikingly different", and from Greenway (1978, Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist. 161: 128), who moreover introduced an element of doubt as to the provenance of the specimen.

The plates are of an enchanting beauty and easily rank amongst the best I have ever seen. I find it difficult to criticize anything at all. In a very few instances (see for example the Barking Owl), the birds are depicted on a branch that looks as if it has been broken off at the proximal end, so that one gets an impression that the bird and its perch are not attached to anything, but float in the air. The flying Masked Owl could also, to my taste, have done with a bit of background. I do hope that Jeremy Boot will be given an opportunity to publish more of his work.

Finally, the question of what kind of public the book is intended for has to be raised. The authors state that: "In its tenor this book is pitched at the general naturalist. We hope that by this course the beginner will find enough of interest to help him along and the professional biologist sufficient fact to be of use" (p. 9). But with its high price, it is hardly likely that the book will fulfil this purpose. The publishers look to an entirely different market. In the prospectus it is first stated that the book will be of particular interest to ornithologists as well as bibliophiles, investors and collectors of fine art, but then follow in bold print the words: "This volume is a must for collectors". The stream of luxury works in the field of natural history published in Australia proves that there are large sums of money floating about in the hands of a public at least mildly interested in natural history. This kind of public will certainly appreciate the plates (and quite rightly so), but is unlikely to appreciate fully the importance of the text.

G. Mees

Birds of East Africa their Habitat, Status and Distribution ed. by P. L. Britton, 1980. Nairobi: East Afr. Nat. Hist. Soc. Pp xiv + 271, col. pll 4, b. & w. pll 15, maps 4. 172 x 246 mm. US$17.00
A Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa by J. G. Williams, 1980. London: Collins. Pp 415, col. pll 48, line drawing 1.130 x 190 mm. US$20.00
Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa by C. W. Mackworth-Praed and C. H. B. Grant, 2nd ed., reprinted 1980. London: Longmans, Green & Co. Pp xxxiv + 836 in vol. I, viii + 1176 in vol. II, col. pll 96, b. & w. pll 114, numerous line drawings and maps. 140 x 212 mm. Vol. I $56, Vol. II $70.

Rarely is a review prepared, as this has been in the field (in Kenya) while actually using the works in question. Of these books the well known "P & G" is essentially a reissue (with the addition of only biographies of Mackworth-Praed and Grant, and 2 maps) of the long out of print 2nd edition, which, because of its detailed treatment of every subspecies and many illustrations, has been the "bible" of determined field ornithologists who could carry the hefty volumes into the field. In our copies the plates are paler and more washed out than in the original issue of the edition. It is a shame that, given the need to reissue and the fact that some pages were added, the publisher did not use the opportunity to have an African ornithologist add modern scientific and English names. The out-of-date names are the books' biggest drawback. Note that the Britton book, for its more limited area, provides modern names and the species' numbers for Mackworth-Praed and Grant, allowing one to insert these names into the latter books.

Coverage of "East Africa" varies in these works: Mackworth-Praed and Grant treat an area from Sudan to Somalia, south to Mozambique and eastern Malawi and west through Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. Williams covers Ethiopia and Somalia south through intervening countries to all of Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Uganda, but not Rwanda and Burundi, is included). And Britton deals with only Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

Williams' guide is an expanded version of his *Field Guide to the Birds of East and Central Africa* (1963). It covers a greatly increased area with many more species, so the larger number of plates (by N. Arlott) does not increase the proportion illustrated. The selection of species illustrated is poor: many widespread species merit only a few words and no picture, while some rare, restricted species have full accounts and illustrations. All lapwings, easy to distinguish, are illustrated, but only one snake-eagle is depicted. Too few bustards are shown, and neither broad-billed roller is illustrated. A number of plates are very poor: the Fine-banded Woodpecker in plate 23 is even worse than in his earlier book. Most barbets are drawn to a single shape, and the bulbul plate (26) is almost useless. On the whole it must be granted that the illustrations average slightly better than in his earlier works (his 1967 *Field Guide to the National Parks of East Africa* included bird plates). The text suffers from carelessness and makes it evident that the author has consulted few modern African works in preparing this volume. A great many scientific names and English names are not those in use today. His ecological and other comments do not reflect the great amount of work accomplished in the past two decades in East Africa, and his statements are often provincial. Species now considered conspecific with other forms are often listed as "Allied Species" of totally unrelated species which do not even appear similar. The picid *Campethera "permista"*, now a race of *C. cailliautii*, is not mentioned under the "Allied Species" of *cailliautii* but is listed as an "allied Species" of *Campethera taeniolaema* (modern *C. tullbergi)*, which is neither very similar nor a close relative. *Dendropicos abyssinicus*, neither nearly related to nor resembling *cailliautii*, is listed as such an "Allied Species" under the name of *C. (Campethera!) abyssinicus. Dendropicos stierlingi* also is "transferred" to *Campethera*. The carelessness and errors (African Piculet is "Peculet") rife in this section are typical of the whole book. We are extracting the better plates from the book, putting modern names on them and binding them for the field, and placing the text on a back shelf at home.

Britton's book differs radically from the others, yet is indispensible in the field. It bears modern names, has categorized (very well) and illustrated with photographs modern East African habitats, and treats in some detail the present range in East Africa of currently recognized subspecies. For rarer species, the status and validity of records are discussed. There are a gazetteer and four excellent maps. We do deplore the alphabetical listing of genera and species, which does not do justice to taxonomic progress and relegates near relatives to places far apart in such large genera as *Ploceus* and *Sterna*. We see no merit in such listing (certainly it brings no stability, as a comparison with an alphabetized Mackworth-Praed and Grant would make clear), and it does not serve young ornithologists-to-be, especially since it now is the basis for an alphabetized Check-list of the Birds of Kenya (1981).

Mackworth-Praed and Grant, for all its outdated names and lack of illustrations for numbers of species, remains the main-stay of our field library kit. Its range and biological data (though not up to date), and especially the many illustrations which show related species close together and the special plates of nightjars with wings extended, and of female weavers and sunbirds, are extremely useful to the field ornithologist in East Africa.

At present one needs all of the above (as well as Heinzel, Fitter & Parslow's European-North African guide) in the field in East Africa. We await with expectation rumoured, good field guides to the birds of all Africa, and to publication of the four volumes of the Birds of Africa that will contain illustrations of all species and major subspecies. Meanwhile, in an area of greatly expanding human population and diminishing avifauna that merits the best possible field aids, we continue to haul our book kit about, making do as best we can.

Lester L. Short and Jennifer F. M. Horne

Relationships and Evolution of Flamingos (Aves; Phoenicopteridae). Storrs L. Olson and Alan Feduccia, 1980. Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology, 316. Pp 73, figs 40, tables 2.

With this paper the authors make a significant contribution to the systematics of the non-passerine orders. Their critical research and review of other work seem to establish the phylogenetic position of the enigmatic family of flamingos (Phoenicopteridae) within the order Charadriiformes, suborder Charadrii, immediately following the Recurvirostridae. This is well supported by carefully treated evidence under the headings: life history and behaviour, myology, pterylosis, natal down, oology, parasitology, biochemistry, osteology and paleontology. The fossil evidence includes a study of the middle Eocene †*Juncitarsus gracillimus*. The description of this new genus and species forms a major part of the paper. This fossil appears to be of an intermediate character of which most systematists might dream. It is referred to as a stilt-like flamingo and placed in the Phoenicopteridae.

Although at first this paper might not appear to be of special interest to Australian ornithologists, the reverse is true, because of the significance given to the Banded Stilt *Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*, which is regarded as an intermediate. Australian palaeontologists should be stimulated to study the tertiary sediments, particularly those of central Australia, which have yielded fossil flamingos, the earliest of them from the Miocene Etadunna formation. Earlier tertiary flamingo fossils or any stilt-like remains would be most interesting in the present context.

A recent trend in Australian ornithology has been to consider the possibility of a southern origin for some groups of birds. Whether it is a result of origin and dispersal or simply of the distribution of habitat it is interesting to note the southern bias in the ranges of flamingos and their relatives. Africa, Eurasia and North America each have one species of Flamingo *(Phoeniconaias minor* in Africa and *Phoenicopterus ruber* in the others) and (excluding *Ibidorhyncha struthersii)* the same two members of the recurvirostridae *Himantopus himantopus* and *Recurvirostra avosetta)*. The greatest diversity in the latter family occurs in Australia with three sympatric species. South America has the largest number of flamingos, with four species together with two recurvirostrids, including the poorly known *Recurvirostra andina*. All but one of the flamingos and both the recurvirostrids occur sympatrically over the Andean altiplano, indicating the importance of this habitat.

Some corrections of a minor nature may be made of some parts of the paper. When discussing heavy fat deposits characteristic of flamingos, they correctly note that McNamara (B.Sc. (Hons.) thesis, Department of Zoology, University of Adelaide) found such deposits in *Cladorhynchus* but not in *Himantopus*. However they also include *Recurvirostra* in the latter category although no specimens of this bird were examined by McNamara.

The authors refer to the raising of "back" feathers in the display of both flamingos and *Cladorhynchus*, but go on to say that the tertials are elongated in the latter implying that these are the feathers so used. The tertials are mentioned twice in this context (pp 12 and 67) and in a discussion of the secondary remiges (p. 34). Most of the accounts of display quoted use the words "back" or "mantle" feathers but the tracts are not accurately defined. In *Cladorhynchus* these are not the proximal secondaries (tertials) nor are they the humeral tract, both of which are dark coloured and similar in form to those of other waders. Those used in display are elongate and white and lie inside the humerals, either side of the mid-dorsal line (see their figure nine), and correspond most closely to the *Pteryla interscapularis* of *Gallus* (Baumel, J.J. 1979. Nomina Anatomica Avium. Academic Press: London.). Hamilton (Orn. Monogr. 17: 1 – 98) noted the raising of "interscapular" or "scapular" feathers in the aggressive displays of American recurvirostrids, and Kahl (1975. Ritualized Displays. *In* J. Kear and N. Duplaix-Hall, Eds, *Flamingos*, pp142-149. Berkhamsted: T. and A. D. Poyser.) describes the use of "scapulae and back feathers" in the neck-swaying threat display of flamingos. It is likely that in all these birds, the homologue of the *Pteryla interscapularis* is involved. *Cladorhynchus* is most like the flamingos in that these feathers are twice as long (60-70 mm) as those of the Australian *Himantopus* and *Recurvirostra* (20-30 mm).

Pigments are not mentioned in the brief but interesting discussion of the use of biochemical studies in taxonomy. The pink of flamingos is well known but that similar colours exist in recurvirostrids is not. The legs of *Himantopus* are pink or red and those of *Cladorhynchus* are pink. A pale blush on the breast of breeding males of *Himantopus himantopus mexicanus* is known and the writer has noted a similar condition in *H.h. leucocephalus*.

As a more general recommendation the dagger or obelisk symbol (†) could have been used to denote fossil taxa by placing it in front of the name of such taxa as recommended by Simpson (1945. The principles of classification and a classification of mammals. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 85:1-350.). Particularly for non-palaeontologists reading unfamiliar names this would be a valuable aid. In addition it would be a recognition of the fact, that whilst extinct and extant species may be compared, they can never be entirely comparable. This is because the concept of biological species, most important in modern species, can never be applied to fossils. A further improvement would have been the inclusion of a dendrogram of the cladistic type, that is a cladogram. ". . . such diagrams are useful summaries of taxonomic knowledge and permit an easily accessible presentation of the author's ideas on the evolutionary history of a group." (Mayr, E. 1969. *Principles of Systemetic Zoology*. McGraw-Hill: New York.). It would clarify the reader's interpretation of the text to see the divergence of a common phoenicopterid-*Cladorhynchus* line from the rest of the recurvirostrids followed by a budding-off of the Phoeni-

copteridae if that is the authors' view.

Those interested in this sort of revisionary work may direct their attention to another paper by these authors about† *Presbyornis* (Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology, number 323.) It is perhaps not coincidental that this paper resembles the subject of this review, in that a study of American fossil material († *Presbyornis)* links two groups (Anseriformes and Charadriiformes) and very useful comparisons are made with the Australian Freckled Duck *Stictonetta naevosa.* It is hoped that these authors continue in this work and as implied in a preview paper (Olson, S.L. *Proc. Colonial Waterbird Group,* 1978: 165-170) perhaps the families of the Ciconiiformes are next.

J: A. McNamara

The Cuckoo by Ian Wyllie, 1981. London: Batsford. Pp 176, col. pll 15, b. & w. photographs 35, tables 32, text figs 10. 242 x 162 mm. $8.95.

Though noisy, cuckoos in general are hard to study in the field. Therefore they have been the subjects of a fine mythology. Also, because so little is known about the habits of many species, people have tended to grasp interesting isolated observations and perpetuate them in the literature as widely applicable facts. Thus our knowledge and understanding of the life histories and particularly the breeding of cuckoos have been bedevilled. The European Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* is perhaps the most studied member of the family but has not escaped this fate. So it is a pleasure to come across a book about it that rigorously (except once, I think, in the lines from page 106 to 107) eschews fantasy and honestly presents the limits of our knowledge.

Mr Wyllie studied *C. canorus* from about 1974 to 1979 in Cambridgeshire, England, where it was parasitizing Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* and his results compose much of the book. An introduction outlines the circumstances of his study and its purposes, most of which unhappily could not be fulfilled because it was too hard to catch and mark the cuckoos, but some success was achieved with radio transmitters.

The first chapter is a conspectus of the family Cuculidae and the other nine concentrate on *C. canorus:* its appearance, plumage and size, its migrations, food, voice, social system, hosts, laying, eggs and young, critically related throughout to what is known about these matters in other members of the family. It is good to have plain statements on various points such as the hepatic plumage and bubble call of females, about which there has been some doubt, and to have data on many other aspects such as length of song period, period of laying, number of eggs laid and incidence of parasitism, which have perhaps not been presented so succinctly or fully before. But I found the chapter on the social system much the most interesting; by radio-telemetry, Mr Wyllie showed that the Cuckoos had no normal system of territories, the ranges of males and females differing and overlapping with those of other birds of the same sex. This or something similar could, I think, account for the puzzling occurrences of cuckoos (especially the Fan-tailed *C. pyrrhophanus)* in the woods where I live. On the other hand the question of the gens or populations of Cuckoos that always parasitize the same host receives little attention and I thought the discussion of hosts and egg-mimicry rather weak or uncritical. For instance, in Table 2 there is no clear discrimination between regular successful hosts and rare unsuccessful ones; in other words the implication is that any species in whose nests the eggs of *C. canorus* have ever been found is a good potential host. However, it seems a bit ridiculous to suggest that a Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* is potentially as good as a Reed Warbler in this respect. In consequence, the fact that there is no egg-mimicry for the first but that it is generally good for the second seems irrelevant, because the one is probably the result of laying by the Cuckoo in desperation or by an itinerant bird (egg-host) and the other deliberate parasitism with the hope of success (biological host). What is really curious is that among the frequent, regular or biological hosts the eggs of the Dunnock *Prunella modularis* alone are not mimicked at all. This is of course discussed but the conventional explanation (recent adoption as a host) seems unconvincing to me. Just to add my own silliness to the literature on cuckoos, I have wondered whether Dunnocks could be colour-blind.

On cuckoo-dom in general the book seems less satisfactory. Mr Wyllie cannot be blamed for lack of experience of cuckoos outside Europe and therefore for having had to rely on the literature. I do not recall any real howlers but there are a good many statements that without qualification mislead. It was charitable to consider an incorrect name for the White-eared Honeyeater (Page 90) and the recording of *Acanthiza* spp as the hosts of Pallid Cuckoos *C. pallidus* (Table 12) as *lapsus calami* but, when I found that these were fundamentally misquotations, my confidence in other references was a bit shaken.

Apart from the contribution on territorialism, when all is said and done, it is doubtful whether the book shows much advance beyond the classic work of Chance *(The Cuckoo's Secret, et al.)* and Baker *(Cuckoo Problems)* but it does present matters rather more succinctly, methodically and with fuller supporting data, brought up to date. It is easily read because Mr Wyllie generally avoids the unnecessary expressions that most authors try to justify as technical terms. He also uses fewer abominations (e.g. 'hopefully', 'overall', 'prior to') and illiteracies (e.g. 'because of', 'comprise' for 'compose') than these days seem obligatory for careless writers.

Probably because my interests now are mostly with cuckoos outside Europe, as I read I came to regard the book as a synopsis of all parasitic cuckoos with special emphasis on *C. canorus* rather than the other way round; my mood oscillated from mild boredom with the rather ordinary treatment of cuckoos in general to great interest in details of breeding and behaviour in *C. canorus.* I conclude that the book will be useful and valuable to serious students of cuckoos for these details and for the bibliography, which will lead them well into the literature, even if it is not exhaustive. For the less specialized bird-watcher it will be beneficial as a plain tale, showing the limits of our knowledge of *C. canorus,* amply supported by data. Once and for all it ought to scotch many myths but readers should be careful not to accept uncritically everything that is said about non-European cuckoos and other birds. It is inexpensive.

S. Marchant

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CORRIGENDUM

An amendment to the synonymy of *Ninox rufa humeralis* (Bonaparte) in Mason, I.J. and Schodde, R. 1980. Subspeciation in the Rufous Owl *Ninox rufa* (Gould). Emu 80 : 141-144.
The corrected synonymy is as follows:

Ninox rufa humeralis (Bonaparte)
Athene humeralis Bonaparte, 1850, consp. Gen. Av. 1:40
(Oceania = Triton Bay, New Guinea – see Mees 1964)
Noctua fransenii Schlegel, 1866, Ned.Tijdschr. Dierk. 3: 256 (Waigeu).
Ninox undulata Ramsay, 1879, Proc. linn. Soc. N.S.W. 3:249. (South east coast of New Guinea) – Preoccupied.

I would like to thank Wayne Longmore for bringing this matter to my attention.

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON ZOOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE

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ITZN 59 8 December, 1981

The following Opinion and Direction has been published recently by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, in the *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature,* volume 38, part 4, 8 December 1981.

Opinion No.

1189 (p. 243) CIRCINAE in Aves and Mollusca: removal of the homonymy.

The Commission regrets that it cannot supply separates of Opinions or Directions.

R. V. MELVILLE
Secretary