

## REVIEWS

Edited by BELINDA GILLIES

**The Fairy-Wrens. A monograph of the Maluridae** by Richard Schodde, illustrated by Richard Weatherly, 1982. Melbourne: Lansdowne. Pp 203, col. pl 36, numerous maps and line drawings. 370 × 270 mm. \$70.

This is quite the most difficult review that I have been asked to write. For someone who has been professionally entranced by the genus *Malurus* for more than thirty years no book will ever seem perfect (unless written by himself!) and so I have tried very hard not to be carping and over-critical especially since the author is a colleague of mine.

The book is large and weighs just under 2 kg so that although it has a page size that shows off the colour-plates well it is a difficult book to read. I have spent four weekends monopolising the dining room table in an attempt to give it a "fair-go". How others will cope makes me wonder whether anyone else will read it *in toto* or will they just dip in to assuage their particular interest? These comments are directed at the publisher whose eye appears to have been on the cash register rather than on the interests of the ornithological public for whom this review is written. By all means *borrow* the book: the paintings are delightful and much of the text is ornithologically important — but no, I cannot recommend you to spend so many of your hard-earned dollars, unless you are as severely addicted to wren-ology as I, (and I bought two copies!).

"The Fairy-wrens" starts off badly so far as I am concerned: I was raised in a land where fairies were distinctly "gay" — and nothing could be less relevant to Malurid wrens, but I suppose that is a personal view-point overruled by the recent Interim List of Common Names (Schodde 1975). Certainly it is too late to change the title of this book. We have an unfortunate horror of Latin names in Australia and so we borrow inappropriate names from another hemisphere. I think Schodde missed an excellent opportunity to get rid of both Fairies and Wrens and initiate the use of malurid as the common name; it is easily pronounced, is distinctly Australian and most of us would soon overcome the initial feeling that we were aping academia in using such an original easily-pronounced name. Scientifically it would be much more accurate for the name "wren" belongs to the Northern hemisphere family, Troglodytidae, which really have little in common with our malurids except that they, too, are passerines. Schodde's grouping of "The world's wrens...." (p 15 para 4) has no basis in science and tends to perpetuate a nomenclature based on home-sick expatriate sentiment, that has no validity in ornithology.

The book claims to be "A monograph of the Maluridae". The author in his introduction says (p 11) ... "Pitching the text to appeal and to blend with the illustrations while maintaining scientific command would not be easy.... Inevitably some readers might find some details too complex, others too simplistic, and still others too speculative or dogmatic. That is the price of compromise and for it I now beg indulgence". Just how far can indulgence be expected to go? I consider my job is to evaluate this book as a piece of science, not as an art form. I can allow for complexity, especially in fields beyond my competence: speculation is an important part of science and dogmatism the hallmark of every taxonomist, but I cannot condone simplistic presentation where it may lead to mis-interpretation and false values.

The book is a strange mixture of scientific fact and extrapolation into the realms of fantasy where no studies have been published. In particular the monograph presents what appears to me to be a well-reasoned and logical taxonomic arrangement for a distinctive group of Australian animals that hitherto had been the subject of much confusion and dissension. Taxonomy is both an art and a science and suffers much at the hand of fashion; whether to lump or to split genera or families is largely a matter of personal taste and curatorial convenience (Mayr 1959). In this monograph Schodde upholds the family Maluridae and allows five genera therein:— *Malurus* (13 species including two species — one new — previously in a separate genus, *Todopsis*), *Sipodotus* (1 sp), *Clytomyias* (1 sp) *Stipiturus* (3 spp) and *Amytornis* (8 spp). His basis for raising these five genera to familial level depends on both osteology (distinctive pre-maxillary processes and auditory bullae) and plumage (interscapular gap bare of feathers and the characteristic cooked tail with ten, or fewer, feathers), features that appear convincingly adequate to me. How the world at large accepts these changes remains to be seen for it is important to realise that here is the first promulgation of a new arrangement — it has not been published in a scientific paper and therefore has not been subjected to the rigorous criticism of journal referees and editors nor to the comments of a wide readership.

In the remainder of this review I shall deal with the text first and then, separately with the illustrations. The layout of the book is straight-forward with a clear plan that is adhered to. The usual introductory pieces (page 5–13) are followed by an introduction to the family (p 14–23) which places the group in world perspective, describes familial characters, discusses the origin and radiation of the species and finishes with a conspectus of the five genera. Without fossil evidence speculation about origins and radiation and inter-relationships must remain highly subjective. I find Schodde's treatment stimulating, thorough, and up-to-date; I am not competent to criticise its validity but regard it as an important milestone in taxonomy. I respect his courage in sticking his neck out "where others feared to tread" if I may mix my metaphors!! Only in this way can advances in thinking be provoked.

Next, each genus is introduced separately and is followed by the member species. The accounts of species are presented in standardised format:— introductory; form and plumages; distribution; groups and routines; food; voice and display; breeding; variation and subspecies. These recurring headings make the book easy to use as a reference work; without this order the book's bulk would make it almost impossible to search for a specific point.

The introductory piece beginning the account of each species spells out the criteria upon which it is accepted as such, and the grounds on which other forms are merged. I found that the unscrambling of the taxonomic confusion that has haunted several of the malurids, reads like a good detective story, and Schodde is obviously in his element when unravelling the minutiae of precedence and nomenclature. He has travelled widely and spared no effort in searching the collections of the world in order to provide the best possible data on which to base his taxonomic arrangement.

The introductory sections vary widely in length depending on

the confusion that has been engendered in the past; usually they are quite long. I found these pieces historically fascinating and much to my surprise I found that what could have been very dull material came to life under Schodde's pen; even the personalities of the collectors peer out from some passages. In this part of a species description one finds the authority for upholding or down-grading its status; again there is room for subjective judgement and it is the author's book but I do find the treatment of the chestnut-shouldered malurids unconvincing, especially with regards *M. amabilis* which Schodde now resuscitates as a good species after Parker submerged it as a race of *M. lambertii* in the Interim list (Schodde 1975). The position in this chestnut-shouldered assemblage is very confusing to the layman and that a measure of uncertainty still exists could, perhaps, be more clearly expressed.

The section on Form and Plumages is, not surprisingly, based on museum specimens and I am sure that the descriptions are accurate and professionally performed. However virtually all museum specimens are un-aged (except for fledglings!) and of course only one plumage state can be described for each (dead) individual. It is a pity that more is not made of the sociological position (and therefore hormonal picture) of the various males in a group of malurids, and its affect on plumage changes. Information from aviary studies as well as from colour-banded wild birds could have helped here. Also many malurids are multibrooded and breed over several months; young males from late nests may never reach full nuptial plumage during the next breeding season although they may breed in eclipse plumage (rarely).

Here I must intrude a criticism of the paintings in terms of the philosophy behind the layout of the book. This is a collection of pretty pictures of very decorative birds. It could have been so much more if the plates had included all the known plumage states of the species. Plates such as Nos. 7, 13 and 19 depicting only one male are really very extravagant in a monograph. I would like to have seen more juveniles portrayed. Also important immature plumage stages such as that when the blue primaries of a maturing young, male *M. splendens* enable his sex to be determined even though he still has female coloured bill and lores (= ca. six months old). And on the same theme if plates such as 7, 13, and 19 were acceptable surely a few plates could have been added to illustrate the difficult differences such as those between *M. l. dulcis* and *M. l. rogersi* or between *Amytornis t. textilis*, *A. t. modestus* and *A. purnelli*? Then the artist would be helping the author to explain his text, surely a worthwhile aim in a monograph?

I found the distribution maps disappointingly small for such an important aspect in a monograph and in this regard Snow's recent monograph on the Cotingas (1982) fares much better. I suspect that this is largely the publishers' fault, but the attempt at uniformity (most are only one column width) becomes chaotic for the Emu-wren (p 126) where the map tries to portray four subspecies, separately, in south-east South Australia. The marginal pencil drawings are all very fine but I would prefer at least equal generosity towards the maps which are more important. Here again I suspect that science and the publishers have been in conflict. I found the sections on Groups and Routines the most unsatisfactory of the lot. As the person who provided most of the hard data upon which the entries for three species were made (*M. cyaneus*, *M. splendens* and *M. pulcherrimus*) I am well aware that the social organisation of malurids is complex and variable. Most, if not all, *Malurus* sometimes breed in groups consisting of more than the simple pair of procreators. The extra birds frequently are the progeny of an earlier nesting, perhaps from the year before, but unless these birds have been banded in the nest their pedigree is unknown and one cannot extrapolate to other unstudied species. For example, for the relatively little known *M. cyanocephalus*

New Guinea, the first paragraph under Groups and Routines (p 61) gives the impression that a major banding study has given the details of sociology and dispersion strategies for this species; none has been published. Likewise the dogmatic statement that *M. coronatus* "... groups of up to five or six that invariably include the young of the year...." (p 66) pretends more knowledge than is available. And for *M. elegans* the assertion that "most groups comprise two to five birds...." Their small size suggests that there is a regular annual dispersal of supernumerary females and subordinate males from each territory," (p 77) represents a quite unwarranted assumption. The point I wish to make is that such statements in such an authoritative-looking book are very apt to be picked up by overseas ornithologists and regurgitated as fact whereas I know (and Schodde knows) that the little word "perhaps" should have been included.

Whilst on this theme I must comment on the too simplistic treatment of malurid-sociology that is made for both *M. cyaneus* and *M. splendens* — species for which my data provide most of the grounds for this interpretation (Rowley 1965 and 1981). Firstly Schodde has used the terms "bands", "parties", "groups", "flocks" and "clan" interchangeably and without any definitions. Those of us who are interested in sociology are jealous that these terms should not be debased in this way. Although no rigid limitations are universally accepted the following definitions give some idea of the problems involved; "bands" and "parties" might be used for assemblages of unknown origin and persistence; a "group" is a long lasting association of two or more members of a species (Rowley *et al.* 1978); a "flock" is a temporary aggregation of many individuals usually at an ephemeral food source, perhaps involving more than one species, "clan" is an association larger than a group, whose members recognise each other, and which may be related. A monograph, dealing with a family where sociology is so important an aspect of their biology, should be consistently precise over specialist terminology even if it did mean a larger glossary.

Although Schodde generously refers to my work in the introduction and explains the malurid social life in detail there (p 18) later under the species account (p 44) he vastly oversimplifies the picture: "Each party of wrens... is a territorial family group comprising the dominant blue male, his mate and their brown young of the year.... Although another one or two coloured males from previous broods may be present as well, brown nevertheless predominates." This dismisses one of the most fascinating aspects of malurid biology and in doing so misses the main point namely that most malurids are cooperative breeders — which means that birds other than the mating pair help raise the young. Because such altruistic behaviour appeared at variance with the evolutionary theories of Darwin it has created world-wide interest; but it simply doesn't come through at all in Schodde's text. Cooperative breeding is no rare event; in my *M. cyaneus* study half of the 64 groups studied included more than one adult, full blue male (Rowley 1965); in my *M. splendens* study 59% of the 69 groups had more than one adult male and 15% had more than one female. These figures are some of the few data available to show how important an aspect of malurid biology cooperative breeding is. Only when the actors are individually colour-banded can one really begin to recognise how widespread the habit is. So much of the sections under Groups and Routines in this book stem from passing glimpses of a species and I probably know better than anyone else just how misleading such glimpses may be. Recently in my current *M. elegans* study area I was trying to net the un-colour-banded "supernumerary" adult male in a group, of which the breeding pair were already distinguished. At last we caught the elusive blighter but before we had banded him I saw yet a third full plumaged male approach the nest and feed the young. All those males had been

metal-banded more than a year previously and they were all old enough to breed for themselves but for one reason or another they had chosen to "stay at home" rather than wander in search of a territory or wife. In this context Schodde misuses (p 18) the term "kin selection" which has a specialised meaning (Maynard Smith, 1968).

On the same theme I refer to foraging routine. On p 44 for *M. cyaneus* "... there is a general lull through mid-day..."; p 52 for *M. splendens* "... By the middle of the day the birds have worked through their territory and retire to rest quietly under cover..."; p 61 *M. cyanocephalus* "... By mid-morning they have finished and, retiring to rest..."; p 66 for *M. coronatus* "... Through mid-day the wrens retire to huddles...." And so on and on for each species the picture is repeated of birds feeding early and late with a long mid-day break. This just is not so in any species of wren that I have studied: small 10 g insectivores cannot afford to loaf for a long period at midday. Occasionally activity may be reduced under very hot conditions — but more often it is the observer who seeks shelter! I have kept a nest of *M. splendens* under observation over 14 h on a day that exceeded 38°C and although the feeding rate slackened a little after midday there was no suggestion of a "siesta". For most of the year malurids forage continuously throughout the day, a fact confirmed by the records of many bird-banders.

Malurids' flight, a feature that can be very important as a character for field recognition is repeatedly mis-described. On page 30 (col 2, 1. 33) "Flight ... is a jerky undulating fluttering, the birds bouncing along as though their tails are about to fall off." page 44 (col 1, 1. 20) "... the trailing tail dangling as if it might fall off at any moment."; page 98 (col 2, 1. 25) "in flight, they jerk along with almost comical uncertainty for five or twenty metres, tail dangling as if about to drop off."; page 105 (col 2, 1. 20) "Flight ... and slow in jerky undulations, with tail hanging out behind." Malurids simply do not fly in anything resembling these flights of literary enthusiasm. It is a very useful field character that they fly *directly*, with the tail streaming behind, they do not jerk or undulate; the obsession with their tails falling off becomes tedious in repetition. When trying to locate Malurids in dense cover this flight-clue, glimpsed out of the corner of the eye maybe, can make all the difference on a difficult day.

Again, in several parts of the book the author stresses the importance of the malurid's long tail; on page 18 (col 1, 1. 10) "... Not restricted to genera, the changes continue through the species to individuals of different age and sex.... These modifications reflect social position and *reveal why Malurus wrens cock their tails* .... (The italics are mine) ... is a flag to signal identity and intentions." This may well be so and I hope someone will test the hypothesis (dare I suggest, using a pair of scissors?) in the future, but to present it as fact is misleading. Absolutely no experimental or observational work exists to support this attractive piece of mental fairy floss.

I fear that these are examples of the thinness of the descriptive text when the author gets away from taxonomy. There seems to be a reluctance to admit that little (or nothing) is known and instead the section is padded out by extrapolation from a better known species. Unfortunately in a "monograph" such "guesstimation" may be taken as fact by future generations or overseas compilers who know no better. I suspect that much of the text has been fluffed out at the request of the publisher.

The section "Voice and Display" I found disappointing since no sonographs were presented and the mnemonics seem so vague as to be hardly worth including. I do not know how the illustrations were selected. Certainly they rarely do anything to explain a display position or activity — but they do

make a change from photographs of birds at nests.

Data on breeding has been drawn from all available sources and I have been unable to fault the author on his bibliographic search.

Under Variation and Subspecies Schodde is back in his element again and in such a subjective field I would not dare to tangle with him except to suggest that it was a pity to present measurements in such detail (average  $\pm$  the standard deviation) without giving their ranges.

The paintings are beautiful and the line drawings amplify them well — and fill the large margins. Many will buy the book for the paintings alone and I wish them as much quiet enjoyment as I have had. But so far as a monograph on the Maluridae is concerned I can see no reason at all for including pictures of (extraneous species that are not even referred to in the text (*Melidectes* and *Paratolia* p 116; Drongo, Fantail and Monarch p 28–29; and the treecreeper p 155). I have one fault to find with some drawings and paintings (and I must confess it was not my eye that recognised what was worrying me): All Australian *Malurus* cock their tails much of the time; it is characteristic of these birds and therefore important to portray correctly. A fully cocked malurid tail parts the body feathers of the lower back, as is shown in many of the illustrations but in some (e.g.  $\sigma$  pl 15;  $\phi$  pl 14;  $\sigma$  and  $\phi$  pl 12;  $\sigma$  and  $\phi$  pl 10) these body feathers are unparted and they "round off" what would otherwise be an abrupt (characteristically) tail-cock. If it is any consolation Gould did the same with his picture of *Malurus callainus* that hangs in my hall — it had always worried me until now!

Ornithologically this book appears to me to be a shot-gun marriage between science and painting, solemnized by a hungry publisher. It is a pity that this monograph was not delayed until more data about the species were available.

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Ian Rowley

**The Birdwatcher's A–Z** by Alan J. Richards, 1980. Newton Abbott, London, North Pomfret (VT): David Charles. Pp 328, nearly 400 illustrations in line, b. & w. and colour. 180 × 250 mm SA\$48.95.

In 1964, *A New Dictionary of Birds*, edited by A. Landsborough Thompson, provided a mine of information on all matters ornithological. That volume is not out of print (although a later edition is being prepared) and *The Birdwatcher's A–Z*, more succinct though without the encyclopaedic depth of Thompson's work, will help to fill the gap that exists at present.

Richards' book is a well-produced glossy publication, in

which page is liberally illustrated. Much of the content, including birdwatcher's slang, is common to all regions of the world, but the book is aimed primarily at the British birdwatcher. This reviewer is not sufficiently familiar with the British scene to judge the author's competence but Richard's credentials and the standard of the finished product would indicate it to be high.

The book could be a useful addition to any library, but the Australian birdwatcher may be put off by the high cost. Besides, Australians are now better served than in the past and Rosemary Balmford's *Learning about Australian Birds*, recently reviewed in *Emu*, provides much of the information needed by beginners.

Pauline Reilly

**A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia** by Graham Pizzey, illustrated by Roy Doyle, 1980. Sydney: Collins. Pp 460, col. p11 56, b. & w. p11 32. 220 × 145 mm. \$25.00

The appearance of this book has been eagerly awaited. Its gestation was protracted well beyond those delays that one expects before the birth of a book of this kind, so that many ornithologists and birdwatchers will investigate the product with not only enthusiasm, but also a tinge of impatience. For the first time, we are presented with an alternative to Peter Slater's two-volume field guide, which has served as the reference for identifying Australian birds for nearly a decade.

If Pizzey's single volume covers much the same subject matter as did Slater's two volumes, it does so with a minimum of resemblance to its predecessor. A good bit larger and heavier than Slater's first volume, the newcomer is exceptionally cumbersome for a field guide. Even the most cavernous pocket or pouch will be stretched to accommodate it, a fact that leads me to hope that more observers will leave their new 'field' guide behind, in favour of a note-book and a critical approach to the characters that they see and hear. To appraise an unfamiliar bird with an open book and the intention of playing 'snap' with the two is a poor way of doing things, when one could more profitably use this book as a reference *after* details of the observation have been noted down. In any case, the bindings of this book do not feel sufficiently robust to withstand heavy field use for long. The white dust-jacket and thin leaves of the text both pick up dust so easily that they plead for the sort of the aseptic hands one expects from the flying doctor rather than from an outback 'birdo.'

The opening section consists of introductory material: ten pages are devoted to the mechanics of the task in hand, 'to identify any bird you are likely to see in Australia.' A main text of 389 pages covers 726 species and their higher taxonomic subgroupings. A block of eighty-eight plates is sandwiched between the accounts of Green-backed and Fairy Warblers. Each of the species illustrated is linked with a text entry by way of an English name and a species number. The third major section consists of a map of distribution for every species, at the rate of twenty per page. Indexes of scientific names and English names complete the volume, except for a remarkably inadequate map of Australia, which appears on both end pages.

Accounts of species are, with minor variations, arranged under the following headings: other names, similar species, field marks, voice, habitat, breeding, range and status. Pizzey's choices for binomials, trinomials and their English equivalents show some idiosyncrasies. It is certainly unfortunate that names used for species could not have been those of the RAOU *List of Recommended Names* which was published in May 1978, more than two years earlier. Yet Pizzey states on page 14

that the RAOU list was published after this book was in press. That this opportunity was missed invites criticism for otherwise adding to the confusion that already exists about bird names in Australia. For practical purposes, some of the losses here are recouped in the lists of 'other names.' For example, one is given fifteen alternatives for the White-fronted Chat.

The information presented in the 'field marks' sections of accounts of species is generally very carefully written and must rank as the book's major strength. What other field guide attempts to describe the birds of a whole continent in such detail? Most accounts combine conciseness with fluency, even if some turns of phrase are a little doubtful, e.g. falcons being 'robust' or 'dynamic'. One raptor is characterized as a 'pocket-eagle' another is said to have a 'more airy style of flight on more shapely wings.' One can guess at what it means but there must be better ways of discussing subjective characteristics if they are to mean anything to the novice. Flowery gambits like a 'small bird of character' (Mallee Heathwren) or 'a plain little bird of much charm' (Jacky Winter) occur frequently. Why is it that writers and publishers feel compelled to cling to nonsensical sentimentalities when describing birds in popular reference literature? It would be unthinkable to include such remarks in a field guide to any other group of animals.

A point of concern over the way in which comparisons of similar species are handled is that, too often, contentious problems in field identification go by either unrecognized (e.g. Swamp Quail versus Brown Quail, Little Stint versus Red-necked Stint, Little Corella versus immature Long-billed Corella) or not fully discussed (Southern Black-backed Gull versus Lesser Black-backed Gull, Saunders' Little Tern versus Little Tern, the two black-cockatoos in Western Australia). Pizzey does not recognize that two little known snipe — the Chinese *Gallinago megala* and the Pin-tailed *G. stenura* — are actually different species rather than alternative names for the former. We are offered nothing on their field characters or their separation from *G. hardwickii*. Here, then, is an example of an opportunity for someone to do pioneering fieldwork in tropical Australia but neither here nor anywhere else does this book encourage it. To write that one species is indistinguishable from another is a small but significant error of logic. A cautionary note and a frank admission of a lack of information would make for a more constructive approach than the pinning of dogmatic negatives to largely untried problems, such as with the separation of non-male plumaged shovelers *Anas clypeata* and *A. rhynchotis*.

With accurate identification as the aim, it is very odd that one should need seventy-nine lines on the geographical variation of the Varied Sittella. This and other detailed treatments of races and clinal variations, many of which are afforded trinomials and common names, will please those who support identification at the level of subspecies. Dozens of non-identificatory preambles could have been left out if it had been felt that compactness was a priority. As it is, there is much of interest that is not strictly relevant to the essential purpose of identifying birds. Thus certain indulgences contrast sharply with other, quite exemplary, discussions, e.g. a very concise treatment of two very difficult birds, the sooty albatrosses *Phoebastria fusca* and *P. palpebata* in just sixteen lines. In general, behavioural information is put to good use throughout. More about feeding methods would have been very useful, but possibly for many species such information is just not available as yet.

Vocal characteristics are set down in considerable detail. Descriptions are often entertaining and apt and should prove to be tremendously useful in working out the noises one hears in the bush. The information provided under 'Habitat' is generally clear and technical, although the odd myth is

perpetuated: e.g. that Thick-billed Grasswrens inhabit samphire in central Western Australia (see *Emu* 9: 203). Under 'Range and Status', attention has rightly been focused on providing regional information for each species and misleading generalizations have been avoided. Much of the information from which accounts have been drawn is already outdated and readers with local knowledge will spot inconsistencies. To use the south-west as a regional example: Pizzey does not allow for the presence of Little Bitterns. He states that Yellow White-eyes have an outlying colony at Bunbury, where there is indeed appropriate habitat (mangroves) but no such birds. Rather than being established around Perth, the European Goldfinch was apparently extinct there by 1976. Some remarks about status are not much help, as when the Black-eared Miner is said to be 'uncommon to rare or locally plentiful'.

Little attempt is made to include new species, whose occurrences are perhaps being overlooked in Australia. Slater did this with some success. One wonders what are the odds that unmentioned migrant pipits and warblers slip into northern coastal areas more often than the fully-described, but doubtfully authentic, Grey Heron? Omitted likewise are various none-too-recent claims to the Australian list: e.g. Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Little Stint, White-rumped Sandpiper, Spotted Greenshank, Franklin's and Pied Wagtail.

Roy Doyle's paintings of whole or part-birds represent a mammoth assignment, which has yielded plates of a rather varying standard. It may have been unfair to expect one artist to paint all of Australia's birds *mainly from skins* for a field guide that was destined to suffer years of delay in publication. Doyle was not primarily a wildlife artist when he began these plates which, to me, are a mixed lot. I particularly liked the cormorants, harriers, plovers, birds of the night and the fairy-wrens. Too many passerines suffer from giant eyes and a paralysis of the toes which prevents them from taking a grip on their perches. Few of the inaccuracies evident to me are serious enough to betray the aim of correct identification but the underwings of the mollymawks are very inaccurate and a definite liability. Other errors include: inaccurate bill patterns on the non-breeding Little and Fairy Terns; lack of wingbars in flying Lesser Golden Plover and Greater Knot; extensive white areas in the upperwing of the Oriental Pratincole; inappropriate geographical forms of the Common Tern and Pied Oystercatcher (both Eurasian); white spotted uppertail coverts in the Western Thornbill; and *rigor mortis* in flying falcons. Poor colour reproduction must be the cause of the Spotted Quail-thrushes with turquoise breasts. That many less well-known seabirds are not illustrated must disappoint enthusiasts of that group. Plumages and postures of the godwits, terns and skuas make interesting comparison with those shown in Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom's *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* (1954). Confusing immature plumages are often unrepresented: neither text nor plates would enable one to put a name to a newly-fledged Hooded Robin, for example. The text includes a number of line drawings, of which two sketches of ratites are sheer perfection.

The section of maps showing distribution begins with an obvious error, in that the sub-heading explicitly states that the maps show breeding distribution. Yet many of the maps relate to birds which do not breed in Australia. One hopes that readers will immediately detect the error. Quite apart from the matter of breeding distribution, some of the maps are misleading. For example, a broad splash of red in the map for the Ruff suggests that it is found throughout south-eastern Australia. Overall, the maps add little to the book and detract from the worth of the distributional data given in the main text.

Without doubt, this book represents a significant enrichment

for Australian field ornithology. According to the back-cover blurb, it is 'the most comprehensive work yet published in one volume on Australian bird life'. So inadequate is the competition that this could well be true. Such a possibility leads one to suspect that, during its compilation, the scope of the book was gradually widened beyond the original aims indicated in the Foreword. Even so, one could still argue that the observer will still need his 'Slaters', at least for their more accurate, lifelike depictions of passerines and their outline diagrams of the bills of seabirds; also his fashionable coffee-table monsters for their photographs and snippets of research information. But one could not do better than to turn first to Pizzey whenever the identity of an Australian bird is in doubt.

Peter Currey

**Oiseaux de Nouvelle Calédonie et des Loyautés (New Caledonian Birds)** by F. Hannecart & Y. Letocart, 1980-1983. 2 vols. Nouméa: Les Editions Cardinalis. Pp Vol. 1: 50, Vol. 2: 136, many col. photos, col. map in vol. 1. 128 × 286 mm. \$35.00 each.

The authors are residents of New Caledonia and in these two volumes they have brought together a selection of their photographs of most of the birds of New Caledonia and the nearby Loyalty Islands taken over more than 10 years. Also included are photos of habitats and, to fill in the gaps of the rarest birds, colour paintings and photos of specimens have been included. They are an excellent update on the field guide (with limited colour) by Jean Delacour (1966, *Guide des Oiseaux de la Nouvelle-Calédonie et de ses dépendances*).

The large size and pictorial format does not enable the books to be used as field guides in the normal sense of the term, but this is not the major objective of the authors. With text in French and English they hope to increase awareness of the unique bird life and the importance of conserving the birds and their habitats. In doing so, new information on many species is included, while also stressing that much more needs to be done. Thus for the multiple purposes of the books, the presentation of the birds is selectively arranged by habitats, but generally volume 1 focuses on the better known birds of New Caledonia, while volume 2 includes the rarer birds of New Caledonia and additional species found in the Loyalty Is. The authors cited very few references in these books and for those seeking further general details to augment the brief summaries in these books, New Caledonia was covered by Vuilleumier & Gochfeld (1976, *Alauda* 44: 237-273) and Stokes (1980, *Emu* 80: 81-86), and part of the Loyalty Is (Lifu) by myself (1978, *Alauda* 46: 295-308).

While an appended summary list of species could have been provided in volume 2, the following details can be gleaned from the books. A total of 131 species are covered (70 in volume 1, 61 in volume 2, plus 5 also in volume 1, but different subspecies). These include 19 endemic and 9 introduced species. Of the 131 species, 111 are illustrated with one or several photographs, 9 by paintings (of mixed quality and accuracy), two with photos of the type specimens (one also by a painting), and 9 (mostly waders and seabirds) are not illustrated. Both volumes are divided into the same habitat divisions: savanna (18 species in volume 1, 9 in volume 2); forest (23, 9); swamps and ponds (14, 14); seashore and sea (15, 29). As in Delacour's guide, some new records for the region are included here: *Pelecanus conspicillatus* (1st recorded 1980); *Oceanites oceanicus* (1981); *Charadrius leschenaultii* (1982). On p 117 of volume 1 of my copy, the authors have inserted a typed correction that *Tringa brevipes* should read *Tringa incana*; on p 118 they report nesting of Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* on coral

islets in 1978 and 1979, an unusual occurrence. The rarest resident species are covered by paintings, including the endemic subspecies of Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus savesi* (shown as similar to the Australian bird, but actually it is nearly all black, (cf Ibis 1881: 132, pl 5), which is doubtfully conspecific, but still only known by the unique type at the Merseyside County Museum, Liverpool, England (Emu 80: 46)). The endemic subspecies of Painted Quail *Turnix varia* (or a separate species *T. novaecaledoniae* — (Macdonald, 1971, *Sunbird* 21: 1-5), with no definite record in over 70 years, is, I suspect, possibly a hybrid between introduced *T. varia* from Australia and *T. nigricollis* from Madagascar. Like the Owlet-nightjar, the endemic subspecies of White-throated Nightjar *Eurostropodus mystacalis exul* has remained unknown since its discovery (in 1939). The Australian Bittern *Botaurus poiceiloptilus* (mislabelled *B. poicephalus*) may not be resident; and the New Caledonian Lorikeet *Charmosyna diadema* (also with a photo of the unique type) has not been definitely recorded since 1860 (a remarkable rarity, if still extant). The New Caledonian Wood Rail *Tricholimnas lafresnayanus* (allied to the Lord Howe Island Woodhen *T. sylvestris*) is shown by its type specimen, but a few others exist (Fullager *et al.* 1982, *Emu* 82: 131-136), and although it is here regarded as 'probably extinct', it may just be 'very rare' (Stokes, 1979, *Bull. Brit.*

*Orn. Club* 99: 47-54). On a brighter note the Beach Stone-curlew *Esacus magnirostris*, although shown by a painting, was rediscovered in New Caledonia in 1978 (Condamin, 1978, *L'Oiseau et RFO* 48: 381-382), and a large number of seabirds occur in the region, many breeding (de Naurois & others, 1978, *C.R. Acad. Sci. Paris* 287 [D]: 269-271, 495-498, 627-629; 1979, *L'Oiseau et RFO* 49: 235-239). Of the surviving endemic birds, the unique Kagu *Rhynochetus jubatus*, an endemic family, holds its own (their long, drawn-out, yelping cries are an unforgettable highlight of the forests), as also does the world's largest arboreal pigeon, appropriately named *Ducula goliath*. Only the white-eyes (*Zosterops* spp) have endemic species in the Loyalty Is (two on Lifu), and on pp 32-33 of volume 2, the authors compare these with the endemics of New Caledonia and the three distinct subspecies of *Z. lateralis*.

Whatever shortcomings one may point to when comparing these books with recent efforts on other Pacific island groups, I hope the authors are successful in promoting a greater awareness of a remarkable bird fauna where, unfortunately, too many species are rare, endangered, or possibly extinct.

Murray D. Bruce

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## REFEREES

The standard of a scientific journal is determined to a very large degree by the quality and conscientiousness of its referees. Referees receive little recognition for their services, although they may elicit considerable abuse from authors, fortunately usually anonymously. I have found referees for The Emu to be almost without exception prompt, fair-minded and thorough and in recognition of their service I list them below. My apologies to any that I have omitted.

J. Ahlquist, P. Ashmole, D. Baker-Gabb, R. Baudinette, B. Beehler, H. Bell, G. Bell, A. Berutti, W. Boles, L. Braithwaite, S. Briggs, M. Brooker, R. Brown, M. Bruce, D. Bryant, A. Burbidge, T. Cade, W. Calder, C. Catterall, D. Close, B. Collins, D. Connel, J. Courtney, S. Cowling, J. Craig, F. Crome, J. Croxall, M. Cullen, P. Currey, P. Dann, S. Davies, S. Debus, A. Diamond, J. Diamond, J. Disney, D. Dorward, D. Dow, R. Draffan, D. Dunnet, The Earl of Cranbrook, R. Elvish, W. Emison, J. Engbring, C. Feare, J. Felsenstein, S. Ferrier, B. Finch, R. Floyd, J. Ford, H. Fry, P. Fullagar, S. Garnett, B. Gill, D. Goodwin, J. Goss-Custard, R. Green, P. Harper, M. Harris, C. Harrison, G. Holmes, R. Holmes, R. Horne, J. Horsfall, D. Houston, J. Hughes, K. Hulsman,

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Hugh Ford,  
Editor 1981-85.

