

REVIEWS

Edited by B. GILLIES

The Birds of China by Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee, 1984. Oxford: Oxford University Press/Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. Pp 602, col. p11 38, b. & w. drawings 39, maps as endpapers. 165 × 235 mm. \$75.00.

Hot on the heels of the first single volume English bird guide to the birds of the USSR, we have the first one for that other vast region of Asia, China (including Taiwan). A total of 1195 species are described, extending over a great diversity of climates and habitats, from cold desert plains and tropical rain-forests to the 'Roof of the World'. The author acknowledges that many bird-watchers visiting China will come first through Hong Kong, and has provided an 'HK' symbol next to the English name of the relevant species so recorded. There are also two excellent, compact guides for Hong Kong — Mike Webster's (1976) *A New Guide to the Birds of Hong Kong*, and Clive Viney's (1977) *A Colour Guide to Hong Kong Birds*, both illustrated by Karen Philipps. Taiwan also has good local guides (See *Emu* 83: 205). During the preparation of this guide, the last of an important series of handbooks on the desert regions of the Palaearctic was published in French by R.D. Étehecopar and R. Hùe (*Les Oiseaux de Chine de Mongolie et de Corée*, 2 vols, 1978-1983). This covers all of China plus Mongolia and both Koreas. The principal companion to *The Birds of China* is the *Distributional List of Chinese Birds* by Cheng Tso-Hsin [Zheng Zuoxin] (1976) to which one is referred for distribution maps (See also *Emu* 80: 174). It is also the major checklist and basis of this guide and de Schauensee indicates where his treatment differs from that of Professor Cheng.

The introduction of *The Birds of China* lucidly covers Chinese geography and its ornithological history. The species accounts are comparable in format to the guides to South American birds published by the author from 1964 (Colombia) to 1982 (South America, 2nd edition). For the descriptive details, geographical (i.e. subspecific) variation is indicated with a number in parentheses, which corresponds to the numbered name in the distribution section; diagnostic field marks are italicised. The distribution is briefly summarized, then expanded in some detail (a convenient overview, but Cheng's maps are helpful if one's knowledge of Chinese geography is limited). Ecological data (including altitudinal distribution) are also summarized briefly. As one would expect from this author, taxonomic variations are noted, but few affect changes at the level of species. One example is the appearance of Swinhoe's Minivet *Pericrocotus cantonensis*, formerly a race of the Rosy Minivet *P. roseus*. The useful bibliography provided will certainly help one enter the vast amount of literature on Chinese birds.

The twenty-three striking colour plates of J.H. Dick are good for field identification; his style is diagrammatic, but useful. The other plates are by J.A. Gwynne, Jr (11) and H.W. Trimm (4). Gwynne's plates, interspersed with Dick's are less striking but no less useful. Trimm's are mostly of finches, which is a large and diverse group in China, and it is helpful to have all illustrated by the same artist. The thirty-nine black-and-white wash drawings by M. Keinbaum provide delicate, but accurate portraits of a variety of species, with appropriate backgrounds. The whole is reminiscent of the Chinese artistic depictions of birds as part of the harmony of nature.

While one would like to see more than adult males in the colour plates when sexes differ, it is impressive to see so many

species covered. This book, as with the author's earlier guides, fills the role of a mini-handbook, where basic field requirements are over-ridden in the attempt to cover vast regional avifaunas adequately.

Wherever the bird-watcher visits in China, or however many other guides are carried, this book is now the starting point. If baggage space is a problem when planning a trip to China, this is *the* essential bird guide, as essential as that travel guide or Chinese phrasebook one could not be without.

Murray D. Bruce

Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania. Volume One by Alfred J. North, 1984. Melbourne: Oxford University Press. Pp. xvii + 366, b & w p11 7. 220 × 285 mm. \$80.00.

This is a timely facsimile edition of an Australian classic originally printed by order of the Trustees of the Australian Museum by F.W. White, Printer, 344 Kent Street, Sydney with an introduction by the author A.J. North, dated October, 1904.

The four parts comprising the volume were published on the 11th June 1901, 25th April 1902, 27th April 1903 and the 11th July 1904 respectively. The foreword to the present volume by Walter E. Boles, of the Australian Museum, is of considerable interest, presenting as it does a valuable, concise and accurate historical record of relevant facts concerning the author, the production of the original work forming the complete set of four volumes and, last but not least, a reference to the artist Neville H.P. Cayley, whose work was carried on so efficiently by his son Neville W. Cayley who was known personally to many of us.

Since the author's death on the 6th May, 1917 there have been profound changes in Australian taxonomy and dramatic changes in our concept of both genera and species. There are such sharp differences of opinion among the professional and amateur taxonomists that it is fair comment to say that there exists an air of uncertainty and confusion. There have, too, been changes in vernacular, therefore the book should be read with this constantly in mind and with modern text books as a guide.

To this end I strongly recommend the latest checklists issued by the RAOU and, in particular, as a cross-reference the *Index of Names of Australian Birds* in the 1926 Official Checklist issued by the RAOU. This index lists all of the names used by North and also contains a wealth of relevant information readily available to those who may not be so familiar with the nomenclature of our earlier era.

North's original volumes must have been a real boon to the ornithologists to his day because, except for Campbell's *Nest and Eggs of Australian Birds* and the catalogue and data of the *Jacksonian Oological Collection*, also printed by F.W. White of Sydney in 1907, there were no other easily accessible books on the subject nor, for that matter, any other books in which so much accurate and valuable information was collected. North's meticulous descriptions of male and female, together with detailed information on nests, nesting sites, shape, size and colour of eggs were outstanding and are still referred to by

researchers. He paid special attention to habitat, bird calls and behaviour generally. All of this was beautifully complimented by Neville Cayley's bird sketches and the author's well chosen and selective photographs.

There is no doubt that Volume 1 will be a welcome addition to any modern ornithological library. The book should not only be treasured as a collector's item, but regarded also as an interesting historical record. It calls for a critical examination and careful study by the conservationist as it contains information on habitats no longer extant; localities no longer frequented by birds where they were once abundant, traditional breeding sites and areas no longer in use. Undoubtedly the relentless march of civilization has taken its toll, but more sinister factors must now be taken into account. Pollution has reared its ugly head and there has been unnecessary destruction of habitats.

When compared with the original, the size of the facsimile is much more convenient and the binding of the book neat and satisfactory, the paper of good quality and the print clear.

The reproduction will be welcomed by both professional and amateur ornithologists who will look forward with pleasure to the reprinting of volumes two, three and four.

N.J. Favaloro

South American Land Birds — A Photographic Aid to Identification by John S. Dunning, 1982. Pennsylvania: Harrowood Books. Pp xvi + 364, col. pl 95 (= col. photos 1112), b. & w. drawing 1, maps 3, small maps 2500. 150 × 230 mm. US\$37.50 (paperback US\$27.50).

According to this book's dust-jacket there are approximately 2950 species on the sub-continent of South America. This book contains descriptions of 2500 of them. One might ask why the other 450 are not included. We are told however, that all the regular land birds are included, which must be close to the mark as the seabirds and waterbirds such as rails, ducks, herons and waders are either omitted or represented by one or two photos. This, then is no major cause for complaint as most of these groups are adequately covered in other books.

The descriptions in the main are excellent, they compare favourably with those in Meyer de Schauensee's *A Guide to the Birds of South America*. In some cases additional information is provided. Conspicuous geographical variation in plumage is also treated. Dunning acknowledges the collaboration of Robert S. Ridgely, author of the excellent field guide to the birds of Panama, who reviewed all the descriptions.

The 'mini' range maps given for each species are an excellent feature of this book. They, together with the habitat and altitudinal preference annotations are largely the work of Ridgely.

I do not wish to enter the argument concerning the use of photographs versus illustrations for identification, but it must be harder to pose a bird to show its identification criteria than to tell an artist the posture you desire. John Dunning has done well; most of the birds are posed to show their identification points and most of the photos are clear and sharp. The cropping of the photos leaves something to be desired as there is an array of birds with parts of their extremities cut off. The work that must have gone into capturing and photographing so many bird species is staggering and John Dunning and his wife should be greatly admired for their devotion to the task. Unfortunately when I go birding in South America I will still be

taking an overnight bag full of bird books but this one will be amongst them.

John L. McKean

The Florida Scrub Jay by G.E. Woolfenden and F.W. Fitzpatrick, 1984. New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press. Pp vii + 406, colour frontispiece, 105 b. & w. figures, US\$52.00 hbk., US\$16.75 pbk.

Data from over ten years continuous study of the Florida Scrub Jay, a co-operatively breeding North American corvid, are presented in this book. The emphasis is on the evolution of social behaviour in this species and, in particular, the relationship between habitat, demography and co-operative breeding. Much of the authors' previous work on this species is collated into this single volume and some of the topics covered include the pair bond, helpers, territoriality, dispersal, patterns of reproductive success and survivorship. Useful discussions of many areas of theoretical interest are also included.

In many respects the jays exhibit the social organization typical of 'helpers at the nest', commonly seen in Australian birds. These jays live in small, permanent social groups comprising a monogamous breeding pair plus non-breeding helpers. Males may remain as helpers for up to six years after fledging while females typically disperse and pair after only one or two seasons in the natal group. Suitable habitat was considered to be saturated with breeding groups, leaving few options open to maturing jays, other than remaining within their natal groups as helpers.

The authors criticize some previous studies of co-operative breeding for the use of per capita calculations of reproductive success when comparing pairs with or without helpers. They also point out errors and misconceptions in previous studies due to failure to use measures of lifetime reproductive success when considering alternative reproductive strategies. Although observations were made over a decade, no major experimental manipulations were attempted. As a consequence some of the most important questions about co-operative breeding have not been completely answered. Attempts to control variables such as prior breeding experience or territory quality statistically, rather than experimentally, are only partially convincing. In their conclusion Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick stress the importance of defining and measuring resources essential for reproduction in co-operatively breeding birds. The extent to which shortages in these resources limit the options available to individuals forms the basis for understanding the evolution of delayed dispersal and helping behaviour, in this as well as other species.

The book is easy to read and well set out. Each chapter starts with a synopsis of the major factual evidence and finishes with summarized conclusions. Actual 'case histories' are separated from the main text which again makes reading easier. Author and subject indices are useful and comprehensive. In summary, this book should be of great interest to those studying co-operative breeding and social organization in birds, as well as being a significant contribution to the study of life-history and demography of Scrub Jays. I hope that it will inspire more long-term studies of populations of Australian birds.

Raymond C. Nias

Proceedings of the second symposium on African Predatory Birds by J.M. Mendelsohn and C.W. Sapsford (Eds), 1984.

Durban, South Africa: Natal Bird Club. Pp v + 254. 170 × 248 mm. R 22.

This is a soft-cover book containing 43 papers, 18 of which are abstracts or extended abstracts. It also lists four resolutions concerning raptor conservation on the African continent. The papers address a wide range of topics including: energetics (7), distribution, status and conservation (6), ecology (6), captive breeding (6), breeding biology (5), foraging and home ranges (4), general biology (3), pesticides (3), population dynamics and mortality (2) and behaviour (1). Five of these papers concern research on raptors conducted outside the African continent.

Many of the papers will be of greatest interest to raptor devotees or those with a special interest in African birds. However, two papers on energetics and one on mortality and population turnover are deserving of a much wider audience.

The use and effects of persistent pesticides on the African continent is documented. The amounts currently being applied in Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries are staggering. For example, average levels of DDT contamination of both raptor eggs and human milk in Zimbabwe are presently similar to or exceed previous world records. A very serious problem confronts the region's resident raptors and the birds which migrate there from Europe. If a raptor population is extirpated, then the cost of restoring that population through captive breeding and release programmes can be enormous, as is detailed in another paper.

This book is essential reading for raptor researchers and conservationists. Selective browsing by other ornithologists is recommended.

David Baker-Gabb

SOUND REVIEW

Edited by F.N. ROBINSON

A Field Guide to Australian Birdsong by Buckingham R. & Jackson L. (eds). Melbourne: Bird Observers Club. \$10.00 per cassette (include postage).

The first two cassettes in this series are now available. They cover 139 species in taxonomic order from Emu to Chestnut Rail. Each cassette contains a printed list that gives the common name, duration of recording, location and recordist. A space is provided for the insertion of tape counter numbers for easy location of species. A booklet accompanies each cassette providing additional information about the nature of the calls and the context in which they were recorded. Reference is also made to descriptions of calls in the field guides by Graham Pizzey and Peter Slater and the Reader Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds. The scientific name of each species is also included. Upon completion of the series, estimated at eight cassettes, these booklets will be compiled in a handbook that will include chapters on the nature of birdsong, recording techniques and equipment, a bibliography and an index.

This ambitious and imaginative project has been funded from the limited resources of the Bird Observers Club and has been made possible by the dedication and expertise of the authors who, with the recordists, have freely given the results

of countless man/hours of patient observation, and expense in equipment and travel.

Not all species are covered but most omissions are either species that are vagrants, do not breed in Australia, or are rather silent, e.g. the Hoary-headed Grebe and Square-tailed Kite. There are omissions of some common calls, e.g. Australian Kestrel, because recordings were not available at the time of production.

Recording levels are well maintained and this, combined with the well modulated voice of Len Grice, make very pleasant listening. The variation in quality of recordings, inevitable in a project of this nature, is quite acceptable.

The text of the booklet is both informative and interesting and I enjoyed comparing the calls with the description in the various field guides. Many of the calls on these cassettes are little known and can provide a valuable guide to identification. I recently used replay of the Painted Button Quail recordings to establish beyond doubt the identity of a pair, though I had no previous knowledge of this call.

F. Norman Robinson

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