

Book reviews

Edited by P. DANN

Bird Etchings, The Illustrators and Their Books, 1655-1855 by Christine E. Jackson, 1985. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. Pp. 296, col. p11 4, B&W figs 76. 265 × 185 mm. \$85.00.

This is the third of this author's excellent books on birds in fine prints, the other two having concerned lithography and wood engraving. In this book Christine Jackson uses the term 'etching' to cover works in which both etching with acid and engraving with an engraving tool have been employed but the two processes are carefully distinguished.

In the first section of 27 pages, the background to the whole subject, covering two hundred years, is concisely and extremely well presented including reference to artists and their materials, to craftsmen (e.g. wood cutters, copper plate engravers), to the outlook of authors of the time, to patronage, to the specimens used and to the changing book scene.

A very significant statement, (quoted here in full with acknowledgement to the publishers), explains engraving and etching and underlines the significance of the etching process, introduced into England about 1640, that allowed the naturalist who had some drawing ability to produce his own plates without dependence upon a craftsman engraver. This gave great impetus to the publication of illustrated natural history works. Quotation: 'Etching had such a great impact on bird-book illustration that we should clearly understand the difference between engraving and etching. Unfortunately, the term "copper engraving" is frequently used for both engraved and etched plates, and some title pages of bird books state that the book contains a number of "engravings" when the illustration process has clearly been etching. The reason for the ambiguity lies in the fact that the finished plate is incised in both cases. The lines of the drawing have been cut into the surface of the copper plate, and these lines hold the ink that then transfers the image to paper. An engraved plate, however, was incised by a graver, an instrument that required a great deal of skill to handle, while an etched plate was incised by acid. In the latter case the artist drew his design with an etching needle through a ground covering the copper so that the copper was exposed to the acid where the needle had passed. When the copper plate was immersed in a bath of nitric acid, the acid cut the line into the copper. It was possible, as George Edwards explained, for an artist to learn to etch after practicing (sic) "a little while," but a seven-year apprenticeship was required to become a proficient engraver.'

Appendices at the end of the book list (a) Continental Illustrated Bird Books Published to 1660; (b) The Use of Metal for Bird Illustrations; (c) The Main Periodicals with Engraved/Etched Bird Illustrations; and (d) Editions, Impressions and Special Issues. These are all valuable adjuncts to the main theme.

The body of the book consists of biographical/historical and critically appreciative accounts of the following 17th-19th century ornithologists of whom many were their own artists and a number both artist and etcher: Willughby, Albin, Catesby, Edwards, Pennant, Hayes, Latham, W. Walcott, T.W. and J.W. Lewin, Bolton, Donovan, Graves, Selby, Jardine and Audubon. These accounts are excellent and are illustrated with figures and some coloured plates from the ornithologists' works. A minor typographical error lists two names against wrong page numbers in the list of plates.

The biographical essays, obviously based upon extensive research include source notes, show keen appreciation of the subject's work and characteristics and touch upon many other aspects of interest of the period. Not least important is the summary at the end of each account listing the books illustrated or produced by the ornithologist/artist concerned. A selected bibliography, an extensive list of sources for each chapter, a comprehensive index to people named and an index (scientific nomenclature) to the birds are also included.

This book, well produced by Cornell University Press, is a work of scholarship that is interesting, instructive and both a valuable and lasting reference. One hopes Christine Jackson will continue to publish such research.

A.R. McEvey

The Birds of Africa II and III, edited by C.H. Fry, S. Keith and E.K. Urban, illustrated by M. Woodcock. London: Academic Press. **Vol. II**, 1986: **Galliformes to Columbiformes**: pp xvi + 552, col. p11 32, many maps, line drawings. 245 × 320 mm, 2.76 kg. **Vol. III**, 1988: **Psittaciformes to Piciformes** xvi + 611, col. p11 32, many maps, line drawings. 245 × 320 mm, 3kg. £71.50 each.

The excellence with which this impressive work started was stressed in the review of Vol. I (*Emu* 83, 281-282). Leslie Brown, its instigator, died before these next two volumes appeared but the work has been admirably carried on by the three present editors and improved, even if the rotating order of their names will cause a headache for compilers of reference lists. Although the general scope, content and layout of the text of Vols II and III remain much the same as in Vol. I, there have been important modifications; in this case, striving to better has not marred what was well. The improvements were introduced with Vol. II and are carried through into Vol. III.

These volumes cover the non-passerines after the Falconiformes and the whole work is being expanded to six volumes instead of four as originally planned. The account of each species is divided into sections for range and status, description, field characters, voice, general habits, food and breeding habits, though vagrants and non-breeding migrants get less treatment. Martin Woodcock's plates are excellent, bold and well-arranged in spite of the inevitable crowding; those of some of the near-passerines, e.g. barbets, seem especially attractive, even if my fading memories suggest that some species are over-coloured. It is here that the first major improvement from Vol. I is noticed. Facing each coloured plate is a full-scale outline, superimposed with the names of the species and subspecies and, where needed, shading to pull together all plumages and particular parts of each. Identification of each illustrated bird is thus made much more easily and quickly than by the clumsy method of Vol. I.

The second great innovation is the acceptance and presentation of superspecies. The editors' decision where and where not to apply this taxon will doubtless be disputed by professionals but for the ordinary person it is decidedly useful to have separate maps for each superspecies, showing the ranges of its components, in

addition to the usual map of distribution for each species in its appropriate place. Though sonograms of voice are still eschewed, a third improvement is in the greatly expanded list of acoustic references, prepared by C. Chappuis.

In the Introduction there is an interesting statement regarding the use of English names for species and the principles concerning their choice. It falls much in line with the ideals of the RAOU's 'Recommended English Names for Australian Birds' (*Emu* 77, Suppl.), especially as regards international usage and group names. For instance, 'Lapwing' is used for all species included in the enlarged genus *Vanellus*, as does the RAOU. However, having gone thus far, it is a pity that the editors have not had the courage of their convictions to set their faces against any alternative name; as it is, most of the *Vanellus* species are named either 'lapwing' or 'plover'. Pounds to a penny, this acceptance of a second name will perpetuate a good many inappropriate, silly and even misleading ones. Other choices are decidedly clumsy; I am all for honouring my friend Forbes-Watson but *Apus berliozii* is really much more conveniently named Berlioz's Swift, as the French do.

In a review of this sort, it seems obligatory to go in for a bit of nit-picking, so I must see what I can do in that regard. The books are beautifully printed and laid out but of course I have not read every word. If I were told that 'accommodate' in line 33 of page xi of Vol. II is the first and last literal, I should not be surprised. References to original sources is a difficult matter in works of this sort. These are given only sparingly throughout the text, which means that reading is facilitated. Yet, if one wants to go back to the original observation of some point of occurrence, behaviour or breeding, it may not be easy to do so in spite of the large bibliography for each family. I am inclined to think that as full referencing as possible in the text is best because in any compilation what was once observed as a possibility so easily becomes a fact and can mislead unless one is encouraged to check.

Finally, there are the maps of distribution. Naturally these are not going to be very informative or accurate for an area the size of Africa. For resident species there is not much cavil but for those that migrate or have several grades of distribution the various kinds of shading or stippling are too much alike for my poor old eyes. In particular I found the coastal distributions of waders, gulls and similar species often almost impossible to detect. No doubt the publishers objected to two- or three-colour printing because it is expensive but . . . Further, the maps are strictly of Africa so that the extralimital ranges of species spread more widely cannot be shown. I should not suggest that there was any need or merit in showing the world-wide distribution of long-distance migrants like waders but it seems a pity that the Arabian Peninsula has not been included so that we can see readily which species reach that corner of the Afro-tropical region. Such a minor extension would then catch the exciting information now coming to us through the efforts of OSME.

Before the war, the leading booksellers in what was then Batavia tried to drum up business from the English-speaking

inhabitants by advertising 'Better books at more expensive prices'. Little did they know how accurately prophetic they were, at least for this work. Anyone who has an interest in African birds must forgo the fleshpots until it has been acquired. Any decent library without it will have a lot of explaining to do.

S. Marchant

Forest Bird Communities of the Hawaiian Islands: Their Dynamics, Ecology, and Conservation by J.M. Scott, S. Mountainspring, F.L. Ramsey and C.B. Kepler, 1986. Los Angeles: Cooper Ornithological Society. Studies in Avian Biology No. 9. Pp. xii + 431, figs 341. 173 × 255 mm. \$US26.50.

This masterly account of the ecology of the forest birds of the larger Hawaiian Islands sets an excellent standard for those who study birds in forests or land birds on islands. It represents the collective research effort of scores of scientists and their technical assistants during the period 1975-83, conducted under rather trying physical conditions. Areas surveyed were the native forests above the 1000 m contour on Hawaii, Maui, Molokai and Lanai, and the known range of rare forest birds on Kauai.

The study comprised many transects on which 9940 stations were surveyed during 20 789 count periods. Over 240 000 birds of 57 species were recorded across 4114 km² in 12 study areas on five islands. A commendable feature was the detailed attention given to training survey staff. At a subsample of stations, the floristics and structure of the vegetation were assessed.

The bulk of the book (pp. 72-330) details the density of each species in relation to elevation and habitat type on each island. If sufficient information is available, density is regressed on a host of variables. However, few of these contribute sizeable coefficients of determination.

The remainder of the book is a synthesis of the detailed species accounts — species/area relationships, species richness, diversity, general patterns of habitat response, distributional anomalies, limiting factors, habitat modification, predation, disease, interspecific competition and conservation are discussed. Recommendations for improved management of the island forests studied conclude the book on a practical issue.

The only weakness that I perceived was the treatment of species/area relationships. Linear and semi-log models were overlooked in the analysis provided.

At a cost of considerably less than one cent per page, this monograph represents exceptional value. It should be essential reading for any ornithologist contemplating studies of the ecology of birds in forests.

Ian Abbott