

west of Balranald; at Dry Lake, Tchelery, in saltbush country 25 miles north-east of Moulamein; at Black Swamp, Wanganella, in saltbush country, 35 miles north of Deniliquin; at Cocketgedong Creek 15 miles east of Jerilderie, in grass-plain country. These indicate how widespread the bird is and there are numerous odd pairs or small colonies to be found at other places throughout the area. No houses are to be found within miles of the majority of these sites. In the more closely settled areas, such as the irrigation district around Finley, it is not possible to distinguish between birds spreading from the homesteads and genuine 'bush-dwellers'. Nevertheless, substantial numbers nest away from the farms and undoubtedly live as independently from man as do the birds in the more outback areas.

The majority utilize holes in dead trees as nest-sites, but the introduced African boxthorn is also a favourite site. At Black Swamp, some nest in lignum, and at two or three places the nests of Fairy Martins (*Hylochelidon ariel*) are used.—J. N. HOBBS, Finley, N.S.W., 4/2/58.

Reviews

The Genus *Amytornis*.—Perhaps no genus of Australian birds, in which there is noticeable specific diversity, is as little known in field habits as is *Amytornis*, the grass-wrens. As some species are known by only a few specimens and not one could be considered at all common, even little taxonomic work has been attempted. Therefore an assessment of species and geographical races within the genus by Dr. A. Keast—'Speciation in the Genus *Amytornis* (Passeres: Muscicapidae, Malurinae) in Australia', *Australian Journal of Zoology*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 33-52, 1958—will be received with interest. The author reduces the nine species of the *Official Checklist* (1926) to seven, placing *puarellii* and *whitei* as races of *textilis* and *striatus* respectively. Two species groups are involved: the *textilis* group (with simple colour pattern and no song) consisting of *A. textilis* (with five races), *A. modestus* (two subspecies) and *A. goyderi* (undivided), and the *striatus* group (with complicated colour pattern and a "sweet rippling song") with *A. striatus* (with four subspecies), *A. dorotheae*, *A. woodwardi* and *A. housei* (the last three with no races). A new subspecies of *A. textilis* is described—*A. t. everardi*, from the Everard and Musgrave Ranges, South Australia. The paper is well illustrated with five text-figures.

Amytornis (the words 'in Australia' in the title seem ambiguous as it is not represented outside Australia) is fundamentally a desert genus, with spinifex the basic habitat. Such inhospitable terrain must be considered primarily the reason for its scarcity in museums (only 172 specimens were examined by the author and 129 of them represented two species) and the shyness of its various species has been a major factor in the scarcity of published field observations. Indeed, four species (*housei*, *woodwardi*, *dorotheae* and *gyderi*) must be considered among the rarest in Australia. No Queensland-collected specimen is known, although the author has inadvertently given that State for the range of *A. dorotheae*.—A.R.M.

Guide to the Hawks of Australia.—The first edition of this popular booklet, written and illustrated by H. T. Condon, and published by the Bird Observers Club, Melbourne, appeared in 1949. A second re-

vised edition has now appeared (1957). The text-matter has been largely re-written and some further data included. Small additional sections are titled 'Protection of Hawks', 'Publications on Hawks', and notes and description concerning the White-eyed Buzzard-Eagle, purported to have been collected near Lithgow, New South Wales, about November 1889—a most unlikely visitation. The main flight-identification plates remain unchanged but there are two additional full-page illustrations depicting 'Names of External Parts of a Falcon' and 'Stance Patterns in black-and-white of Six Species'. The second edition of this helpful guide, which should be in every field-worker's pocket, condenses excellently the necessary information in identifying in the field the hawks of Australia.—A.R.M.

Function of Bird Coloration and Behaviour.—That coloration in all animals, whether obtrusive or not, is biologically equally suitable for survival, provided the creature makes intelligent use of it, is the contention of W. Hoesch in a paper on 'Ueber das Zusammenwirken von Färbung und Verhalten', *Journal für Ornithologie*, 99 (2), 178-177, April 1957.

Obtrusive coloration, he states, serves to accentuate threat or warning behaviour, and supports the effect of courtship display. Cryptic coloration generally serves to make easier the efforts to concealment, but it is effective in desert areas with little vegetation, only so long as the creature remains motionless. A desert lark which moves about is in greater danger of elimination than a bright-coloured bird of the trees which is resting motionless.—E.F.B.

Tasmanian Birds.—This must be the season for revisions—Leach recently, Sharland under review, and Cayley 'in the offing'. Published in 1945 (with an almost immediate second edition), the format and appearance of *Tasmanian Birds* did not do it justice and it is a matter for congratulation that this aspect has been remedied. Now it is a book of 175 pp. (including index), a frontispiece which is an excellent sample of colour photography, and a number of half-tone illustrations by the author, Michael Sharland. Price 21/-, Angus & Robertson Ltd.

Adherence to the *Official Checklist* is shown generally in the names used—vernacular and scientific. Detailed colour descriptions are given but there is also a 'first-glance' colour description for each species, the 'homogeneity' of colour as it were, which must have been difficult to compile and which does not always achieve its aim, for example 'Brown, spotted white' for the Banded Landrail, 'Black and white, yellow breast' for the Golden Whistler, and a few others.

There is no intention here of giving details of various species: the book as a whole is well-produced, informative, properly-balanced and generally useful and is recommended for students and beginners. What this reviewer wishes expressly to do is to pay a sincere compliment to the author for his fostering of interest, over a lengthy period, in matters Tasmanian. His allegiance to the island State is marked, and his educational guidance to those interested in natural history is exemplified by *Tasmanian Birds*.—C.E.B.

Learning and Instinct in Animals.—A major problem facing amateur ornithologists in Australia, at least those living in the more settled areas, is to decide what kind of research can be carried out which will not be a mere repetition of previous studies. The field of bird behaviour offers rich rewards to the student. Much can be done by the amateur using only the simplest of resources. However an essential factor is a wide reading background to understand something of the problems involved and the techniques of study needed. Again ornithologists concentrating entirely on birds tend to lack perspective. A recent book by W. H. Thorpe, titled as above, may be regarded as an essential for intending students in this field.

The book is in three sections. The first deals with general concepts, the second with the problem of learning, and the third discusses the

learning abilities of the main animal groups. It is impossible to deal in a short review with the theories and conclusions reached in an extensive work of this sort.

The large section of the book dealing with birds is extremely stimulating. Modern work tends to show birds are more intelligent than suspected and they show similar types of learning to that of mammals, though generally speaking birds seem to lack olfactory sensitivity. Judging a flying animal by its reactions when grounded may have caused some of the early misconceptions on the subject of avian intelligence. There is a full account of the present position regarding orientation studies in birds. At times there is a tendency to be dogmatic on the basis of limited experimentation, but this may be deliberate in order to challenge workers to confirm or disprove the contentions put forward. This section should help galvanize Australian workers into activity in this field. The scanty reference to Australian material shows how little we have done as yet.

Finally, for the ornithologist interested in birds but with no intention of carrying out serious work, this book will help make his understanding of the animals he is studying much deeper and therefore more interesting.—V.N.S.

Names of Parrots.—Ornithology has considerable aspects, and one that interests many is the nomenclatorial, especially if there is something of etymological or historical interest attached. Appendices B and D of the *Official Checklist* have always attracted attention in this regard. On such a colourful group as the parrots superlatives indicative of pulchritude have been bestowed, and the desire to honour persons who have been "the discoverer, collector, or, more rarely nowadays, a patron", has resulted in many of the Psittaciformes carrying specific names founded on personal cognomens. This is the theme of Mr. Arthur A. Prestwich's booklet *I Name This Parrot*, obtainable from the author at 61 Chase Road, Oakwood, London, at 5/6. There are 86 pages of succinct accounts of such names and their origins.

As would be expected Australian examples are numerous (both Australian birds and folk with Australian associations). In the latter category are princesses, colonial governors, explorers, collectors, ornithologists and relatives of Capt. S. A. White and Gregory M. Mathews. A reference might be justified to *goodfellowi* (of *Eos*) and to *hilli* (of *Platycercus venustus*) if only because of Australians 'losing sight' of these two men. The former led the British Ornithologists Union Expedition to southern Dutch New Guinea in 1909-11 and was awarded that Union's gold and silver medal in 1912. He was on Melville Island in 1935. He died in July 1953. Gerald Hill was a Victorian who was Secretary of the R.A.O.U. for a short term and branch secretary for the Northern Territory for a number of years. He died in 1954.

There is acknowledgement to Whittell's *The Literature of Australian Birds* for much detail, and considerable general research is indicated.—C.E.B.

The Delineation of Natural Areas in New Zealand. See *Proc. N.Z. Ecological Soc.*, IV, May 1957, 6-26, published by the N.Z. Ecol. Soc., Box 202, Wellington, N.Z.

At the fifth annual meeting of the Society (10-12/5/56) an interesting symposium was held in which speakers dealt with the following categories: climatic districts, soils, grasses, beech forests, earthworms, land snails, freshwater fish, reptiles, birds, sub-fossil birds. In the discussion following the Chairman said that "The problem was to try to establish some community of pattern in the various ecological and biological factors present in the areas propounded as natural and see to what extent it was possible to make broad delineations of these areas. Various points had emerged from the papers: the apparent significance of the 38th parallel; the effect of Cook Strait, which is a barrier to certain reptiles and some of the birds, but not to worms."

It was evident that there were a great many factors involved, as biological groups were affected in different ways by present or historical physical configurations. Nevertheless the meeting was broadly agreed that there were three primary divisions which fitted several groups, viz. to the north of about latitude 38°, and to the east and west of the main divide of the islands. For example Dr. R. A. Falla was able to show for birds that the west area includes "the range of distribution of endemic genera of remote affinities and sedentary habits, either recently extinct or only just surviving." But the distribution of the Australian Magpie was not considered to have any direct relation to the other line boundaries (possibly this is because the range of this introduced bird is by no means stabilized).

It is obvious that some definition of areas widely applicable to biological groups would be a great convenience. At present divisions commonly used are a combination of ecological and political boundaries, e.g. Manawatu, Lake Wairarapa, Wairarapa Plains, volcanic plateau, etc. There has been no attempt to divide the country on a basis such as the vice-county system of England, though this, while lacking ecological significance, would prove of use in distributional papers. Workers have, however, discussed dividing the country on a grid basis. Others have discussed the publication of a classification of what are largely botanical habitats. A grid system and a habitat classification are not mutually exclusive of each other, and would be of value to ornithologists. It would therefore seem desirable to go ahead with the publication for ornithologists of some such system in view of the fact that "... in most of the groups discussed not enough was known about the biology, systematics, or distribution of the organisms to make it possible to reach agreement on even a broad distribution of smaller natural areas ... the symposium had been an interesting experiment but it was a hundred years too soon to reach a satisfactory conclusion."—J.M.C.

News and Notes

HONOUR FOR MEMBER

Mr. A. H. Chisholm has been congratulated by the Council of the R.A.O.U. on his having received the award of the O.B.E. in the Queen's Birthday Honours and on having completed nine years of work as Editor-in-Chief of *The Australian Encyclopaedia*. The citation covering the award stated that it was bestowed for services to Australian literature and to natural history.

It may be noted that there are numerous ornithological entries in *The Australian Encyclopaedia* (which embraces 10 volumes) and that most of these, including the governing article, Birds, were written by the Editor-in-Chief personally; various articles on sea-birds were contributed by Dr. D. L. Serventy.

Mr. Chisholm recently completed 50 years of membership in the R.A.O.U., having joined the Union (when it was the A.O.U.) as a youth in Victoria. He was later State Secretary for Queensland and afterwards an officer in both New South Wales and Victoria, including a year as President and a short period as Editor of *The Emu*. He has also been a consistent contributor to this journal, being represented in almost every volume during 50 years, and in addition has written a number of books dealing with Australian birds.

The date of publication was December 15, 1958.