

# LITERATURE

Edited by A. R. McEVEY

## BOOKS

**Australian Parakeets** by Dr. Klaus Immelmann, 1968. Association Ornithologique de Belgique. Pp. 195, 11 col. pll., 26 photographs, 29 line drawings, 11 maps, 21 x 13.8 cms., 42/- (\$A5).

This book is a translation of the second edition of Immelmann's *Die australische Plattschweifsittiche* (Australian flat-tailed parrots), the primary purpose of which was to inform European zoo visitors and aviculturists about the parrots in the field. Only twenty-eight species that might be called the typical Australian parrots are covered; the cockatoos and lorikeets, the Fig Parrot, and the Red-Cheeked, Eclectus, King and Red-winged Parrots are excluded.

The author has contributed much to Australian ornithology, and none of his writings should be overlooked. However, the present work is of only minor interest. It contains little that is new, being largely a compilation from the published work of others, but the treatment of most species is reasonably good. Some important points are raised, e.g. adaptation of parrots to settlement and resulting changes in habitat, similarities between the apparent decline of the Northern Rosella and that of the Gouldian Finch, the possible effects of competition on the status of the Western Rosella, and the use of Mathews' generic name *Neopsephotus* for Bourke's Parrot. The classification adopted is that of von Boetticher (1964). The distribution maps are taken from other authors' works, including several, unfortunately outdated, from Cayley's *Australian Parrots* (1938).

The presentation and layout of this paperback are pleasing, but the coloured plates, drawings, and photographs are of no particular merit. The price of the book is far too high for anyone but the most ardent parrot-fancier.

J. H. Calaby

**Song and Garden Birds of North America** by Alexander Wetmore and others, 1964. National Geographic Society, Washington. Pp. 400 plus 6 gramophone records in endpaper, 555 illustrations (509 in colour) 10" x 7". \$US11.95.

There is a homogeneity about the writing and photography of this kind of publication. It is claimed that this book was written by seventeen named and other unnamed authors, but the consistency of style swiftly produces satiety in the reader, as facts, human interest stories, nature rhapsody and more facts, follow each other in a carefully calculated procession. In spite of this accumulation of facts, the book is not a field guide, a reference work, or a scientific treatise. As a picture book, however, it is efficient and impressive, and it is on this basis that the book should be judged. The reproduction is excellent. The six lightweight gramophone records give an hour's playing of bird calls, too much of which is drowned by superfluous spoken commentary.

R. A. Balmford

**Thorburn's Birds**, edited with an introduction and new text by James Fisher, 1967. Ebury Press and Michael Joseph, Lond. Pp. 184, 82 col. pll., 10½" x 7½". £2/10/-.

The publication of this book brings Archibald Thorburn's great paintings of British birds within the reach of the average book buyer for whom the 1915-16 edition, now a collector's piece, is virtually unavailable. Apart from their reduced size, the reproductions compare excellently with those in the earlier volumes. James Fisher contributes notes on the status and worldwide distribution of each of the 400 species illustrated and on some 70 others most of which have been added to the British list since Thorburn wrote. The book, without being excessively glossy, is an efficient example of the publisher's art.

R. A. Balmford

**Birds of the New Zealand Shore** by Bernard Stonehouse, 1968. A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington, printed and bound in Japan from New Zealand type-setting. Pp. 122, pl. 62 (14 in colour), line drawings, 7½" x 8½". \$A & NZ4.95.

This introduction to New Zealand shore birds deals only with the penguin, gull (and skua), cormorant, heron, and wader families, and excludes many species found on the shore as untypical. The work could be regarded as treating the shorebirds of the South Island rather than of New Zealand, because reference is made to South Island stragglers such as the Emperor and King Penguins but not to vagrant tropical seabirds visiting the North Island. The introduction describes the shore habitat and briefly identifies its component estuaries, mudflats and offshore waters attractive to different birds. Next come bird species in family sequence with discussion of their habitats and plumage. Each family has an identification key for species, illustrated with small drawings that are sometimes not to scale. The text for each bird is accompanied by a photograph (sometimes in colour) and by a larger drawing. In these accounts the White-flipped Penguin is said to be distinguished by two bands on its flippers, although this is also a feature of the northern race of the Blue Penguin in Cook Strait. The impression is given that cormorants fly in skeins, but this is not true of all species. Similarly observers might disagree with the description of the dimorphic New Zealand form of the Little Pied Cormorant *P. m. brevirostris*, herein referred to as the White-throated Shag. It would have assisted identification if drawings of both the Pied Cormorant *P. varius*, with diagnostic black thighs, and of the white-breasted phase of the Little Pied Cormorant, with white thighs, had been included.

The user of this book will need to be aware of the various species excluded from it. An appendix in a later edition indicating the birds outside its scope (some herons and waders, cliff-breeding tube-noses such as the Grey-faced Petrel, various rails, the Kingfisher, various passerines of pasture and woodland, several anatids, and some tropical sea-birds) would assist the reader. With these qualifications the work is a welcome contribution to the literature of birdlife on the New Zealand coasts.

H. L. Secker

**The Life of the Emu** by Maxine Eastman, 1969. Angus & Robertson, Sydney. Pp. 72, 102 photographs (16 in colour), 12 black and white drawings, 9¾" x 7¼". \$A4.50.

Books which illustrate and superficially discuss large numbers of bird species have become so numerous that it is a pleasure to find one devoted to a single species and written for the general reader. The treatment is largely anecdotal, and the American authoress includes information gleaned from discussions with station owners and workers, as well as from her own observations. A general picture of the life cycle of the Emu is revealed, including some interesting details of food and behaviour. One short chapter touches on cave-paintings of this bird by aborigines, and their methods of hunting it.

A few statements are questionable, inaccurate or irritating; e.g., 'This special feather construction undoubtedly enables emus to endure all the variations in weather they are likely to encounter — temperatures from 120 degrees down to 10 degrees — thus eliminating the need to migrate because of temperature.' On p. 10 the caption accompanying a drawing of feathers claims that 'In plumes on back and rump, hairs or filaments are glued together into a solid blade'. There are several references made to the birds 'kneeling' to drink or rest, with no explanation given of the bones of a bird's leg, or of the actual position of the 'knees'. The irritating and inaccurate caption to a photograph of a small chick accompanying an adult is 'Learning the "emu step"'. The black and white photographs and drawings vary in quality, and several could have been omitted without loss. The author's sympathy however is revealed in the sentence, 'It is like turning back the pages of time to see the large flightless birds systematically working away at the bright coloured fruit from a forgotten age'. The index is reasonably good.

In spite of its shortcomings this book would be suitable for school libraries. It has a variety of illustrations, and the text simply and clearly gives information not conveniently available elsewhere.

E. M. McCulloch

**Sixty Camera Studies of Australian Birds** by Donald Trounson and Molly Clampett, 1969. Aust. Wom. Weekly, Sydney. Pp. 64, 60 col. pll., dist. maps, 11" x 8½". \$A1.00.

As the authors make clear, most of the fifty-seven species portrayed in this paperback, which includes twenty-nine parrots and cockatoos, were photographed in an indoor 'bird studio'. This is obvious from the sometimes exotic background foliage, the occasional broken feathers of wing or tail, and the disarrayed plumage in some of those trapped with official permission in the field and liberated in the studio. The quality of the plates is uneven. Some are excellent, others are fuzzy or show wrong colouring. There is very little information in the brief notes in the appendix, but the accompanying species distribution maps are useful and accurate.

The production in general is not of the quality one might expect from a \$100,000 scheme to create a central collection of colour photographs of Australia's 700 or so species of birds' and seriously detracts from its desired photographic standards. The book should appeal to readers of the *Woman's Weekly* and provide for beginners a useful pictorial introduction to a limited range of native birds.

H. E. A. Jarman

#### SHORTER NOTICES

*It is not possible for the Editor of "Literature" to check the bibliographical accuracy of all titles and references supplied by contributors.*

#### Australasian Publications

##### Palaeornithology

SCARLETT, R. J. 1968. An Owlet-Nightjar from New Zealand. *Notornis* 15: 254-266.

From a number of New Zealand localities a sub-fossil Owlet-Nightjar with larger limbs than *Aegotheles* is described as a new genus and species *Megaegotheles novaezelandiae*.

D. G. M.

SCARLETT, R. J. 1969. On the Alleged Queensland Moa, *Dinornis queenslandiae* De Vis. *Mem. Qd Mus.* 15: 207-212

Examination of the holotype of *Dinornis queenslandiae* De Vis, a part left femur, has shown that it is from a *Pachyornis elephantopus* (Owen) derived from a Moa-hunter Maori midden from the South Island of New Zealand and it must therefore be expunged from the list of Australian fossil birds.

Author's abstract.

##### Families

LENDON, A. H. 1968. Distribution of Australian Psittacines. *S. Aust. Orn.* 25: 3-17.

This paper provides up-to-date information on the parrot family on the basis of regional lists, published records, museum specimens and the author's own observations over many years. The distribution given in the 1926 Checklist is corrected or amplified where necessary. There are references to certain well-marked subspecies in the text, but the general treatment is strictly binomial.

H.T.C.

##### Regions/Distribution/First Records: SA - NT, NZ

BONNIN, M. 1968. The Bridled Tern Breeding in South Australia. *S. Aust. Orn.* 25: 18 and 22.

This note reports the surprising discovery of a breeding pair of Bridled Terns *S. anaetheta* at Baudin Rocks off Robe, SA. The report provides an additional species record for SA.

H.T.C.