

LITERATURE

Edited by A. R. McEVEY

BOOKS

Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, together with those of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Ceylon by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley, 1969. Sponsored by Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. Bomb. Lond. NY: OUP. Vol. 2, Megapodes to Crab Plover. Pp. xvi + 345, col. pll. (paintings) 13, line drawings, maps, 253 × 180 mm. Vol. 3, Stone Curlews to Owls. Pp. xvi + 325, col. pll. (paintings) 12, line drawings, maps, \$20.00.

Volume 1 of this outstanding handbook has been reviewed (Emu 70: 37). The introductory remarks found there apply to Volumes 2 and 3. Therefore, among matters of general interest, such finer points in the present volume as nomenclature and distribution will now be considered especially where they bear upon Australasian ornithology.

Volume 2 covers the Galliformes, Gruiformes and part of the Charadriiformes. In the first volume the Australasian reader was indirectly reminded of Australia's comparative paucity of species in the Anseriformes and Falconiformes by India's wealth of diversity in these orders. In Volume 2 the Indian sub-region is seen to be rich also in Phasianidae with forty-six species as opposed to Australia's three native species. Of note is the Mountain Quail *Ophrysia superciliosa*, of the Kumaon Himalayas, last taken in 1876 and considered by the authors to be probably extinct.

In the section on cranes, Gruidae, both races of the Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* are treated: *G. a. antigone* of northern India east to western Assam, with a white collar, and *G. a. sharpii* that ranges from Burma to Vietnam and the northern Malay Peninsula, with no white collar. This racial difference is of interest because the recent report of Sarus Cranes in northern Queensland involved birds with and without white collars (Gill, Emu 69: 49-52).

Ali and Ripley, following Peters (Check-list of Birds of the World, 2), use the generic name *Choriotis* G. R. Gray, 1855, in the bustards, as in *Choriotis nigriceps*, the Great Indian Bustard. Meinertzhagen (Birds of Arabia, 1954: 545) has shown, however, that *Choriotis* is antedated by *Ardeotis* Le Maout, 1853. Both generic names are based on *Otis arabs* Linnaeus, 1758. The Australian Bustard belongs to the same superspecies as the Great Indian Bustard (in fact, Meinertzhagen treated them as conspecific) and must be known as *Ardeotis australis*. (See also Condon, A Handlist of the Birds of South Australia 1968: 43.)

In the section on plovers, the reviewer noted with interest that the Australian Black-fronted Plover *Charadrius melanops* has been recorded once in the Indian subregion, a specimen having been collected near Madras by Jerdon in the last century.

Wader enthusiasts will find the notes on this group of importance, especially because some of the species dealt with have only recently been recorded in Australia. Australia has been omitted, however, from the wintering range of the Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*, a species first taken on the continent by W. Burton on the Fitzroy River, northern WA, on 24 September 1886 (Mathews 1913, Birds of Australia, 3: 252-253; Warren 1966, Type-specimens of birds in the British Museum (Natural History), 1: 319), and recorded again several times in the last few years.

Without comment, the Curlew Sandpiper is referred to as *Calidris testaceus* (Pallas, 1764) instead of *Calidris ferruginea* (Pontoppidan, 1763). Also, under Green Sandpiper, the original spelling of the scientific name is given as *Tringa ochropus* Linnaeus, but was in fact *Tringa oerophus* Linnaeus, the emendation to *ochropus* having been generally accepted on etymological grounds. A point affecting the Australian checklist is that, as Ripley showed in his earlier *Synopsis*, when the Terek Sandpiper, formerly *Xenus cinereus* (Güldenstädt, 1774) is transferred to the genus *Tringa*, it must be known as *Tringa terek* (Latham, 1790), not *Tringa cinerea*, which is preoccupied by *Tringa cinerea* Brünnich, 1764. Condon overlooks this point in his 1968 handlist (*op. cit.*).

Volume 3 completes the Charadriiformes, and covers also the Columbiformes, Psittaciformes, Cuculiformes and Strigiformes, again groups in which the subregion is quite rich. Another Indian bird which is considered to have become extinct, and unaccountably so, is the Double-banded or Jerdon's Courser *Cursorius bitorquatus*, last recorded authentically in 1900. The Large Indian Pratincole, the Oriental Pratincole of the RAOU Checklist, is treated as a race of *Glareola pratincola*, i.e. *G. p. maldivarum*, although it is accorded full rank as *G. maldivarum* by Vaurie (1965, The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna, 2).

Of terns, the Indian subregion has twenty-two species whereas Australia claims twenty, with sixteen species common to both. In the reviewer's opinion, further work on the breeding ranges of forms at present lumped under *Sterna albifrons* will reveal that more than one species is involved.

Australia has some twenty-three native species of pigeon, seven of which, in the bronzewing group, inhabit the semi-arid areas of the continent. The Indian subregion possesses thirty species, most of which are forest-dwellers, the dry-country niches presumably being filled by some seven species of sandgrouse (Pteroclididae), a family not represented in Australia, but which is often regarded as being related to the pigeons.

The original citation of the Ceylon Woodpigeon is given as *Columba torringtonii* Bonaparte, *C. r. Acad. Sci., Paris*, 39 (1854): 1103 (as in Peters 1937, Check-list of Birds of the World, 3; Goodwin 1967, Pigeons and Doves of the World). It is in fact *Columba torringtonii* Kelaart, 1853, in Blyth, *Prodromus Faunae Zeylanicae*; Appendix C: 35, as pointed out by Warren (*op. cit.*: 297-298).

India lags behind Australia in the parrots, with fifteen species in two genera compared with Australia's fifty-two species in twenty-two genera. This situation is reversed in the owls, however, of which the Indian subregion has an extraordinary richness, twenty-nine species compared with Australia's eight.

The colour plates are good, and the text meaty. As with Volume 1, the reviewer recommends these two volumes to all Australasian ornithologists interested in the birds of their neighbouring subregion, but again with a warning against incautious use of Stuart Baker's egg data.

S.A.P.

A Natural History of Australia: 1 Tropical Queensland by Stanley and Kay Breeden, 1970. Sydney & London: Collins. Pp. 262, b. & w. pll. 192, col. pll. 74, drawings by K.B. 47, map 350 x 250 mm. \$13.50.

Artistic photographs of the highest quality, featuring some of the least known representatives of Australia's fauna, and good drawings of animals and plants by Kay Breeden characterize this first volume of a projected Natural History of Australia.

This comprehensive book is concerned with the narrow strip, a natural history 'treasure trove', extending from Ayr to the tip of Cape York peninsula. The various types of rainforest are prominently featured but other habitats—woodland, savanna, mangrove swamp, watercourse and lagoon—are also treated, to reflect the entire ecology. Noted for genuine enthusiasm, the authors have presented a vivid picture of 'this corner of Australia richest in wild life'. They also convey the sense of urgency so necessary in forestalling the alarming destruction of irreplaceable habitat, for example rain-scrub. The chapter on conservation emphasizes the frightening fact that not even the remotest areas of Cape York are safe from the depredations of large-scale chain-saw operators stealing orchids as a lucrative business.

We are told that by cattle grazing and mineral development obliteration of these areas, so uniquely different from the rest of Australia, can occur within a matter of several years. The reviewer agrees with the authors that only very determined and prompt action by the government can save the remainder. Predominantly featured are such species as the Torres Strait Pigeon, all but gone from half of its former range and greatly reduced in number. The illegal massacre of parent birds flying daily from feeding grounds on the mainland to nesting areas on islands emphasizes the greed and thoughtlessness of Australians and the need for strong co-operation between State departments in stamping out such practices.

Golden-shouldered Parrots, endangered because they make their nesting tunnels in termitaria, provide one of the most melancholy examples of deliberate plunder of wild life. During northern travels the authors saw only twelve birds and found only a single nest. Nearly all nesting tunnels found had been robbed because a single live bird of this rare species of great beauty fetches about \$3,000 on the European market. Obviously only resident rangers can protect this magnificent parrot.

Worthy of special note are the unsurpassed coloured plates of the White-tailed Kingfisher, Yellow-breasted Sunbird, Jacana, Golden-shouldered Parrot, Shining Starling, Spectacled Flycatcher, Lovely Wren, Golden Bowerbird and also Peter Slater's notable picture of a Wompoo Pigeon and young. Mammalogists will revel in

what to most of them will be the first live photographs of the Brush-tipped Ringtail and its extraordinary fellow, the variable Herbert River Ringtail. Delightful also are the excellent portraits of the Striped (Green) Ringtail.

This most attractive book brings into sharp focus the Australian tropical heritage that is ours to preserve or destroy, and its value to the cause of conservation has been emphasized here because of the urgency of the matter. Its illustrations and text make it a valuable book of reference as well.

D.F.

The Birds of Port Moresby and District by Roy D. McKay, 1970. Melbourne: Thomas Nelson (Australia). Pp. 74, b. & w. pll. 16, col. pl. 1, figs. 2, 148 x 222 mm. \$4.95.

Our knowledge of the avifauna of New Guinea is decidedly patchy and until recently most of the information was scattered through scientific journals. The publication of Rand and Gilliard's *Handbook of New Guinea Birds* made such information readily available and this hand-list goes farther in easing the difficulties for the inexperienced observer or the visitor to the Port Moresby area.

The introductory chapters are brief, include explanatory notes, and refer to early collectors, boundaries, environment, migration, nesting, economics and conservation. Two maps show the area covered. Five of the photographs show habitat, the rest birds. I would have preferred to see included fewer species shared with Australia and more endemic to New Guinea.

The annotated list, to November 1968, covers some 364 species. Since then, as one would expect, several more species have been recorded for the district, e.g. *Sturnus vulgaris*, *Phalacrocorax carbo*, *Spizaetus gurneyi*, *Pterodroma rostrata* and *Puffinus leucomelas*.

There is a small list of doubtful species to which a number that appear in the main text could probably be added. Some of the localities given by early collectors, particularly the Astrolabe Range, are doubtless erroneous. The birds in question must have been collected from farther inland at higher altitudes. Some of the more unusual records, given as sightings, have actually been confirmed by some means, as for example a photograph of *Lonchura tristissima*. Others such as *Zosterops minor*, *Halcyon chloris* and *Psittaculirostris desmarestii* require verification.

Taking into account the hard cover, the illustrations and the useful text, the book is reasonably priced. This is an important factor when value for money in Australian ornithological books is becoming rarer as the spate of publications increases.

J.L.McK.

SHORTER NOTICES

For simplicity the names of authors of papers are accompanied by initials only

Australasian Publications

Species

PESCOTT, T. 1970. The gannets of Lawrence Rocks. *Wildl. Aust.* 7: 76-77.

This is a popular account describing the Australian Gannet's major breeding island off the Victorian coast.

D.D.D.

PRATT, E. 1970. Do Pheasant Coucals mate for life? *Sunbird* 1: 72-73.

This question is posed after observing a coucal closely attending another coucal killed by a car on a Queensland road. The behaviour suggested that the pair was mated,

and the date (2 May) that breeding should not have been in progress.

D.D.D.

WOOD, V. J. 1970. Observations of the clustering of Little Wood-swallows, *Artamus minor*. *Sunbird* 1: 59-64.

Two clusters are described, one in southern Queensland and one in Northern Territory in 1962. In the former, six dead birds were found positioned upright in the walls of a burnt-out tree. Clustering birds completely covered the corpses.

D.D.D.

Historical Collection and Early Books

HINDWOOD, K. A. 1970. The 'Dobroyde' Ornithological Collection. *Aust. Zool.* XV: 231-232.

Leith's Parrots (1883), Campbell's Nests and Eggs (1883'), and The Southern Science Record. *Aust. Zool.* XV: 227-230 + pl.

The 'Dobroyde' Collection of bird skins in The Australian Museum contains type-specimens of scientific importance and is otherwise of historical interest. Details of its history, compiled with the aid of information from Mr J. S. P. Ramsay, a descendant of the collectors, are outlined in this paper which is valuable and timely.

The rare Melbourne book, *The Parrot Family and Parrots of Victoria* by T. Augustus Forbes Leith, and the less rare *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds* by A. J. Campbell (not the large work), of each of which a copy was auctioned in Melbourne in 1969, are described and informatively discussed. Leith's book is possibly excessively rare. Of Campbell's, however, a copy was presented to the National Museum of Victoria by Mr N. J. Favalaro recently, and a further copy that was the 'Author's Presentation-Ernest Gibson-Gregory Mathews' association copy, suffered an eclipse when it was purchased twenty years ago by the present writer who, then unaware of the niceties of the situation, promptly wrote his name in it. Perhaps readers can notice further copies of either of these works in the 'Literature' columns.

The history of the Southern Science Record, important in Victorian ornithology, is outlined with interesting comment and reference.

A.R.McE.

Historical Ornithology

COOPER, R. P. 1970. Our birds since Cook. *Wildl. Aust.* 7: 7071.

A brief account of early Australian ornithology stressing the collection and destruction of birds, this article ends with a useful list of species that are now threatened.

D.D.D.

Ecology

WILLIAMS, M., and M. IMBER. 1970. The role of marginal vegetation in some waterfowl habitats. *Proc. N.Z. ecol. Soc.* 17: 126-128.

This paper concisely defines the aquatic vegetation and needs at the margin of water of the Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*, dabbling ducks, *Anas* spp. and other waterfowl for NZ wetlands.

H.L.S.

Overseas Publications

Rarities Committees

WALLACE, D. I. M. 1970. The first ten years of the Rarities Committee. *Br. Birds* 63: 113-129.

This is a most interesting critical history of the committee set up in Britain in 1959 to 'collect, investigate, judge and publish annually the essential details of all the rarer vagrants'. The successes, failures, development and functioning of the committee are reviewed objectively and in such a way that many vital aspects of field observing and reporting, not necessarily accepted immediately by everyone, are illuminated and justified. The conclusion is that the committee 'is playing a vital role of supervision and interpretation over a major part of the British list'. As has been said before, the RAOU hopes to establish something similar in Australia, even though the problems are different from those in Britain. If Wallace's article were studied and became well known among field-workers here, the difficulties of setting up such an organization would be decreased and the

hostility, possibly to be caused by its inauguration, would be lessened.

S.M.

Species

FORDHAM, R. A., and R. M. CORMACK. 1970. Mortality and population change of Dominican Gulls in Wellington, New Zealand. With a statistical appendix, by R. M. Cormack. *J. Anim. Ecol.* 39: 13-27.

Food supply, flooding and predation are considered in this interesting paper.

J.L.McK.

ISENMANN, P., J. L. MOUGIN, J. PREVOST, G. TRAWA and J. F. VOISIN. 1970. Recherches ecologiques sur les oiseaux des terres australes et antarctiques françaises. *Oiseau Revue fr. Orn.* 40: 1-156.

This special issue contains papers on Antarctic seabirds. Prevost reports on the status of populations of penguins, albatrosses and petrels breeding on the little known East Island, Crozet Archipelago. Mougin's papers are on the ecology and breeding biology of *Diomedea exulans*, and a comparative study of the breeding of *Phoebastria palpebrata* and *Phoebastria fusca*, the reproductive cycle of *Procellaria aequinoctialis*. Isenmann's contributions are studies of the breeding biology of *Pagodroma nivea* and *Daption capense*. Trawa's work is on the vascular system of *Aptenodytes forsteri* and *Pygoscelis adeliae* while Voisin notes a stray *Pygoscelis antarctica* from Kerguelen. All papers are in French with English summary.

J.L.McK.

HOLYOAK, D. 1970. Comments on the classification of the Old World ibises. *Bull. Br. Orn. Club* 90: 67-73.

A sensible appraisal of the specific and generic limits within Threskiornithidae was long overdue. Holyoak's review is just that. Of interest to Australian workers is the merging of the white ibises *Threskiornis aethiopicus*, *T. melanocephala* and *T. molucca* into one species. *T. aethiopicus* has priority. The plumage characters, on which *Carphibis* (a generic name sometimes used for the Straw-necked Ibis) is separated from *Threskiornis*, do not seem sufficient to afford it generic rank. *Threskiornis* is the older name.

J.L.McK.

HUTCHINSON, M. 1970. I thought I saw a huia bird. *Birds* 3(5): 110-113.

An account of a possible sighting of the 'extinct' Huia of New Zealand.

J.L.McK.

MCBRIDE, G., I. P. PARER and F. FOENANDER. 1969. The social organization and behaviour of the feral domestic fowl. *Anim. Behav. Monogr.* 2: 127-181.

The first seventeen pages of this paper are devoted to a report on 'Field studies on Northwest Island', an uninhabited coral island 65 km north-east of Gladstone on the Queensland coast. The breeding season runs from September to December. The alpha male in the dominance hierarchy of each flock becomes territorial and is accompanied by a single female. Broods are reared for ten to twelve weeks. Two successive clutches are laid, but most chicks from the second brood die. All broods form a single flock before sexual maturity. In the non-breeding phase each alpha male has a harem of up to twelve females. Studies of captive birds are also described, and the paper contains a useful discussion on communication and the evolution of the social system.

D.D.D.