

REVIEWS

Edited by G. W. JOHNSTONE

BOOKS

John Cotton's Birds of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales 1843-1849 by Allan McEvey, 1974, with Foreword by A. H. Chisholm and Biographical Introduction by Maie Casey. Limited edition of 850 copies. Sydney: Collins. Pp 127, col. pl 15, b. & w. pl 6. 323 x 288 mm (boxed). \$A25.00.

In May 1843 at the age of 41, Mr John Cotton, his wife and nine children arrived in Melbourne from England to settle on his brother's sheep-station on the Goulburn River between King Parrot and Muddy Creeks, in a region then known as the Port Phillip District of New South Wales.

John Cotton was a keen ornithologist and had published and illustrated privately in 1835 *The Resident Song Birds of Great Britain* and *Song Birds of Great Britain*. On arrival in his new country he immediately set about collecting birds and painting them in sketch-books. He was undoubtedly the pioneer birdman of what was to become Victoria shortly after his early demise in 1849. Sydney had Thomas Watling and John Lewin as its early artists: Victoria, John Cotton.

The list of 140 species that he recorded during his six short years in this country was considerable and he left some valuable notes of the birds of the district of 130 years ago. Following John Cotton, were Isaac Batey with his bird-list for Jackson's Creek, Sunbury, from the late 1840s (1907, *Emu* 7: 1-17) and H. W. Wheelwright, the 'Old Bushman', with his list for the Mornington Peninsula area in the 1850s (in his *Bushwanderings of a Naturalist*, 1865).

Cotton's information would never have been published were it not for the patience and dedication of his great-granddaughter, Maie Casey, wife of one of the great sons of this country, Lord Casey. She contacted relatives from all parts of the world and brought together the greater part of John Cotton's sketch-books, paintings and writings. These she then handed to Allan McEvey, former President of the RAOU and Curator of Birds at the National Museum of Victoria in Melbourne. Again with great dedication, he carefully examined and annotated the collection and from it has now produced this book. Including a catalogue of all the drawings in the possession of Lady Casey and fine reproductions at original size of a selection, this represents a most valuable contribution not only to Victorian ornithology but to Australian ornithology as well.

There could be no one more suited to write the foreword than Alec Chisholm, OBE, Fellow of the RAOU and the greatest ornithological historian in this country. Lady Casey gives a very fine account of the family background and the struggle John Cotton had to get his brother, William, interested in his ornithological work.

To me two interesting facts stand out in John Cotton's writings. On 11 May 1843 he wrote: 'We are approaching Cape Otway. A little bird with a flame red breast flew past the stern of the ship towards the land.' This was probably the first record of migration of the Flame Robin between Tasmania and Victoria. There is still no evidence from bird-banding of this migration in spite of hundreds of birds being banded in Victoria.

The other concerns the Bell Miner. On 19 June 1843 when he crossed the King Parrot Creek, John Cotton

wrote: 'Wherever there is running or constant water the bell bird may be heard uttering his sonorous clear "tink" which, from its similarity to the sound of a silver bell, when many are heard at the same time, is the origin of its name.' The Bell Miner has not been heard in that area for a very long time, possibly for more than a century.

This book is a first-class piece of Australiana and should be in all libraries with a particular interest in early history; my congratulations to all concerned with this tribute to John Cotton.

W.R.W.

Birds and Where to Find Them: New South Wales by W. Roy Wheeler, illustrated by Margo Pederson, 1974. Jacaranda Press, Qld. Pp xiii + 82, col. pl 50, maps 50 + end-cover. 215 x 285 mm. \$A5.25.

This well-illustrated and attractively produced book will be especially valuable to the bird observer who has the opportunity, time and enthusiasm to tour New South Wales. Whether he wants to know what species might be expected in the best 'birding' spots or to find out what facilities are available in national parks and nature reserves, Roy Wheeler's book supplies the answer in a condensed style. It is the first of a proposed series, planned to cover all Australia.

There are two main divisions: the first fifty pages deal with fifty areas recommended for seeing birds and the next twenty-eight list in alphabetical order all species so far recorded from New South Wales, including Lord Howe Island, indicating by shading in vertical columns from which of the fifty localities each species has been recorded. The selected areas cover most of the State, although there are few in the western region, and this tabulation is a useful guide to the distributions of species in New South Wales. The final few pages contain a revised list of all birds (vernacular names only) known from New South Wales in the systematic order adopted in *A Handlist of the Birds of New South Wales* (McGill 1960), with additional species for Lord Howe Island. Scientific names are included in the tabulation, but five on the Lord Howe list are given trinomials and allotted additional lines. This unbalances the arrangement somewhat and it would have been better simply to have included them under the binomial names given for all the 531 species for New South Wales proper. Under this title, it is surprising and surely inappropriate that extinct forms have been included in the tabulation.

In the first section each page deals with one selected area, for which a clear map is given, with brief information about location, distances from Sydney or some other centre, attractions, history, area of the site, accommodation and vegetation. The number of species recorded from each place is given (some are incomplete) and the ten 'most conspicuous' and the ten 'highlights' are named. Four are illustrated in colour, occupying slightly more than half of each page.

The paintings of 200 species by Margo Pederson are generally pleasing and well executed; some show both male and female. They give the book considerable added appeal and, because no plumage descriptions are given, are the only aid to identification. A few, however, such as White-cheeked Honeyeater and Mangrove Heron on

Plate 28, depict the birds in unnatural poses and would probably be of little help.

It is to be hoped that the response to this book from the growing list of field-workers and enthusiasts will assure the publication of the companion volumes planned for other States, which are already in an advanced state of preparation.

A.R.McG.

Tasmanian Birds by The Tasmanian Field Naturalists' Club, 1974. Jacaranda Press, Qld. Pp 98, col. pll 83. 100 x 133 mm. \$A2.50.

This little book contains coloured photographs of seventy-seven common Tasmanian birds, including all twelve endemic species. It fits easily in the pocket and

with stiff covers is ideal for the field. Separate descriptions are given of males and females and also adults and juveniles, when they differ. A full list of Tasmanian species is given at the end. The description of each species is accompanied by a few lines on its natural history including, voice, behaviour, migration, ecological niche and food. The reproductions vary in quality but are generally good to adequate, quite an achievement in view of the book's low price. In fact I can complain seriously only of the Green Rosella, which has turned out far too yellow.

The book will help anyone who wants a simple aid to recognizing Tasmanian birds and to learning a bit more about their natural history. No Tasmanian school or public library should be without a copy.

M.G.R.

PAPER

Ecological and behavioural evidence for the systematic status of New Zealand Oystercatchers (Charadriiformes: Haematopodidae) by A. J. Baker, 1974. R. Ontario Mus. Life Sci. Contribn (96). Pp 34, figs 11, tables 7. \$Can2.00. (Obtainable from the Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, M5S, 2C6.)

Five New Zealand oystercatchers are commonly recognized: South Island Pied *Haematopus (ostralegus) finschi*; Chatham Island *H. (o.) chathamensis*; and Variable *H. unicolor* with three forms, Black, Intermediate and Pied, of which the Pied has sometimes been given specific status as *H. reischeki* (e.g. Falla *et al.*, A Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand, 2nd ed., 1970). To date, their taxonomic relations have not been satisfactorily evaluated, (cf. Annotated Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand, OSNZ, 1970) and Baker has attempted to unravel the problem—in two stages.

Concentrating on the more abundant and accessible mainland birds, *finschi* and *unicolor*, he examines a variety of characters (including selection of habitat, feeding and breeding behaviour) and starts with the idea

that the maintenance of taxonomic differences depends largely on the avoidance of competition. From his data, important differences emerge, e.g. in breeding habitat, timing of nesting, migratory behaviour and piping (though an unsatisfactory distinction is made between social and aggressive piping). Another major dichotomy concerns feeding behaviour; *finschi* appears to be better adapted to soft substrates and *unicolor* to feeding in rocky habitats, only venturing onto estuarine areas in the absence of *finschi*, which thus seems to be dominant in these areas. However, *unicolor* appears to be the more adaptable species and on rocky shores was able to obtain about twenty per cent more food (and energy) per day than from soft substrates. The estimated daily requirements of energy for existence (EER) for a captive *finschi* was sixty-four K-cals whereas the observed daily intake in the wild was 1,100 K-cals; this huge difference suggests that the difference between the EERs found for these two oystercatchers (75 and 64 K-cals) has limited significance when Baker extrapolates to the wild situation. His argument that the different dimensions of the species' bills have adaptive value fails to provide convincing evidence of his theory of exclusion.

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