

## REVIEWS

Edited by G. W. JOHNSTONE

### BOOKS

**Bird Life: An Introduction to the World of Birds** by Ad Cameron (ills) and Christopher Perrins (text), 1976. Oxford: Elsevier-Phaidon. Pp 160, numerous col. illus. 235 x 310 mm. \$A16.50 (£5.95).

A large-format picture book with two or more coloured illustrations on every page is one thing; an introduction to bird biology by Dr Perrins, a serious ornithologist, is quite another. When they are combined, as in this book, the pictures, by virtue of their very excellence, effectively distract from the text. The detailed and informative captions tell a story quite separately from the text; the text never refers to the pictures. English names are used throughout the text; the captions give both English and scientific names. The inescapable conclusion is that text and pictures were prepared independently.

Because the artist has top billing on cover and title-page, it can be assumed that the publishers see this production as a picture book coupled with a text rather than as a well-illustrated textbook. No references or bibliography are included; the text is not intended for the scholarly or inquiring reader. Considered as a picture book, it is elegant, well produced and attractive.

Although the introduction deplores the tendency for bird books to be restricted to the birds of a particular region and there is token use of examples from the Australasian Region, both author and artist show the usual lack of real interest in or knowledge of anything outside the Holarctic. It is interesting, in passing, to find the reviewer of this book in *The Auk* welcoming 'the nice balance between New and Old World forms in the species chosen to illustrate particular points'. We all look for our own.

Not only Australian ornithologists will be surprised to read six pages headed 'Young and their Care' in which there is no suggestion that any bird other than the parents ever takes any part in the care of the young. The passing references under the headings 'Bird Study' and 'Pair Bond' to co-operative breeding as an aberration of warm climates are not really good enough in 1976.

The Superb Lyrebird (p. 77) with its tail vertical, balanced on a mound the size and shape of an upturned bucket, will fall off when it gets its tail into position and starts its display.

This is an attractive book, superficially useful for a secondary school library in the Northern Hemisphere.

Rosemary Balmford

**Birds of New Guinea and Tropical Australia** by W. S. Peckover and L. W. C. Filewood, 1976. Sydney: Reed. Pp 160, col. photos 113, maps 96. 255 x 190 mm. \$A14.95.

Despite its title, this book is really about birds of New Guinea. As such, it is an excellent layman's introduction to the extraordinarily rich bird fauna of that island. The main section of the text has been written round coloured photographs of ninety-five species, roughly one-seventh of the Island's birds. These photographs, taken by Peckover, are nearly all of first-rate quality, notwithstanding that several have been taken in or against unnatural surroundings. They go a long way in supporting the authors' arguable and perhaps pointless claim that

'colour photography is the medium that stands out above all others for bird species identification'. The representation of species portrayed is well-spread and balanced and many of the more typical and distinctive members of the island's fauna are illustrated. The only photographs that can be seriously faulted are those of the Brush Cuckoo *Cuculus variolosus*, both of which are of immatures, and those of the Red-cheeked Parrot *Geoffroyus geoffroyi* and the goshawks *Accipiter*, which are, respectively, faded and poorly posed.

As a rule, explanatory texts that accompany each photographed species are also well prepared, concisely written and contain a wealth of general biological information and observation found in no other general publication. Songs, food, flocking, breeding, habitats and other aspects of general behaviour have been included. Details of the nearest relatives of each species and characteristics of the family to which it belongs are given often and help to relate each species to the bird fauna of the Australian region as a whole.

Errors of fact are few but several deserve special mention because of their wider implications. The bill of the Feline Owllet-nightjar *Aegotheles insignis* does not in fact approach that of frogmouths *Podargus* and the nostrils are forward as in all species of *Aegotheles*; thus, grounds given for putting this species in a monotypic genus (*Euaegotheles*) are invalid. Nor in the flycatchers is *Myiagra alecto* 'intermediate' between *Myiagra* and *Monarcha*; none of the features that it shares with the species of *Monarcha* is absent in other species of *Myiagra*. Juveniles of the Rufous-naped Whistler *Aleadryas rufinucha*, moreover, are generally rufous, not dull green, which partly accounts for the species having been referred to *Pachycephala* by previous revisers.

Accounts of breeding, though welcome, are sketchy and often unhelpful. Descriptions of the eggs of many species are vague or misleading, for example 'creamy or pinkish' for those of the Hooded Pitohui *Pitohui dichrous* and 'olive-brown' for those of the Black-eared Catbird *Ailuroedus melanotis*. The size of clutches of New Guinean passerines is said (p. 62) to average two or three, whereas, for most forest-dwellers it is one or two and so less than for Australian congeners living in drier and more open eucalypt forests. The point is important because it bears on how birds adapt reproductively to differing habitats under differing climatic and seasonal regimes. It is also inappropriate that the hitherto unknown eggs of at least one species, the Chanting Scrubwren *Crateroscelis murina*, are described for the first time in a book like this, which is not part of the primary ornithological literature. Nests and eggs of other species said not to have been published previously, e.g. other species of *Crateroscelis* and the White-shouldered Wren *Malurus alboscapulatus*, have in fact been described.

Maps of distribution are given for each species illustrated. They are beautifully prepared but too small and fine in detail to be read easily and colours for distributional limits and several altitudinal levels are used with sufficient inconsistency to be confusing.

A list of all Papuanian birds is provided in an appendix. The list covers all species of birds recorded from New Guinea and satellite islands, the Bismarck Archipelago, Solomon Islands and Santa Cruz group, and

gives their scientific names, English names (selected by the authors themselves) and symbols for their regional distribution. I am in two minds about this. Even though it is out of place in this sort of book, it is, to its great merit, the only generally available comprehensive list of the birds of the Papuan region. The next previous, Salvadori's monumental *Ornitologia* published at the end of last century, is not only rare and cumbersome to use for the non-specialist but also very much out of date.

The shortcomings of the list lie in its arbitrariness. On the one hand, sea-birds are covered patchily and incompletely, as shown by reference to King (1967, *Seabirds of the tropical Pacific Ocean*, US natn. Mus., Washington) and Greensmith (1975, *Sunbird* 6: 77-89). On the other, it includes birds from the Santa Cruz Islands, which zoogeographers have consistently aligned with the Polynesian or Micronesian avifaunas. Here for the first and, I hope, last time, a number of Polynesian elements are included in a list of Papuan birds, e.g. *Ptilinopus greyi*, *Charmosyna palmarum*, *Halcyon cinnamomina*, *Lalage maculosa*, *Myiagra vanikorensis*, *Mayornis schistaceus*, *Clytorhynchus nigrogularis*, *Aplonis zelandica*, *A. tabuensis* and *Woodfordia lacertosa*. A further problem arises from the way in which tertiary bracket names are used in scientific binomina. They are intended to inform about alternative names in the literature but in fact conflict with nomenclatural conventions for bracket names and are too easily misinterpreted. Relations between the Varied and Singing Honeyeaters *Meliphaga* (= *Lichenostomus*) *versicolor* and *virescens* have also been confused for the first time.

Much is innovative about the list's English names. Many are short and apt replacements for the cumbersome names used in Rand and Gilliard (1967, *Handbook of New Guinea Birds*). Others can hardly be expected to be taken seriously, such as 'blackwit' for *Melampitta*, 'shieldbill' for *Peltops* (which, by the way, is probably not a flycatcher) and 'shywit' for *Androphobus*, an orthonychine whipbird. And why, for example, 'Lesser Pied Fantail' for *Rhipidura cockerelli* instead of the simpler 'Pied Fantail'? ('White-winged Fantail' is even more appropriate.)

Perhaps the most serious criticism that can be levelled at the choice of English names is that despite the stated claim that they ought not to 'seriously conflict with current usage in Australia', this object is practised as much in the breach as in the observance, particularly in the case of species that are widespread (or as widespread) in Australia and about whose names here there has been little, if any, disagreement over the last fifty years. Examples are White-bellied instead of Olive-backed Oriole, Green instead of Yellow Oriole, Long-billed Cuckoo-shrike instead of Cicadabird, Rufous-breasted instead of Rufous-banded Honeyeater, Brown instead of Rufous or Little Shrike-thrush, Grey-collared instead of Grey Fantail, Monarch instead of Flycatcher for the various species of *Myiagra* and White-throated instead of Black-backed Butcher-bird. The ultimate ideal is full integration of the English names for Australian and Papuan birds (after all, the birds of both regions belong to the same avifauna) and it has still to be achieved.

An introduction summarizes the characteristics and relationships of New Guinean birds, the habitats and altitudinal zones in which they live and geographical divisions within the avifauna and concludes with an essay on the use of English names for New Guinean birds. It covers the field well enough and is easy to read. The arrangement and discussion of habitats, altitudinal zonation and relationships between Australian and New

Guinean avifaunas follow the deeper treatments of these subjects that I, together with W. B. Hitchcock and J. H. Calaby, have given on New Guinean birds in *Encyclopaedia of Papua and New Guinea* (1972, Melbourne Univ. Press), in a symposium on the natural and cultural history of Torres Strait (1972, Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU Publ. BG3) and elsewhere. If they were good enough to adopt, one might have thought they were good enough to quote (if only for the benefit of future students) in the bibliography, which includes a number of references of much lesser relevance (including my own on the birds of Lake Kutubub).

These shortcomings, however, hardly diminish the central value of the book as an introduction to the New Guinean avifauna. How much the Australian and New Guinean avifaunas are part of each other is still not well understood in this country. They are of common origin and their differences result in the main from the diversification of the one in dry sclerophyllous woodlands and deserts and of the other in tropical and montane rainforests. Those who want to acquaint themselves with our whole regional bird fauna need Peckover and Filewood's book to introduce them to its New Guinean side.

Richard Schodde

**Eagles of the World** by Leslie Brown, 1976. Newton Abbot: David and Charles (per ANZ Book Co.). Pp. 224, numerous b. & w. plls, figs and tables. 240 x 170 mm. \$A13.75.

This is one of three books on birds of prey by Leslie Brown published in 1976, the others being *British Birds of Prey* (London: Collins) and *Birds of Prey, their Biology and Ecology* (London: Hamlyn).

*Eagles of the World* is divided into six sections, which deal with the species of eagles, their physical attributes, behaviour, breeding biology, development and ecology of the young and their conservation. The author presents a thorough documentation of scientific material available on this group of raptors, although their taxonomy and distribution are treated rather lightly. Appendices show the gaps in our knowledge of each species, data on breeding for the better-known species and the status of threatened species. He makes a plea to zoo keepers and falconers for information on such aspects as daily intake of food, wing-loading, moult and changes in plumage. Key references are listed for each chapter. It is a pity that, as usual for reasons of space, a fully comprehensive bibliography was not included.

The material presented has an African bias but this is principally because the author and others such as Valerie Gargett, Peter Steyn and Chris Smeenk have worked tirelessly on the birds of prey of that continent. Five of the fifty-nine species dealt with are found in the Australasian region: White-breasted Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*, Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax*, Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides*, New Guinea Harpy Eagle *Harpyopsis novaeguineae* and Gurney's Eagle *Aquila gurneyi*. Very little is known of the biology of the last two species.

Of the unresolved aspects of the life of the larger better-known species, none seems more intriguing than the biological significance of sibling aggression and submission ('Cain and Abel battle'). In the Lesser Spotted, Verreaux's and Crowned Eagles, two eggs are laid and, if both hatch, the younger chick (Abel) invariably does not survive. This happens apparently regardless of food supply. In others, such as the Golden Eagle, broods of two are not uncommon although sibling aggression has been observed. Again, the evidence suggests that

final brood size is not related to food supply. The Wedge-tailed Eagle would appear to present a slightly different picture: the older chick (Cain) has been known to kill the younger but the final brood size does appear to be related to food supply.

This authoritative book is recommended to anyone interested in raptors. The text is most readable and the black-and-white plates and other illustrations are generally good.

M. G. Brooker

**Avian Physiology** edited by Paul D. Sturkie, 1976, 3rd ed. New York: Springer-Verlag. Pp xiii + 400, many figs and tables, 275 x 190 mm. \$A23.50.

When this book first appeared in 1953 it was unique. Now in its third edition, there are still very few books on avian physiology in English; indeed probably the only other major works available are Marshall's *Biology and Comparative Physiology of Birds* (1960), Farner and King's five volumes of *Avian Biology* published between 1972 and 1975 and Bell and Freeman's three volumes on the *Physiology and Biochemistry of the Domestic Fowl* in 1971.

This single volume is from the Springer-Verlag Advanced Text in Life Sciences Series. It assumes some previous knowledge of anatomy and physiology, but its twenty-one chapters, written by twelve specialists, contain a very readable and balanced summary of general avian physiology.

Each chapter starts with a summary and ends with a most comprehensive list of references; in all some 2,550 references are cited. The double columns and larger format are improvements on earlier editions. New chapters on lipid and protein metabolism have been included, emphasizing some of the differences between the metabolic pathways and products of birds and mammals. Substantial re-arrangements and revisions have occurred in most sections.

Chapters follow the usual order beginning with the nervous system and sense organs. The next three chapters deal with blood and the cardiovascular system including sections on haemoglobin, the formed elements, coagulation, the anatomy of the heart, its circulation and haemodynamics. Respiration, regulation of body temperature and energy metabolism follow. The anatomy and various functions of the alimentary canal including feeding, drinking, passage of ingesta and motility are the main subjects of another chapter followed by secretion of gastric and pancreatic juices, digestion, liver and bile, and absorption. The three chapters on metabolism (carbohydrate, protein and lipid) are welcome additions to this edition. Excretion is dealt with in the sections on kidneys, extra-renal salt excretion and urine. The remainder of the book is concerned with hormones and effector organs, including the hypophysis, reproduction in the male and female, egg production, fertilization and early embryonic development, thyroid, parathyroids, ultimobranchial body, pineal, adrenals and pancreas.

It is not surprising that many of the data come from work on the chicken *Gallus domesticus*, duck *Anas* spp and pigeon *Columba livia*; these are commonly available laboratory species and are also of economic importance. Two criticisms ought to be made. First, the Index is incomplete and a number of subjects are discussed often in some detail without appearing in it, even though they have been listed in the chapter summary. Second, there are many typographic errors.

The book is recommended to all interested in avian physiology. Though it probably will not be bought by many ornithologists despite its reasonable price, it ought

to be in all libraries where there is an interest in comparative biochemistry, physiology, zoology, ecology or ornithology. As Sir Landsborough Thomson has said, the ornithologist 'cannot understand behaviour without some knowledge of physiology and psychology'. We do not yet have in Australia either an Ornithological Institute with adequate funds or a tertiary course in ornithology. For both, this text would be the standard reference in physiology. The often limited baseline data, the many 'grey areas' and the numerous questions raised in most chapters could then be re-examined with Australasian birds, so providing research projects until the 'crows (and ravens) fly backwards to keep the dust out of their eyes'.

Xenia Dennett

**Bird Hazards to Aircraft** by Hans Blokpoel, 1976. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co. in association with the Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada and the Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada. Pp xiv + 236, many text figs, b. & w. pl and tables. 228 x 150 mm. \$C9.50 (hardback); \$C5.95 (paperback).

When an aircraft strikes one or more birds the incident is usually fatal for the bird and rarely serious for the aircraft and its occupants. There have, however, been a few crashes and near-crashes of aircraft which were at least partly due to vital parts of the aircraft being damaged by striking birds. From 1962 to 1976 the Associated Committee on Bird Hazards to Aircraft of the National Research Council of Canada has acted as an international co-ordinating body for the study of problems related to bird hazards to aircraft. It was at the request and under the auspices of the Committee that this book was written by one of its members.

Chapter 1, 'Birds and Bird Migration', is a good introduction to birds and their behaviour with respect to aircraft. Chapter 2, 'Bird Strike Statistics', contains a wide variety of statistics on bird strikes and the damage they have caused to aircraft. Since World War II there have been reported at least twelve crashes of civil aircraft with almost a hundred lives lost and sixty-five crashes of military aircraft with at least thirty-five lives lost, due to bird strikes. Chapter 3, 'Bird-proofing of Aircraft and Engines', concludes that, thanks to improved standards of airworthiness, the chances of disaster resulting from the impact of a bird strike on a modern fully certified aircraft seem to be extremely small. But, as has happened in Australia, damage by bird strike can be a minor contributing factor in crashes mainly due to several human errors on the ground and in the air. To design a completely bird-proof aircraft that can also fly is at present impossible. Chapter 4, 'The Search for On-board Equipment to Disperse Birds', concludes that there appears to be no effective airborne device to disperse birds from the path of an aircraft. Chapter 5, 'Prevention of Bird Strikes at Airports', evaluates various methods that have been used to try to remove birds, by killing, scaring and management of habitat. In general, different methods are needed for different airports and for different categories of birds. It was found to be difficult to demonstrate that the costs of controlling birds are justified by commensurate reduction of the hazards of bird strikes. Chapter 6, 'Prevention of Bird Strikes Away from Airports', reports that considerable progress has been made in improving the design of bird radars for recording bird densities, which are converted to the risk of bird strikes for notification to air-traffic controllers and pilots. Such radars are already in military use but have not yet been adopted by civil aviation authorities. Chapter 7, 'Organisations Working on the

Bird Strike Hazard', outlines how committees should be formed at national and international levels to deal with the various aspects of the problems associated with bird strikes.

It is sad that the committee, which produced this book, published numerous papers and notes, sponsored several research programmes and organized two world conferences on the hazards of bird strikes, was disbanded at the end of 1976 by the Canadian Government.

G. F. van Tets

**Birds of the Northern Territory** by G. M. Storr, 1977. Spec. Publs West. Aust. Mus. No. 7. Pp 130. 185 x 239 mm. \$3.50 + \$0.60 postage and packing. (Available from WA Museum, Francis Street, Perth, WA.)

One of the defects of ornithology in the Northern Territory is the absence of a journal for publishing local records. In this situation both this new publication by Dr Storr and its predecessor (*List of Northern Territory Birds*, 1976, Spec. Publs West. Aust. Mus. 4) assume unusual importance as points of reference. The new report improves on the previous one in several ways; it has a better layout with the species grouped into families instead of in a continuous list and many of the earlier inaccuracies, specially in the status of the Charadriiformes, have been corrected. There is a one-page introduction, an adequate index of species and a gazetteer of place-names giving map co-ordinates and, for most, brief descriptive notes. Treatment of species follows the format of the 1966 List with brief comments on range, status and sometimes taxonomy. Unfortunately, it remains unsatisfactory in several ways.

Although published records up to 30 June 1976 are included, there seems to have been little effort to contact ornithologists who live or have lived in the Territory; of the ten people whose personal notes are acknowledged in the introduction, only one is resident. More local knowledge could have avoided inaccuracies or added detail. For example, the Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* is square-bracketed although there are adequate if unpublished records. There are some curious statements that suggest a shortage of relevant field experience. It is hard to believe that anyone with field experience of the warblers *Gerygone chloronota* and *G. olivacea* could mistake them as suggested in the entry for the latter species. Similarly the entries for the Square-tailed and Black-breasted Kites are revealing: most records of the Square-tailed are attributed to the Black Kite and most of the northern records of the Black-breasted, where the species is not uncommon, are referred to the Square-tailed. The author clearly has little faith in sight-records but local ornithologists surely do not find these birds so confusing.

The terms of relative abundance lack accurate definitions and are used laxly. If the author has a clear idea in his mind of the difference between 'scarce' and 'uncommon', he fails to convey it to the reader. Some of the summaries are so concise as to be misleading; it is inaccurate to say that the Knot is a 'moderately common visitor (*all months*)' (my italics) though it does occur in all months and is moderately common in some of them.

I doubt if the publication will give much pleasure to most taxonomists. The lack of a bibliography is annoying anyway but specially frustrating because there is some unconventional taxonomy and nomenclature in the text, offered completely without explanation. There is a bibliography in the 1966 List for all except the most recent references but the inclusion of controversial subject-matter without discussion or references strikes

me as a scientific discourtesy. Northern Territory ornithologists specially are to a large extent remote from current research and could benefit from relevant taxonomic summaries. An inquiring reader without a finger on the taxonomic pulse of the moment might wonder, for example, why *Pachycephala melanura* is merged with *P. caledonica* or why *Gerygone mungi* has been created and from what. Similar treatments occur elsewhere and all lack any discussion. Although there are taxonomic references for some species, there are inexplicable omissions. Under Richard's Pipit we are given *Anthus novaeseelandiae australis* at its face value in spite of the suggestion in Schodde's *Interim List* that the form in the northern part of the Territory may be specifically distinct. At a time when we are trying to standardize the English names of Australian birds, Storr proffers some unorthodox contributions such as 'Black-tailed Bee-eater' and unearths 'Flyeater' for *Gerygone* although it will probably create more confusion than it dispels. This practice seems an exercise in pointless individualism.

It would be unjust to deny the uses of this paper as a handy compendium and a yardstick in local ornithology but this is largely because nothing better exists. One may hope that it will inspire local workers in the Northern Territory to produce their own authoritative checklist in the near future.

H. A. F. Thompson

**A Field Guide to the Birds of West Africa** by W. Serle, G. J. Morel and W. Hartwig, 1977. London: Collins. Pp 351, col. pl 28, b. & w. pl 20. 200 x 130 mm. \$A17.10.

This field guide covers an area bounded by the Sahara in the north and the Congo River in the south, and includes Chad and the Central African Republic in the east.

For each of the 515 species that are treated fully and illustrated (335 in colour), there are paragraphs on Identification, Voice, and Distribution and Habitat. A paragraph on Nesting is included where appropriate but many of the species are palaearctic migrants, which only winter in Africa. A further 211 'allied species' are dealt with more briefly and not illustrated. The remaining 371 uncommon or locally distributed species are included with brief status notes in a checklist that covers all the 1,097 species recorded from the area.

The text is concise yet descriptive and follows the layout and pattern first established by R. T. Peterson, except that foreign vernacular names (Spanish, French and German) are not given in the main text but instead are listed with scientific names at the end. There are also indexes of scientific and English names. Space is saved by dispensing with distribution maps for each species but end maps show the regional topography and countries named in the text.

Hartwig's illustrations are generally of a high standard with good colour reproduction. However, I am puzzled as to why the illustration of the White-crowned Cliff-chat (Plate 39) portrays the race where the male lacks the white crown; perhaps a small inset showing both races would be more appropriate.

The nomenclature mainly follows White's *Revised Checklist of African Birds* (1961-1965) but West African ornithologists perplexed by the many changes and more familiar with the nomenclature of Bannerman's *Birds of West and Equatorial Africa* (1953) will be relieved to find that Bannerman's scientific name or names, where they differ from White's, are given in brackets.

The authors of this field guide, which is little larger

than that of Slater's Field Guide on Australian passerines, are to be complimented on compressing a great deal of detail into such a small volume. I would recommend this book to anyone with ornithological interests who is likely to visit West Africa and I have wistful regrets that such a useful little book was not available when I first went to Nigeria twenty years ago.

V. W. Smith

**Wild Australia: a view of birds and men** by Douglas Dorward, 1977. Sydney: Collins. Pp 128, b. & w. pll 51, col. pll 12, b. & w. drawings 17. 196 x 260 mm. \$A11.95. Our responses to birds are as varied as ourselves. Here we have the responses of Douglas Dorward, the professional ornithologist, of John Olsen the artist and of the photographers whose work complements the words of the ornithologist and the paintings and sketches of the artist. The book is based on an ABC television

series, which itself was another response to the birds and stimulated other responses in those who watched it.

The narrative links the birds, the landscape, early explorers and settlers, the aboriginal people and the active curiosity of modern scientific research in a continuing story of the relations of birds and human beings in wild Australia: Bass Strait, Arnhem Land, The Coorong, Townsville Common, the Nullarbor Plain and Werribee Gorge.

The author's deep awareness of the beauty of the birds is matched with a recognition of the importance of understanding their lives and their needs if birds and people are to live together in a stable relation in a world dominated by man.

Every Australian who loves and studies birds will find a personal pleasure in this book.

Rosemary Balmford

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