

REVIEWS

Edited by G. W. JOHNSTONE

BOOKS

Philippine Birds by John E. duPont, 1971. Delaware Museum of Natural History, Monograph Series No. 2. Pp x + 480, col. pll 85 (by George Sandström and the late John R. Peirce). 200 x 275 mm. \$US40.00.

The Philippine archipelago is a semi-isolated sub-region, bounded on one side by the avifaunas of Malaysia and Borneo and on the other by the Pacific. Until widespread logging destroyed the tropical rainforest it was, and still is in certain outlying areas, a fascinating area for study but one that had not been covered by any standard ornithological work with the exception of Delacour and Mayr's popular guide *Birds of the Philippines* (1946). Thus I would normally welcome a recent book on the Philippines, particularly one by the founder of the Delaware Museum of Natural History. Alas, this is not so.

The author claims to provide a ready identification guide to all the known Philippine birds. This he clearly fails to do because it is difficult, almost impossible, to use it in the field. DuPont is obsessed with listing all subspecies, based on museum specimens, regardless of whether they can be separated in the field. Indeed, the author makes no attempt to give the fieldmarks that distinguish similar species. Total lengths are omitted, as are calls (so useful in identifying babblers). Habitat is not described nor any indication of status: the Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna zimmermani* is said to have occurred once in the Philippines but this must have been decades ago because it is doubtful if any living ornithologist has seen it. One subspecies of the Amethyst Brown Fruit-Dove is described but it is then stated to be extinct.

The illustrations by the late John Peirce are good but all too few; the majority, by George Sandström, are less useful. He seems to lack field experience; his birds adopt unnatural poses and many appear pugnacious. Many are too small and there are frequent inaccuracies. For example, the Red-throated Pipit is shown with a red throat, which it lacks while wintering in the Philippines, the Black-faced (Masked) Bunting has lost its black face, both godwits are shown with up-turned bills (that of the Black-tailed should be straight) and the Roseate Tern is given a bill with a yellow instead of a red base. However, perhaps the greatest fault is that there is no indication which of the many subspecies is shown.

Readers trying to align this with other books about Asian birds will be disappointed. The names have remained largely unchanged from Delacour and Mayr's book twenty-five years ago and thus they will find the Gray Frog Hawk (Chinese Goshawk), Brown-winged Tern (Bridled Tern), Short-winged Cuckoo (Indian Cuckoo), Oriental Screech Owl (Collared Scops Owl), Mosque Swallow (Red-rumped Swallow) and Least Stint (Long-toed Stint). There is even a bird, *Serinus estherae*, known only from Mindanao, that has been named the Malaysian Finch! Nor may the index help very much: in the review copy pages 455–470 were missing and pages 439–454 duplicated. There are many other faults, and in addition the book is large, heavy (1.8 kg) and very expensive. I do not recommend it.

David G. Robertson

South Pacific Birds by John E. duPont, 1976. Delaware Museum of Natural History, Monograph Series No. 3. Pp xii + 218, col. pll 31 (by George Sandström), 2 endpaper maps. 160 x 235 mm. \$US24.95.

The book covers from approximately 175°E to 130°W and 6° S to 28°S, an area about 6,100 kilometres long and 2,500 kilometres wide, and includes the Fiji, Tongan, Samoan, Cook, Society, Tuamotu, Marquesas, Austral, Pitcairn and Henderson Groups (shown on the two endpapers). The only previous book for this area was Mayr's *Birds of the Southwest Pacific* (1945). Long since out of print, it extended eastward only to the Samoan-Tongan Groups. Thus this book covers new ground, ground that contains many unique features: a high degree of endemism, numerous flightless birds and many island subspecies.

This book follows a format similar to that of duPont's *Philippine Birds* (1971): each species and subspecies is briefly described, there are some details of range (but only in the area covered), some measurements (but not of length of body) and a few notes on status, habitat, behaviour and call (but not all for every species). Of the 183 known species, 181 are illustrated as well as forty-five subspecies. There is an average of seven birds per plate and one plate per five to six pages. Most of the information comes from the collections of the Whitney South Seas Expeditions (1921–39) but material is also drawn from other museums in the USA and UK. Taxonomy, nomenclature and sequence of species are according to Peters, with modifications from recent literature. There is also a glossary of place names and a very extensive bibliography, which contains all relevant references to the avifauna of the South Pacific.

Although the efforts of the author, and specially the illustrator, are a considerable improvement on their disappointing *Philippine Birds*, the book still falls short of what we have come to expect in new books. It is claimed to provide a ready guide to the identification of all the known birds of the South Pacific as well as being an important reference work for the research ornithologist. Therein lies the problem; for, the attempt to produce both a field guide and a checklist is not very successful: duPont is again more concerned with separating subspecies than species. In *Birds of the Southwest Pacific* Mayr rejected this concept and said: 'The emphasis has been placed on the species name, since the subspecies is primarily of interest to the specialist only.' Would that duPont had heeded his advice! For some species up to twelve subspecies are described, most of which are not separable in the field. There are five pictures of subspecies of the Red-breasted Musk Lorikeet, all of which are instantly recognizable as being of the same species.

The author's preoccupation with taxonomy has caused him to overlook some essential requirements of a field guide. Chief among these are the field marks for segregating similar species; the descriptions of the species must be read slowly and compared, phrase by phrase, to work out the differences because the illustrations may be of little help (e.g. the noddies, the fruit-doves, the Samoan and Layard's White-eyes). The proportions of

different birds in one plate are wrong (e.g. the Gray Duck and the Northern Pintail on Plate 7) and because the lengths of bodies are omitted it is impossible to check the accuracy of the plates. This latter deficiency leads to another problem: for example, depending on whether you mentally equate the Cardinal Honeyeater on Plate 29 with the Mistletoebird or the Red-headed Honeyeater (both of which it resembles), then the Giant Forest Honeyeater on the same plate becomes the size of either a White-eared Honeyeater or a Blue-faced Honeyeater; on Plate 21 there is no way of telling whether the kingfishers shown are tiny, like the tropical forest kingfishers, or large, like the White-breasted Kingfisher.

Descriptions of calls are few and would have been valuable, specially for the doves and pigeons, and flycatchers. There are a few pictures of birds in flight but none for some groups, such as the albatrosses, raptors and shorebirds, which need them. Comments on status are vague: 'breeds on Ducie Island' (when?), 'visits Tahiti' (when and how often? The Slender-billed = Short-tailed Shearwater 'visits' Samoa but there is only one record).

The English names are much more up to date than in *Philippine Birds* but there are still some peculiarities in the seabirds; *Calidris ruficollis* is called the Little Stint and I am surprised that the name Broadbill is retained for the *Myiagra* flycatchers when it is usually applied to the Eurylaimidae. The few comments on status are welcome though it appears that duPont is an incurable optimist; there are plates or descriptions of the (very) Mysterious Starling, known only from one specimen somewhere in the Central or South Pacific; the Samoan Wood-Rail and the Barred Wood-Rail, both last seen in the 1870s; the Tahitian Sandpiper (1773); and the Tahitian Rail (*circa* 1773), which may never have existed at all!

Nevertheless, this is the only work available for this area and likely to remain so. The pictures are generally good (although Sandström still has trouble with white birds, which come out grey). The book is smaller and lighter and can, with some care, be used in the field. These points may justify paying twice as much as for other field guides.

David G. Robertson

A Checklist of the Birds of the World by Edward S. Gruson with the assistance of Richard A. Forster, 1976. London: Collins. Pp xii + 212. 245 x 160 mm. \$A9.55 (£3.95).

Suddenly, after a gap of over half a century, a number of lists of the birds of the world have appeared. This one, based on the epic *Check-list of the Birds of the World* begun by the late J. L. Peters and still incomplete, pretends to provide no more than a reference for 'tickers' and 'listers'.

It is simply a list of species arranged in columns by their scientific and English names, against which are placed symbols indicating distribution and the authority for each species in the current literature. The authorities followed are usually regional compilations such as Rand and Gilliard's *Handbook of New Guinea Birds*. Distribution is indicated very broadly, the symbols referring to the main zoogeographical regions and subregions generally recognized today. Thus Australasian birds are indicated as belonging to subregions of the Australasian region, such as 'J' for New Guinea, off-shore islands and, inexplicably, only part of the Bismarck Archipelago, and 'T' for species, including introductions, occurring in Australia, New Zealand and islands in between.

Species are arranged alphabetically within genera and

the genera and families are arranged after the sequence of Peters's Checklist. Presentation is clean and open, easy to read and refer to.

It is only reasonable to judge the list by its stated objectives and therefore not as a taxonomic document. To achieve its objectives, the list ought to be complete and it must be accurate in the distribution given for each species within the broad geographical limits set. I assessed primarily the Australasian species in the list, for three reasons: limitations in personal competence; relevance to Australasian ornithologists; and the assumption that if compilers from the northern hemisphere, as Gruson and Forster are, could provide an exhaustively correct account of Australasian species, they could be relied upon to do as well or better with birds or faunas nearer their homeland.

Regrettably, the Australasian sections of the list have too many omissions, errors and inconsistencies to inspire faith in the list as a sound reference to the birds of the world. On a quick count, I found at least ten Australo-Papuan species entirely missing. Among them were the Papuan Scops Owl *Otus beccarii* of Biak Island, the Black Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina melaleuca*, the magnificent *Pitta superba* from the Admiralty Islands, the Atherton Scrub wren *Sericornis keri*, the sunbird *Nectarinia sericea* from Papua and the Forest Raven *Corvus tasmanicus*. Note that *Corvus mellori* is included, leaving no excuse but carelessness for the omission of *tasmanicus*.

Major errors in distribution are even more serious, numbering over sixty. Australians will be surprised to find that there are four species of *Collocalia* in their country, including the New Guinean endemic, *C. hirundinacea*, which is not listed for that subregion. Moreover, *Philemon buceroides* (including *novaeguineae* and *yorki*) is omitted from Australia but, perhaps in its place, the New Britain endemic *P. cockerelli* is added. Judging from the footnote, this appears to have resulted from confusion with *Trichodere cockerelli* on Cape York Peninsula.

Among other species omitted from Australia are *Ardeotis australis*, *Gelochelidon nilotica*, *Eudynamis scolopacea*, *Tyto capensis* (= *T. longimembris*), *Ceyx pusillus* (which is listed under the English name 'African Mangrove Kingfisher' and given a range in the islands of the south-western Pacific), *Pitta erythrogaster*, *Acrocephalus* spp., *Sericornis beccarii* (even though *minimus* is given as a synonym in a footnote) and *Rhipidura rufiventris*. Australia has instead been blessed with the following, among others: *Turnix powelli*, *Charadrius collaris*, *Ptilinopus mercierii*, *Geoffroyus heteroclitus*, *Saxicola caprata*, *Petroica archboldi*, *Myzomela malaitae* (mis-spelt *malaite*), *Myzomela nigrita* and *Dicrurus megarhynchus*. Many of these (e.g. *Geoffroyus heteroclitus*, *Petroica archboldi*, *Myzomela nigrita* and *Dicrurus megarhynchus*) are endemic to New Guinea or to adjacent archipelagos from which, incidentally, they have been omitted.

With regard to English common names, to quote Gruson, a pleasant disorder reigns. Greybird and cuckoo-shrike are used for the species of *Coracina* with equal abandon. The only real objections that can be raised are to those given to primarily Australian groups of birds that are not part of traditional Australian usage. A few unnecessary novelties are used, such as 'wren-warbler' for the species of *Malurus* and 'robin-flycatcher' for the species of *Petroica*, though just 'robin' is enough for *Eopsaltria*. Perhaps the most amusingly disconcerting names of all are those used for the friar-birds, rounding off the taxonomic and distributional confusion among them. *Philemon buceroides* is the Noisy Friarbird, *P. corniculatus* is the Bald Friarbird,

P. eichhorni of New Ireland is the Helmeted Friarbird (its head is feathered and casque vestigial), *P. novae-guineae* is the Leatherhead and both *P. moluccensis* and *P. fuscicapillus* are the Moluccan Friarbird.

Sources of authority on the literature have not been used or quoted consistently. In the introduction, it is said that Mayr and Serventy's list of Australian bird species in the *Emu* (1944) and the 'CSIRO publication' (= *CSIRO Index of Australian Bird Names*, 1969) were used for Australian species, but in the bibliography of source codes it is revealed that Slater's *A Field Guide to Australian Birds* (1970) and the 1926 RAOU Checklist of the Birds of Australia have served instead for non-passerines and passerines respectively.

Spelling errors are few but they do occur, for example 'Stressemann' on p. x, *Stringops* for *Strigops* and *Eopsaltria crissogularis* for *E. griseogularis*, the last being singularly distasteful.

Generally, the non-passerines fare better than the passerines, probably because they are better known overseas. But here just faring better is still not good enough.

Richard Schodde

The Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds by William T. Cooper and Joseph M. Forshaw, 1977. Sydney: Collins. Pp 304, col. pll 60, b. & w. ills 37, maps 3 + distribution maps. 292 x 415 mm. Cased, 4.3 kg. \$A100.00.

Many readers of this review will already be familiar with *Parrots of the World* (1973), also by Forshaw and Cooper. In much the same style as that book, *The Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds* is a large volume containing spectacular paintings and carefully researched accounts for each species in these two families. This monograph represents a less formidable undertaking than that on parrots; for, it deals with fewer species, forty-three birds-of-paradise and eighteen bowerbirds as compared with 332 parrots, and encompasses a smaller area, Australia, New Guinea and nearby islands rather than most of the world. Being Australian ornithologists, both authors know many of these birds in the field and their observations, specially Cooper's, are incorporated in the text. In writing the book, Forshaw, the principal author, has also drawn heavily on other sources, thereby including a thorough survey of the literature. Cooper's experience with these birds is also reflected in his paintings, which maintain the high standards set by his plates in *Parrots of the World*.

The book is in two sections: first, a short introduction, which provides background information on the two families, and second, the accounts of species. The introduction, in keeping with the rest of the book, avoids a detailed and technical approach. Despite the abbreviated presentation, the authors outline clearly some of the newer ideas on the evolution and ecology of the two families; the sections on breeding systems and conservation are particularly good. Following the introduction, each species of bird is separately discussed under the headings Description, Distribution (with accompanying map), Subspecies, General Notes, Calls, Displays and Nesting, and Eggs.

The portraits of species, all done by Cooper, are outstanding. In fact, most people will buy the book for its plates alone. Birds-of-paradise with their bizarre plumages of wires, flags, gorgets, capes, skirts, shields and crests (each ornament carried in a particular way depending upon the bird's circumstance and mood) combined with peculiar feather textures, pigmentation, glosses and iridescences, provide a most difficult challenge to any artist. Cooper has met this challenge with

great success. It may be argued that in some instances colour reproduction is not accurate. For instance, in life the male King Bird-of-Paradise is dark crimson rather than scarlet as in the plate; both sexes of the Black-billed Sicklebill are bright ochre above, particularly in the tail, and the blue behind the eye ought to be dull maroon; and there are other examples. However, these differences from nature can be overlooked, considering the problems in achieving the quality seen in these plates. Cooper made several trips to Papua New Guinea to study the behaviour and habitats of the birds that he painted. This effort has resulted in many beautiful and accurate representations of the birds in their natural settings, such as Lawes Parotia opening a nutmeg capsule, the King of Saxony Bird-of-Paradise singing and the Trumpetbirds feeding on an aroid fruit. However, most species are portrayed sitting quietly on their perches, a poor characterization of such active and innovative birds. Few birds are shown searching for insects, an activity that takes up much of their time and is fascinating to watch, nor are there illustrations of parents at the nest or with young. Many readers will be disappointed that not a single plate depicts a bird-of-paradise or bowerbird in courtship display. Cooper compensates for these omissions by including a number of black-and-white sketches showing various examples of behaviour for selected species. The bowers of the Ptilonorhynchidae receive special attention in this way.

Descriptions of the species and subspecies following each plate give detailed accounts of plumage and soft parts for both sexes and these agree with the plates. The same cannot always be said when one compares the maps with the described distributions and general notes. For example, the map for the Magnificent Riflebird shows that this species is absent from the Adelbert Mountains and part of southern Papua New Guinea; the text, however, refers to the bird occurring in both of these places. The same error is made for the White-eared and Spotted Catbirds in southern Papua New Guinea. In preparing the maps the authors have shown only areas where the species are definitely known to exist and have not extended the illustrated ranges into potentially suitable but unexplored territory. Thus the maps for widely distributed species such as the King, Magnificent and Superb Birds-of-Paradise represent their distributions as fragmented populations, when in fact these populations are almost certainly contiguous.

The systematics of birds-of-paradise and bowerbirds has always generated controversy and in recent years several studies have attempted to clarify relationships within and between these two extraordinary groups. Cooper and Forshaw use the names and follow the systematic arrangement of Gilliard (1969, *Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds*). One additional species, the Eastern Parotia, has been resurrected and a few recently described subspecies added. Two genera are combined (*Prionodura* in *Sericulus*) but otherwise the authors have been conservative in accepting taxonomic revisions. Still, readers of the book ought to have been alerted to likely changes of names, such as the inclusion of *Phonygammus* in *Manucodia* and *Drepanornis* in *Epimachus*, as recommended by Diamond (1972, *Avifauna of the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea*) and Schodde (1976, *Proc. Int. orn. Congr.*: 137-149).

The literature on birds-of-paradise reveals little about their social systems, feeding behaviour, nesting and many other aspects of their biology. Not so for the bowerbirds, a family well represented in Australia where the natural histories of nearly all species are relatively well known and several, particularly the Satin Bowerbird,

have been the subject of long-term studies. In this book the general notes for species of birds-of-paradise and bowerbirds reflect this contrast in our knowledge of the two families; the accounts of the species of bowerbirds are much more complete. Yet the text, specially the sections on birds-of-paradise, is deficient for another reason. The preface begins: 'This book has been planned as a companion volume to Gilliard's very successful *Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds*.' Most of the field studies done on birds-of-paradise and bowerbirds in New Guinea, where most species occur, are the work of the late Thomas Gilliard; his book on the subject contains not only a detailed account of his research but also includes most previously published information on these birds. Cooper and Forshaw avoid repeating Gilliard by summarizing or omitting much of the fundamental information in his book. To compensate for this loss, the authors incorporate material from recent sources and these are few for New Guinea. They include studies by Diamond on avian communities and systematics, several systematic and ecological papers by Richard Schodde and a remarkable mass of field lists and notes in the New Guinea Bird Society Newsletter. To these references were added miscellaneous communications to the authors and the authors' own observations. Cooper and Forshaw recognize this problem in their acknowledgement to Gilliard at the beginning of the book but just the same their text is overshadowed by Gilliard's and suffers from a dearth of new sources.

The magnificent plates and well-prepared text make *Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds* not only a popular book but also an important reference. Some readers will be disappointed by the incomplete accounts of these poorly known birds; however, several studies now under way in Queensland and Papua New Guinea will provide an option of new material if this book, following the example of *Parrots of the World*, is revised in a second edition.

Thane K. Pratt

Granivorous Birds in Ecosystems edited by J. Pinowski and S. C. Kendeigh, 1977. International Biological Programme 12. Cambridge, &c.: Cambridge Univ. Press. Pp xxii + 431, many b. & w. figs. 158 x 234 mm. \$A46.25 (£19.50).

This book attempts to summarize all that is known about the biology of those bird species that eat grain crops grown by man, with a view to assessing the impact of birds on man's cereal production. Given the constraints of time and money that are part of any such endeavour, the book is remarkably successful and presents an extremely useful set of references for anyone practising management on bird populations.

The nine chapters dealing with different aspects of the biology of granivorous birds, specially the sparrows and Red-winged Blackbirds, are written by combinations of authors who have worked together during the International Biological Programme. The resulting book is better integrated and shows less evidence of overlap than many such volumes. Where gaps in knowledge occur they are recognized and the conclusions qualified accordingly. At the same time attempts at synthesis are not shunned and the available information is made to work hard to provide a coherent summary of what is known, a background for future research and some well-informed judgements of desirable managerial practices.

The introductory chapters make it particularly evident that the problems of co-ordinating money, people and projects are cosmopolitan and affect all disciplines. It

is clear that gaps in knowledge could so easily and cheaply have been filled had the right facilities and finance been made available at the right time. The book seems to me a remarkable achievement in the face of the bungles of a technological society and the selfishness of man. One of the most interesting chapters, and perhaps the one of most interest to Australians, is that by Dyer and Ward, on management of pests. Their attitude is summarized on page 269: 'Yet it is almost a rule in many countries that an authority . . . plunges into lethal control without adequate consideration of ways of tackling the problem . . . lethal control is often adopted as the obvious strategy; discussion begins only with the choice of tactics: shooting, trapping, poisoning and other lethal methods. The expectation is that with only a modest effort, the birds will soon be so reduced in number they will no longer pose a problem. But such programs frequently escalate as the birds prove more intractable than expected. As more and more birds are accounted for, but damage levels remain unchanged, the arsenal becomes larger, more widely deployed and more sophisticated. If research is undertaken at all at this stage, the emphasis is on ways of making the population-reduction strategy work. Questioning the validity of the strategy itself is frowned upon.' The chapter goes on to discuss a logical succession of strategies that can be followed before such expensive and usually ineffective practices are tried.

Other chapters, although more mathematical, provide interesting analyses and syntheses of the energy relations between the birds and their food supply and the relations between the biomass productivity of birds and that of the environment as a whole. The latter analyses emphasize that birds process a tiny part of the total environmental productivity but, at certain times and places, can exert significant 'predation' on human cereal crops.

This is perhaps not a book to buy so much as one whose availability ought to be ensured. Encourage your library to get it and do not forget to read it when next you are confronted with a problem of birds as pests. It will remain an essential reference for economic ornithologists for years to come.

S. J. J. F. Davies

Recollections of a Birdwatcher by Hugh R. Officer, 1978. Melbourne: The Hawthorn Press. Pp ii + 173, maps 7. 220 x 145 mm. \$A13.50.

In *Walkabouts and Birds* (1970) Brigadier Officer recorded some of his ornithological travels in the remoter parts of Australia. In this second volume the map is unrolled and the search for the Carpentarian Grasswren takes its place among cranes on migration coming down the Khyber Pass, divers in Iceland, flamingos over the Camargue and, less ornithological but none the worse for that, at the end of a year's duty in Tibet, 'The troops were in first class condition . . . I have a photo of the company marching over the crest of the Tang La, fifteen thousand two hundred feet and not a man is out of step. The stage that day was twenty miles and not a man fell out'. Thirty years' service in the Indian Army provided an introduction to birdwatching and much more.

'The Brig' has made his own varied contribution to Australian ornithology and the widening of many people's ornithological horizons may prove to be not the least part of it. Vivid and idiosyncratic, this record of his travels ought to give pleasure to the many who use his field guides and to those fortunate few who have shared his expeditions.

Rosemary Balmford

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