

## REVIEWS

*Edited by J. M. PENHALLURICK*

**Birds of the Gambia** by M.E.J. Gore, 1981. BOU Checklist No 3. London: British Ornithologists' Union. Pp 130, b. & w. pll 8. 250 x 155 mm. £9.00.

This is the third annotated checklist published by the British Ornithologists' Union but the second checklist published recently for The Gambia as it was preceded by **The Birds of The Gambia** (Jensen & Kirkeby 1980). The introduction of twenty pages includes a brief history of Gambian ornithology and sections on geography, vegetation and climate, habitats and bird distribution. There is generalised information on breeding which is analysed by family and a final section on migration and movements.

The systematic list of eighty-five pages provides information on status, distribution and breeding where available on 489 accepted species, though a further twenty, some of which are included in Jensen & Kirkeby (1980), are rejected. Sixteen good half-plate black and white photographs illustrate species that may be seen in the various habitats described, and places referred to in the text may be identified on the three maps at the beginning. A table of mean monthly maximum and minimum temperatures is included. There are ninety-five references listed and indexes of scientific and English names.

V. Smith

**Birds for Beginners. How Birds Live and Behave** by J.D. Macdonald, 1980. Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed. Pp 173, col. pll 57, figs 49, tables 17. 220 x 140 mm. \$12.95.

The author writes in his preface that 'the aim of this book is to satisfy the desire many people have to know more about birds than their names and to explain in simple terms how they live and behave'. Thus the main title is a little misleading in that this is not a book to teach beginners how to watch birds. The subtitle describes the contents succinctly and correctly.

Macdonald selects twelve aspects of the life and behaviour of birds, illustrating them with Australian examples. Topics covered are Territorial Behaviour, Breeding Biology, Population Problems, Post-Breeding Activities, Learning to Fly, Distribution, Habitats and Adaptations, Plumage, Other Important Features, Various Systems, the Senses, and Variation and Evolution. The level of detail on each subject is well suited to the intended audience and avoids both superficiality and excessive detail. Indeed, beginners are far from the only birdwatchers who would profit from reading this book. The list of references, although short, is useful and reasonably comprehensive and would give the interested reader a useful introduction to the literature on a particular topic.

At times I found myself disagreeing with the author, particularly in relation to the origin and distribution of birds. However, such occasions brought home to me how successful the author is in persuading the reader to look at facts in a new light, and to re-examine one's conclusions. Macdonald is always careful to distinguish between facts and interpretations, an area in which ornithological books have not always been successful.

Unfortunately the colour plates showing skins of birds are of very poor quality. I am uncertain whether this is due to problems of reproduction or to the notorious difficulty of photographing skins.

In summary, this is a well written book which achieves the aims set out in the preface. One hopes that potential readers will not be put off by the unattractive plates.

G.S. Clark

**Learning about Australian Birds** by Rosemary Balmford, 1981. Sydney: Collins. Pp 240, col. pll 8, many b. & w. drawings. 140 x 215 mm. \$16.95.

As a fledgeling professional ornithologist I found William Hickey's **A Guide to Bird Watching** an invaluable source of general information on the study of birds. Much the same kind of useful instruction is now provided by Rosemary Balmford for Australians who have the inclination to learn more about birds than the names, but do not know how to set about developing their interest.

The author has achieved success in several professional fields, including law and business. Even if the study of birds is but a diversion in a busy life she could hardly be described as an amateur ornithologist; for in fifteen years she has absorbed and analysed a volume of information about birds which could be the envy of many who study them as a fulltime occupation.

The book consists of thirteen chapters. They are unconnected essays and therefore can be read in any order, or the user can browse to find whatever subject most attracts attention. There are also appendices on Metric Conversion, Institutions and Organisations, and Legislation, with a massive seventeen pages of references for further reading. The book is neatly bound, clearly printed and decorated with a number of very attractive colour photographs, mainly by M.D. Gottsch. The essays begin with 'Where and When to Look for Birds', a dissertation that could easily be skipped for the answer is condensed in the simple statement incorporated in the text - 'anywhere and anytime'. Then there are instructions on various ways of identifying birds, attracting them, and recording behaviour and physical characteristics. Balmford then moves on to the more complex subjects of classification, nomenclature and evolution.

The statement that classification and nomenclature 'are intricately interwoven and both arouse stronger emotions than one might expect' could easily discourage the learner from probing further into this area. But the subject is briefly and clearly stated to an extent adequate to reassure the beginner that the situation is not as baffling as it might seem.

The learner will find less enlightening instruction on the relatively unimportant but often troublesome question of when, if at all, common names should be dignified with an initial capital letter. As a sample of both forms capitals are used in one chapter, intentionally, but not in the others. A doubtfully valid reason for not using them is claimed to be that 'a profusion of capital letters interrupts the flow of the text and distracts the reader'. There is a fairly simple rule of thumb that might solve the problem: when using a name in a singular or particular sense then 'Galah' is preferable, and in a plural or general sense it can be 'galahs'; but like any rule it is not always practicable.

An essay entitled 'Research' occupies a disproportionate section of the text and is possibly more suitable for advanced learners than beginners. It takes the reader from the point of

discovering a problem, on to how to collect and relate data to what is already known on the subject, and finally to the way to prepare the work and its conclusions for publication. Unusually, and thoughtfully, there is also instruction on how to present the gist of the paper in lecture form. Many research workers faced with speaking on their subject, and having little aptitude in the art, could well benefit from studying the advice.

On the subject of writing, whether for a scientific paper or a book, there are comments on two ways of going about it: 'Some set out a careful and detailed plan before beginning the actual writing - - - others point out that in this way you use up your enthusiasm and creativity on the plan and have little zest left for the actual writing'. The author's preference for a more extempore method is clearly evident in her book. There is a risk that such a method might result in a loss of clarity. But the author is obviously skilled in the art of

mustering facts and presenting them in a convincing form. Her object is not to instruct experienced ornithologists, although many could profit from, as well as debate, some statements and conclusions. The book is for the guidance of an increasing number of people of all ages, such as members of groups and nature societies, who find it interesting to peer at birds through binoculars and cameras. It is especially aimed at the many who, regrettably, leave it at that. Having identified and listed the names, few seem to have the urge to record what the birds are doing and to wonder why, or to think of co-ordinating data into some meaningful observation, or to initiate an aspect of research which, however simple, could contribute to the sum of knowledge. The excuse they make is, as I have repeatedly found, 'I'm a bird lover, not an ornithologist'. This book and others like it will help to bridge this imaginary gap.

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### INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON ZOOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE

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I.T.Z.N. 59

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The following Opinion has been published recently by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature in the *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature*, Volume 38, part 2, 30 April, 1981.

1180 (p. 120) *Thamnophilus amazonicus* Schlater, 1858 (Aves): conserved.