# Reviews

**Functions of Territory in Australian Magpie.**—In a paper on 'Ecological Significance of Territory in the Australian Magpie, *Gymnorhina tibicen*' (*Proc. XIIIth Internat. Orn. Congress,* 740-53, 1963), Dr. Robert Carrick outlines the main findings of his research on the functions of territorialism in the species at Gungahlin, near Canberra. The study is based on 650 birds individually colour-banded and 2,500 others banded; 220 territorial groups were studied and three field experiments done on proximate factors in the stimulation and inhibition of breeding.

Carrick has established that territorialism reduces breeding to one-quarter of its potential, successful breeding being virtually confined to permanent groups in which productivity is low. Territorialism creates a high degree of numerical and spatial stability, and buffers the permanent occupants from serious disease mortality—and probably also from predation.—E. F. BOEHM.

**Mortality Rates in Black Duck and Grey Teal.**—As part of a wider study of wild ducks in south-eastern Australia, Dr. H. J. Frith has considered and compared the losses in populations of Black Duck, *Anas superciliosa*, and Grey Teal, *A. gibberifrons*. His paper, 'Movements and Mortality of the Black Duck and Grey Teal in South-eastern Australia' (*C.S.I.R.O. Wildl. Res.* 8: 119-31, 1963), presents evidence that the more sedentary Black Duck has a relatively lower mortality rate and a higher expectation of life than the extremely nomadic Grey Teal.

Frith suggests that harvesting of Black Duck could be at a more constant but lower rate than the Grey Teal, which is subject to great fluctuations of the population.—E. F. BOEHM.

**Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land.** 4. Zoology, ed. R. L. Specht. Melbourne Univ. Press, 1964. £6/6/-.

**Birds of the Arnhem Land Expedition.** H. G. Deignan, pp. 345-426.

As the author points out, due to the efforts of earlier collectors, no startling ornithological novelties should have been expected of this expedition; there weren't, unless the demonstration that the Melville Island Friar-bird is widely distributed on the mainland could be so classified. Nevertheless Deignan is to be congratulated on a carefully prepared list of the discoveries.

There is some information on moult and breeding season of many species, but it is very disappointing to find the general ecology of the region almost completely ignored when such information could have assisted the interpretation of these data and advanced significantly the efforts of earlier collectors. There is little doubt that some earlier taxonomists' work requires review but it is depressing to note the continual sniping at these authors in this paper. It is hard to see what is achieved in a scientific paper by levelling accusations such as "pot shot naming of Territorian races" and "but, in his usual fashion, has failed" at Mathews.

There are one or two surprising statements that could have been made clearer by amplification. One refers to the Cattle Egret and points out that much of the territory, like that between Oenpelli and Darwin, is "thoroughly unsuited to the requirements of the species." In fact the territory between Oenpelli and Darwin is very similar ecologically to that at Oenpelli and by 1955 at least these intervening river plains supported many more Cattle Egrets than the East Alligator at Oenpelli. This reviewer is also surprised at the estimate of Magpie Goose numbers at Oenpelli as "many tens, if not hundreds of thousands of individuals". In 1955 and succeeding years the whole population between Darwin and Oenpelli was about 350,000 and of these probably no more than 7,000 spent the dry on the East Alligator. If the author is taken literally it suggests that drastic changes in goose numbers or movements have occurred recently or that 1948 was very unusual climatically.

191 forms of Northern Territory birds were collected and sight records "certainly identifiable to species" reported for 31 others. One of these sight

records refers to *Numenius arquata* and it is suggested that this species be included in the Australian list on this evidence. Apart from the sight records, in most cases, 3 or 4 specimens were collected and their affinities discussed. The paper can be summarized as a convenient list of nearly all of the birds normally found in subscoastal Northern Territory.—H. J. FRITH.

**A Distributional Study of the Birds of British Honduras,** by Stephen M. Russell, published by the American Ornithologists' Union: Ornithological Monographs No. 1, June 1964, 195 pp., 2 coloured and 8 black and white plates. Price $4.50.

This publication is something of a departure from the normal practice of a national ornithological society, no matter to what extent such a society's interests may have become international. Apart from such special publications as Lynes' "Review of the Genus Cisticola" and perhaps the B.O.U. centenary publications, this reviewer does not recall any effort by a national society to produce a series of publications outside the standard issue of the appropriate journal. The present work is the first of a series by the A.O.U., established for major papers too long for inclusion in *The Auk*.

After introductory chapters on the history of ornithological work in the area, topography, geology, climate and vegetation, this study gives a systematic account of all species recorded. All species whose occurrence is not substantiated by verified specimens, are put in square brackets, even those for which sight records are fully documented and virtually beyond doubt. For each species the known specimens are listed with a paragraph on general status, as far as it is known, breeding records (if any), and taxonomic discussion, where called for or if possible. In other words it falls somewhere between a bare check-list and a full reference book. It is of little value to the casual visitor who has no previous knowledge of the local birds or of Central American birds, and who wants merely to identify what he sees: yet it is of fundamental importance to a serious understanding of the avifauna of the country, providing as it does the clear limit of present established facts.

In fact, this publication follows exactly the pattern of, and achieves the same high standard set by *Bulletins* of the American Museum of Natural History, dealing with the avifauna of poorly known tropical areas. Some of the best known of these were F. M. Chapman's volumes on the distribution of bird life in Peru and Ecuador, while Chapin's outstanding work on the birds of the Belgian Congo is only an extension of the same treatment. For such areas it is obvious that a comprehensive, fully illustrated work, on the lines either of a Collins Pocket Guide or of a Mathews or Bannerman, is not justified by the state of knowledge, or is impossible economically. Thus, the present publication, perhaps best called an annotated check-list, has a most important place in the development of the ornithological knowledge of poorly known regions.

Recipients of *The Emu* may wonder how it can be worthwhile noticing this paper, when very few of them can be remotely interested in British Honduras, but it is the principle which could be of real interest in Australia, rather than the actual publication. The knowledge of Australian birds is essentially in the qualitative stage and should be emerging into the quantitative stage. Even as regards simple distribution the published information is essentially general rather than precise, or else is widely scattered in the literature, as can only be expected for a vast area, many parts of which have only been superficially investigated. As interest in ornithology is undoubtedly widening, one wonders whether there are not many opportunities for Australian publications on the lines of this paper, which after all covers an area of only 10,000 square miles. To achieve the same critical standards admittedly a lot of museum research would be needed, but because Australian birds are much better known than those of British Honduras a much greater tolerance towards sight records could be allowed; the result, however, would be immensely valuable as a precise record of distribution and occurrence in local areas, comparable with the county lists in Britain, apart from providing a much needed historical account of past and present for the benefit of future students.

Certainly the A.O.U. is to be congratulated on undertaking this enterprise outside the scope of its standard journal, and we may now hope for a continuing series of similar, important and useful papers from that Union. Could not other Unions encourage the same sort of work and adopt the same policy?—STEPHEN MARCHANT.

# News and Notes

### CONGRESS AND FIELD OUTING, 1965

The proposed programme for the Congress and Field Outing to be held in Victoria is as follows:

November 6—opening of Congress and all-day business session in Melbourne.

November 7—day excursion.

November 8-November 17 (inclusive)—field outing at Mount Beauty in north-eastern Victoria.

Accommodation will be available at Mount Beauty chalet, tariff 35/- per day. Transport between Melbourne and Mount Beauty will be arranged. Fares, meeting place and times to be notified later.

Would all those proposing to attend please write to the acting State Secretary, ROY WHEELER, 59a UPTON ROAD, WINDSOR, S.E. VIC.

### PHOTOGRAPHS REQUIRED

Messrs Cassell and Co., London, are to publish a book, "Rare and Vanishing Birds and Animals", for which they are seeking certain photographs. Normal reproduction fees will be paid for any photographs used and all material will be returned to the body or person supplying them.

Species required from the Australian region are: Stubble Quail, Lord Howe Island Woodhen, Ground Parrot, Night Parrot, Turquoise Parrot, Scarlet-chested Parrot, Paradise Parrot, Norfolk Island Blackbird, Mallee (Western) Whipbird, and Eastern Whipbird.

Photographs should be sent to John R. Freeman and Co. Ltd., Harleyson House, 74 Newman Street, London, W.1.