

BOOKS, PAPERS AND LITERARY NOTES

Edited by ALLAN MCEVEY

Reviews

Books and Papers

The Bird Faunas of Africa and its Islands by R. E. Moreau, 1966. Academic Press, Lond. and N.Y. Pp. 424, 10" x 6 1/2".—**The Birds of Tasmania: Ecology and Evolution** by M. G. Ridpath and R. E. Moreau. *The Ibis* 108: 348-393, 1966. (Copies of this paper are available from C.S.I.R.O., Division of Wildlife Research, Canberra, A.C.T.) The former work, a book for the specialist and not easy reading, is the culmination of the author's unparalleled experience of the African avifauna. Africa has undergone immense climatic changes over the past twenty thousand years and it is these that provide the key to the present day distribution of habitats, in each of which has evolved a distinctive bird community. The whole of Africa, including that part north of the Sahara with strong Palaearctic affinities is dealt with on the basis of habitat distribution with scant attention to political divisions. The book is illustrated with many maps a few of which are difficult to follow. The composition of the various communities is summarized in a series of tables in which the arrangement of families is in alphabetical sequence. Its importance is not, however, restricted to Africa for the authors' concepts of what may be called ecological zoogeography are applicable to the Australian avifaunas as M. G. Ridpath and R. E. Moreau have shown in the paper named above. Attention to the latter in fact provides the best introduction for Australian readers to the ideas expressed in Moreau's African book.

In dealing with a paper of this nature the reviewer with local knowledge must avoid the temptation to air this knowledge unless it is of fundamental importance to the main theme. In other words, this particular reviewer questions many of the statements made but, since these do not negate the argument advanced, no further reference is necessary, except to point out that where lack of objective data forces undue reliance on subjective information such disagreement is bound to occur. The answer lies in obtaining the objective data.

The reviewer would also be remiss if he did not stress that this paper is important to Australian ornithology as a whole, for this is no less than the truth. Here, for the first time, modern concepts of ecological zoogeography are introduced to the Australian scene. The results should be two-fold. Firstly, Tasmanian ornithologists should strive to fill the gaps in our knowledge that the authors readily admit exist; secondly, and of even greater significance, this paper should serve as a model to all ornithologists for many years. While exemplifying what may be termed the scientific method this is no mere dull technical paper but one which is eminently readable even by someone of limited knowledge, and this it achieves without sacrificing any of its authoritativeness.

The modern concepts of eco-geography, to borrow Moreau's term, owe much to his pioneering efforts which culminated in his major work "Bird faunas of Africa and its islands". Indeed the similarity in the presentation of this work and the present paper is immediately apparent.

Fundamental to these concepts is that of the "niche", i.e. that in any community, whether of many or few species, each utilizes a particular segment of the habitat and that these are mutually exclusive. It follows that the basic "unit", so to speak, becomes the community rather than the species. This allows the familiar lists of species that have cluttered up works dealing with bird faunas to be relegated to a single table which can be analyzed, along with the many other factors that help determine the fauna, with the individual species being used only to illustrate salient points.

From a consideration of all factors a comprehensive, if still somewhat tentative, picture of events in Tasmania from the Tertiary is built up, from which it is possible to trace the probable origin and evolution of the bird

faunas. On the available evidence only one species the Scrub-tit, was present before the last glaciation some 18,000 years ago, although five others may have been present. It should be emphasized that the inferences drawn can only be tentative for, as the authors stress, much further work is required on all aspects but particularly on the status of species within the communities. This in no way detracts from the importance of the paper which presents the known facts in masterly fashion. It merely implies that some revision may be required in the light of further evidence.

One of the puzzling features of the Tasmanian avifauna is the high proportion of endemics amongst its breeding species, 14 full and 27 sub-species being admitted. It is somewhat disturbing to find that acceptance as a sub-species is based on unpublished information, a highly unsatisfactory state of affairs for which the authors are in no way responsible.

This, then, is a paper that should influence Australian ornithology as a whole for it should serve as the mode for future work on bird faunas throughout the continent.—D. G. THOMAS.

The Parrots of Australia by William R. Eastman, Jr. and Alexander C. Hunt, 1966. Angus and Robertson Ltd. Sydney. Pp. XIV + 194. paintings 16, col. & b. & w. plates. 7 1/2" x 10" \$A10. Because no good book on the Australian parrots is currently available one is apt to approach the present one in expectation of finding something it does not claim to be. It aims to be a guide to identification and habits (sub-title) for bird lovers (p. ix), and must be judged accordingly. This aim makes it the more regrettable that in the preface Hunt expresses the perfectly logical but, to the reviewer, quite unconvincing taxonomic opinion that "being able to see and recognize in the field a bird that we can identify as a different one from one of its close relatives is enough for the great majority of bird-lovers . . . to call a species". Such unwary treading into a field outside the book's already defined scope, a field upon which the authors must rely for the very names in the text, unless they intend to discard their aims, engage in taxonomy and create their own parrot classification, is unfortunate to say the least.

Not this however but the great many errors in the text regrettably demand a critical review of the book even from the bird lovers' view-point. Taxonomy: Since the book aims to be a guide to identification what a pity the authors did not accept the Checklist with amendments and leave it at that. As it stands, and resulting from its excursion into the field of taxonomy, carrying the strangest of taxonomic principles (p. ix) one must expect that the parrot taxonomist will disagree with the Rainbow and Red-collared Lorikeets being treated as separate species, with *leadbeateri* being used instead of *macleayana* (Emu 29: p. 81) for the Lorileet, and other points; while even ordinary Checklist users will expect to see the Lorilets treated as sub-species, the Cloncurry Parrot as a sub-species of *barnardi* and the Twenty-eight Parrot as a sub-species of *zonarius*.

Distribution: This aspect of species information is an important one to all users of the book and its compilation calls for the utmost care. It may therefore be noted, regarding the distribution maps, that: for the Red-collared Lorikeet the range ought to include Melville Island and Groote Eylandt; for the Varied Lorikeet the range ought to include Melville Island; for the Purple-crowned Lorikeet, the range ought not include Tasmania or Southern Australia, between Eyre Peninsula and south-west Australia; for the Little Lorikeet the range ought to include Tasmania, the coastal parts of south-western Victoria, and south-east S.A. where it has been recorded as far west as Mt. Lofty ranges and Adelaide Plains; the Banksian Red-tailed Cockatoo is certainly not found throughout the entire continent being absent from the Nullarbor Plain region, most of S.A., much of Victoria and the east coast of Cape York; for the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo the W.A. range ought to be shown as limited to the Kimberleys north of the Behn River, but including Melville Island and Groote Eylandt; for the Little Corella the range ought to be restricted in Victoria to the north-west though recorded at the You Yangs. It does not normally include the coastal regions of southern Australia, but includes Melville Island and Groote Eylandt; for the Slender-billed Corella the range ought not include Queensland or Central Australia; the eastern and western subspecies being isolated—and so far we have reached page 81. Other species calling for correction are Rock-pegbler, Barraband, Crimson-winged Parrot, Crimson, Murray, Tasmanian, Blue-

cheeked, Northern and Eastern Rosellas, Buln-buln, Port Lincoln, Golden-shouldered, Hooded, Red-backed, Many-coloured, Blue-winged, Elegant and Ground Parrots.

Morphology: (pp. 42-6). The correct size ratios are Blue-browed Lorileet 6½", Red-browed 5½", Marshall's 5½-5½". The female of the Red-cheeked Parrot has a chestnut-brown head, not a grey one.

Illustrations: The paintings unfortunately often fall below the standards a field guide ought to present in terms of colour accuracy as for example in the Red-backed, Mulga and Red-capped Parrots, and the shapes and postures are not always convincing e.g. Twenty-eight, Port Lincoln, and Scarlet-breasted Parrots. The rather unusual "water-colour sketch" style is often pleasing and effective, but the standards are very uneven. This latter remark can also be applied to the photographs.

The authors' desire to include habitat is commendable and the vegetation definitions (Beadle and Costin's ?) would have been better left untouched. As it is Mallee is regarded both as Scrub and as Mallee.

One regrets very much that the book cannot be confidently recommended, though this does not lessen to any degree the authors' genuine interest in the parrots, nor the Australian author's reputation in parrot breeding and care. —A. McE.

Australian Birds in Colour by Keith Hindwood, 1966. A. H. & A. W. Reed Pty. Ltd., Sydney. Printed in Japan. Pp. 112, 52 col. plates, Board and cloth covers; 6½" × 7½", \$3.25. During the present century a number of books on Australian birds have appeared that were produced for the general public rather than for the student of ornithology. Some of the books have been of indifferent quality in respect both of statements contained therein, and their illustrations. In a few cases colour plates in such books have been little better than impressionistic drawings of little value.

Hindwood's "Australian Birds In Colour" is a truly outstanding book in its class. It contains a brief and good outline of the development of the knowledge of birds in this country, and the fifty-two selected species illustrated represent most major groups and provide a fairly good introduction to Australian bird life. The appropriate text serves to introduce the bird depicted, both as a species and as the member of a group, genus, or family. It is pleasantly written as well as being informative.

The colour plates are outstandingly good, several being of superb quality, and made from photographs taken by some of Australia's best photographers.

"Australian Birds In Colour" can be recommended as a beautiful book on some of our many beautiful birds, and one that will provide much informative reading for bird students as well as for members of the general public. —E. F. BOEHM.

Australian Birds by Robin Hill, 1967. Thomas Nelson (Australia) Ltd., Melbourne. Pp. XXVIII + 281, ca. 1000 illustrations of nearly 700 species. Map of Australia. 13½" × 9½". Price \$16.00.

This large book in the same format as *Birds of the World* by Oliver L. Austin Jr (1961), received much publicity and is claimed by the publishers as "the most modern and comprehensive work on Australian Birds." If this is true, however it will also be true that no Australian bird book of this nature carries so many errors. The author says in the preface "even the most readily available modern text books are poorly illustrated", however when one checks a doubtful illustration of his against that in the most readily available book, Neville Cayley's *What Bird is That?*, it is found Cayley is right and Hill wrong. It is agreed that Cayley's illustrations have been too greatly reduced and unless the birds are known the diagnostic differences are not readily seen, but they are there. Robin Hill's book with its larger illustrations, particularly of the smaller birds, may be a help to beginners and visitors who do not know Australian birds, but inaccuracies in so many illustrations will soon create difficulties for them.

At least thirty pages containing illustrations have obvious errors: wrong shape, proportions, colours and/or captions. In many other cases not specially noted later the colours are poor and tails particularly are wrong.

Special mention must be made of the errors on pages 139 and 161. On

page 139 the male Superb Lyrebird is illustrated with the colours of the tail upside down. On page 161 the Golden Bower bird is shown with a single feather in its crown. No bird in the world has a single feather of this shape sticking from the crown. The yellow on the crown is actually a series of normal yellow crown feathers which can be raised in the same way as similar feathers in other bower-birds.

Some of the most obvious errors in the illustrations are listed below.

Page No.

- xiii Koel (male); tail completely out of proportion.
- xv Log runners; the difference in sizes between species and between males and females is not shown. All are captioned as being the same size.
- 3 The Cassowary depicted is not the Australian species. The casque is the wrong shape and colour for our bird.
- 8 All albatrosses are shown incorrectly with a hind toe and tube noses like petrels. They do not have hind toes.
- 15 Yellow-faced Cormorants with black faces.
- 24 Nankeen Night-heron (adult) wrongly captioned immature.
- 35 Captioned Black-breasted Buzzard, but it is not clear what it is.
- 52 Jungle Fowl and Mallee Fowl both marked as 24 inches long. But the Jungle Fowl is smaller, about 18 inches only.
- 64-65 Captions of Spur-winged, Masked and Banded Plovers are wrong. The correction in the corrigenda only partly rectifies the error. The left hand bird is the Masked Plover, the centre bird is the Spur-winged Plover and the right hand bird the Banded Plover.
- 67 Illustrations poor, particularly that of the Black-fronted Dotterel where the reddish brown shoulder patch does not stand out.
- 76 All the skuas like the albatrosses have been given tube noses incorrectly.
- 81 Little Tern, tail too square.
- 90 The bird captioned Scaly-breasted Lorikeet is like no-known Australian parrot. The red under the wing is the only guide to this bird's identification as captioned.
- 94 Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (male), tail too short and depicted with the pale bill of a female. The crown feathers are also too short.
- 118, 119 The illustrations of the Oriental Cuckoo are very misleading, indicating nesting of the species in Australia. This bird is a summer migrant from the Northern Hemisphere where it breeds in central and eastern Siberia and throughout the Himalayas. As stated in the text, it has never been recorded breeding in this country.
- 125 The legs of the Barn Owl are hidden by the Masked Owl. The Barn Owl and Grass Owl are very similar, the tarsi of the former species being noticeably shorter than those of the latter, yet the illustrations prevent this diagnostic comparison.
- 133 Yellow-billed Kingfisher, male and female signs are reversed.
- 139 Superb Lyrebird (male) tail colours upside down. Albert Lyrebird (male), tail too long.
- 148 Spangled Drongo, tail too short.
- 153 Mudlark. Nest completely wrong shape. The bird shown is a male, but is wrongly depicted with white on its forehead, which is a female character.
- 161 Golden Bower-bird; odd yellow feather in crown is completely wrong. The bower is also drawn wrongly as this bird builds a "maypole" type bower and not an "avenue" type bower.
- 171 Grey-crowned Babbler (female) is wrongly shown with throat different from that of male.
- 193 Eyrean Grass Wren; heavy bill not evident.

- 200 Fairy Wrens; tails wrong shape.
- 221 Shining Starling (male), lacks red eye.
- 223 Lewin Honeyeater; the ear tufts should be dark grey in front of the yellow, not blue as shown.
- 241 White-cheeked Honeyeater; too much black on breast and white cheeks are too small.
- 253 Sun-bird (male); colours poor.
- 265 Map. The Atherton Tableland is shown about 400 miles south of its correct location.

The text is pleasant and easy to read and as the author says, is mainly based on Cayley's *What Bird is That?* In many cases the text is at variance with the illustrations. For instance the author does explain that the type of bower built by the Golden Bower-bird is of the "maypole" type with a vine or two draped across on which the male displays. He also qualifies his pictures of the Oriental Cuckoo by saying it is unlikely that it nests in this country.

However, it should not be necessary to read the text to see whether the illustrations are correct.

Young Channel-billed Cuckoos (page 121) do not throw out the eggs and young of the host bird in the usual cuckoo manner as suggested by the author, but grow up with the young of the foster parents. This is not unique as the same happens with the Greater Spotted Cuckoo of Southern Europe and Africa.

He repeats the error that in winter plumage, the flanks of the Grey-breasted Silvereye become a deep tawny buff. Dr. A. J. Keast in 1958 showed these birds to have a complete post nuptial body moult; and a prenuptial body moult. He also showed that the plumage colour does not change and that those specimens with deep tawny-buff flanks are representative of birds from Tasmania and Victoria. This species as found round Sydney and further north has very pale buff or grey flanks.

When describing the distribution of the Meliphagidae (page 222) the author omits New Guinea where there are 65 species, nearly as many as in Australia.

The final assessment of this book is that the author shows that given sufficient time and opportunity to observe the birds he can produce good illustrations. However the whole work obviously has been far too rushed causing so many inaccuracies that it can never be quoted justifiably as an authority to stand beside the great works of Gould, Mathews or even Cayley's *What Bird is That?*—H. J. DE S. DISNEY.

The Editor,
Dear Sir,

In view of certain criticisms and reactions to *Australian Birds*, I am hoping that, in the interests of ornithology in Australia, you will publish this letter. I should like to make an opportunity of clearing up a few points and, quite frankly, inviting criticism of certain parts of my book.

At the outset I should like to say that my last thought or pretension was to set up as an original author of a definitive modern work which would be a direct successor to Gould or Mathews. Obviously these multi-volume works are in a completely different category from a single volume compilation—even if some of the paintings are perhaps "in line" with them. We should remember, I think, that authors are not responsible for their publisher's "blurb" and publicity.

I was, however, aiming to gather together a good deal of interesting and useful information from the various sources available to me, and present it, in a readable form, to the general public and bird watchers.

This I think I have done, but regrettably, a number of errors have been made in this text. Some of these are typographic and others the result of my own lack of checking and re-checking. There are upwards of 150,000 words in the book, much of this was written under pressure of deadlines over which an author has little or no control. Which is an explanation, if not an excuse.

Now that all this material has been gathered, it seems a great pity that its usefulness for the more serious ornithologists should be suspect because of a number of avoidable scientific mistakes and misleading remarks. Therefore, I am hoping that readers will undertake to write to me with their suggestions and criticisms, both of text and illustrations, thus enabling me to improve the reference value of the work.

The publishers intend, I believe, to put a new edition in hand some time in the not very distant future. This will allow the alteration and even re-writing of parts of the text. The new edition should not be confused with the reprint, due about April 1968, which can only have a number of typographic errors rectified.

As I said in the preface to the book, Allan McEvey and Claude Austin read a good deal of the MS., and made many technical criticisms and suggestions. Some of these were not carried out in the text simply because of time. Other MS. errors pointed out by Mr. McEvey are still, unfortunately, in the text (e.g. the introduction to the thrushes and *Colluricincla*) but these would, of course, be altered in a new edition.

To conclude, I should like to say again that in the interests of science and accuracy, I will be glad to receive any criticisms ornithologists and bird watchers would be kind enough to send me.

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In brief . . .

(It is not possible for the Review Editor to check the bibliographical accuracy of all titles and references supplied by contributors)

Australasia

Economic Orn. "Birds and Aircraft: A Problem at Auckland's New International Airport" by E. K. Saul. N.Z. Depart. Internat. Affairs *Wildlife Pub.* No. 91. Problems result when an airport is built in the middle of the rich feeding area of up to 30,000 godwits, knots, oystercatchers, dotterels, swans, ducks and gulls. Control methods tried have included scaring, the use of a model aeroplane designed to look like a hawk, and the building of alternative roosting sites.—J.M.C.

"Pesticide Propaganda" by Eric Hardy. *Manufact. Chemist and Aerosol News*, April 1967, p. 27. This article argues that judging from counts, many species have increased in abundance following the introduction of modern pesticides but that the pesticides have adversely affected local bird populations and sensitive species; an informative, factual, but somewhat biased account.—H.L.S.

Anting. "Coachwhip-bird Anting" by Mrs I. C. de Meyrick. *Bird Obs.* No. 421, Dec. 66, p. 4.—W.R.W.

Regional. "Birds Listed in the Alice Springs Area, Oct.-Nov. 1966" by J. D. Watson. *Bird Obs.* Jan.-Feb. 1967.—W.R.W.

Biography. The late D. J. Dickison, "Obituary" by W.R.W. *Bird Obs.* June 67.

Aviculture. "Rare Native Birds Have Best Chance of Survival by Being Reared in Captivity" by Brian Reid. *Forest and Bird*, May, 1966, pp. 11-14. Discusses the desirability of attempting to preserve such rare species as the Takahe, *Notornis mantelli* and Kakapo, *Strigops habroptilis* in captivity in preference to letting them become extinct in the wild.—H.L.S.

Species. "Occurrences of the Double-banded Dotterel in Western Australia", by J. Ford. *W.A. Nat.*, Jan. 1967. Records from Pt. Malcolm in south-east to near Dongara in the north; specimens from North-west Cape identified as such by Tom Carter are really *Charadrius mongolus*, and the records from Condon and Port Hedland by F. L. Whitlock are discounted.—D.L.S.

"A Historical Note on the Grey-headed Honeyeater, *Meliphaga keartlandi*", by G. F. Mees. *W.A. Nat.*, Jan. 1967. Reports a specimen in Nat. Hist. Mus. at Leiden received by Temminck from Gould about the middle of the last century (incorrectly identified as *M. plumula*) about half a century before A. J. North described it as new to science. It was probably collected

by Benjamin Bynoe, Surgeon on H.M.S. *Beagle*, on Depuch I. in June 1840.—D.L.S.

"Report of the Sarus Crane, *Grus antigone*, in Northern Queensland", by F. T. Smith. *Bird Obs.* Feb. 1967.—W.R.W.

Overseas

Zoogeography. "Apparent Zoogeographical Dispersal Patterns in Two Avian Families" by C. J. O. Harrison. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 87: 63, April 1967. Describes speciation and distribution of *Estrildines* in Australasia and elsewhere on basis of continental spread, and replacement from a centre of origin.—H.L.S.

Economic Orn. "Peru's Anchovy See-Saw" by Audrey Kennet. *The Geog. Mag.* Dec. 1966. Pp. 621-32. Brief notes on guano birds (3 species), their likely fate, and the problem they cause by eating 2½ million tons ? of anchovy a year.—A.McE.

Biography. Those who collect information on Antarctic ornithology, or Wilson, will know of the beautiful book published on his diaries (1966). A further glimpse of his writings and drawings will be found in *The Geog. Mag.* Sept. 1966, pp. 364-72.—A.McE.

Ecology. "Clutch-size in Tropical Passerine Birds of Forest and Savanna" by D. Lack and R. E. Moreau. (In English) *L'Oiseau et la Revue Française d'Ornithologie* 35: 76-89, 1965. This study, of interest to students of nidification in the Australian Region, records that tropical birds mostly lay larger egg clutches in savanna and similar habitats than in forest, judging from data from two continents. The writers discuss why these differences occur.—H.L.S.

Species. "The Adaptive Radiation and Feeding Ecology of some British Finches" by I. Newton. *Ibis* 109: 33-98. Includes data on the Greenfinch and Goldfinch.—J.McK.

Literary Notes No. 8

Manuscript Material of Ornithological Interest in Australasian Museums: Short notes to appear under this heading are based on information kindly supplied by Librarians of the Institutions named and now gratefully acknowledged. *South Australian Museum.* M. Symonds Clark Diaries. The following is quoted from "Extracts from the Late Mr M. Symonds Clark's Diaries. By J. Sutton". *South Aust. Orn.* 10: 144-53 and provides an explanatory note regarding this MS now in the Collections of the above Museum. "Mrs M. Symonds Clark has very kindly donated to our Association the diaries which her late husband kept over the years 1862 to 1916.

Mr M. Symonds Clark, who died on the 10th July, 1920, at the age of eighty-two years, was an aviculturist during the above years, and was also a good ornithologist. He was a foundation member of our Association and a member for years of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union. His residence for many years was at Hazelwood, Burnside, four miles from the city, but later he lived at "Hilltop", Belair.

It was his custom to record in his diary particulars of the nesting, etc. of the birds in his aviaries, as well as notes on the wild birds and other natural-history objects in the district in which he lived and those he observed in his outings in South Australia.

From time to time extracts from the diaries will be published exactly as they were entered up, and a beginning is here made with those referring to the two uncommon species of Parrots—the Bourke Parrot (*Neophema bourkei*) and the Princess-Parrot (*Polytelis alexandrae*). *Otago Museum, N.Z.—The Library of the University of Otago.* Tily MS. This item is in the library of the University of Otago which is housed in the Otago Museum but is not part of that Institution. The Tily MS. comprises 15 vols. containing records of bird observations made in Dunedin and surrounding districts 1936-1954 by Mrs Isabella Tily who died in 1954. The contents include general bird observations, Blackbird and Silvereye investigations, clippings of newspaper articles, and photographs. The MS. was donated by Mr H. S. Tily.—A.McE.