

## REVIEWS

Edited by G. W. JOHNSTONE

### BOOKS

**Parrots of the World** by Joseph M. Forshaw, 1973. Melbourne: Lansdowne Press. Pp 584, illustrated by William T. Cooper with col. pl 158, numerous figs and maps. 380 x 250 mm. \$A65.00.

Because of their gay colours, exotic origins, ability to imitate the human voice and hardness in captivity (often under the most appalling conditions), parrots have always had a special appeal to men. There is an extensive literature on them but there has been no monograph on the whole order for over a hundred years. This deficiency has at last been made good by a work conceived in the grand tradition of excellent paper, printing and binding, large handsome illustrations beautifully reproduced and a text of able scholarship written in clear precise English.

Mr Forshaw's first book, the monograph *Australian Parrots* (1969), was a marked success, and he has now broadened his scope to embrace all species; this work must stand as the standard reference for many years. Forshaw has travelled the world studying his subjects in the field as well as examining specimens in all the major reference collections. The extensive bibliography indicates the extent of his research into the literature.

An introduction devotes twenty pages to a lucid account of the classification of the parrot-like birds past and present, their origins, relationships, physiology and anatomy, distribution, breeding habits, moult, conservation and economic importance to agriculture. Large clear line-drawings illustrate external features, skeleton and digestive and reproductive organs. The author gives no information on the care of parrots in captivity but he has drawn on aviculturists' knowledge, including descriptions of eggs and nestlings, exhorting such people to make detailed observations of their birds because so little is known of the breeding biology and behaviour of many species.

The species are dealt with in three groups according to distribution: *Pacific*, covering Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea, the Philippines, East Indies and Pacific islands; *Afro-Asian*, overlapping *Pacific* in Malaya and western East Indies; and *South American*, covering Central America, the Caribbean and Mexico.

Mr Forshaw disclaims any pretensions to being a taxonomist. His classification of the parrots is a modified version of that of Peters, with three families recognized: Loriidae (lories and lorikeets), Cacatuidae (cockatoos) and Psittacidae (parrots). Some families are further divided into sub-families. Cacatuidae comprise the Cacatuinae (true cockatoos) and Nymphicinae (the monotypic genus *Nymphicus*, Cockatiel). Within Psittacidae there are the sub-families Nestorinae (Kea and Kaka), Microsittinae (pygmy parrots), Psittacinae (fig-parrots, typical parrots, parrakeets and *Lathamus*, Swift Parrot), and Strigopinae with only the nocturnal *Strigops*, New Zealand's Kakapo, unhappily on the verge of extinction. In spite of many species, Africa, Asia and America have only the sub-family Psittacinae. All sub-families are found in the Pacific region.

Mr Forshaw tends to be conservative in his treatment of genera and species and not to lump, apparently for

the sake of clarity rather than on taxonomic grounds. Brief introductory notes to each genus detail genetic features and often give the reasons for separation from closely related genera. For each species there is a full description of the plumages of adult males and females, and juveniles, and a distributional map. Where subspecies are recognized, the differences in plumage and dimensions are described and the trinomial name and distribution given. A vernacular is quoted if in general use. Also for each species food, habits, habitat, distribution, voice, breeding behaviour and eggs are described. Only one vernacular name is given for each form, so one must go to other sources to elucidate the equivalent of familiar vernaculars such as Quaker Parrot, Cockatoo-parrot, Orange-breasted Parrot and Pink Cockatoo. It is tragic to note how several species of Amazon parrots that were confined to specific islands of the West Indies have become extinct or very rare. Many South American species are under threat because their habitat is being cleared and the birds exported for sale as cage-birds. Wasteful methods of collecting and transport lead to heavy mortality. Legislation in Australia has reduced the threat from trapping, particularly with a ban on exports other than to accredited zoos. However, smuggling persists and the clearing of habitat and loss of nest-sites resulting from logging are major threats.

Mr Cooper's superb full-page paintings, made from museum specimens with the museum number of each listed, complement the knowledgeable text. Every illustration is of the highest standard both as regards posture, form and colour, and the backgrounds have an air of authenticity. The block-maker and printer have ably contributed to the general excellence.

Because of its lavish production this is a very expensive book and it is a pity that for this reason the publishers felt unable to present a review copy to the RAOU Library; it would make a most desirable addition.

H.E.A.J.

**Australian Parrots in Field and Aviary** by Neville W. Cayley, revised by Alan H. Lendon, 1973. Sydney: Angus & Robertson. Pp xxx + 342, col. pl 13, maps 60, figs 3. 160 x 242 mm. \$A17.50.

The reappearance of this book is pleasing. The revision by the late Dr Lendon is praiseworthy and extensive; nevertheless, the general aim of the book remains as Cayley set it out: to provide a comprehensive manual for aviculturists and field ornithologists. This aim is certainly realized and it is worth adding that it will be very useful to professional ecologists and ethologists.

I do not quarrel with the arrangement of genera and species, especially as Dr Lendon states that he does not wish to become involved in taxonomic arguments. At the same time, it is not the order that I should have used, but then this is a field of endeavour that divides professional and amateur taxonomists within and between their ranks. The taxonomy of taxonomists is itself a difficult taxonomy; even today, in the era of numerical taxonomy, the art remains definitely subjective. One thing is certain, however: aviculturists have contributed

significantly to the production of facts with which taxonomists tend to practise their art. Likewise, field naturalists have made many important contributions.

It is here that I think this new edition is so important; for, Dr Lendon has produced a summary of material from field ornithologists and aviculturists by what is obviously a rigorous sifting of material. This has been possible as a result of his profound knowledge of parrots in field and aviary, as well as his equally profound knowledge of the men who make the observations and keep the birds in aviaries. It is in no sense an adverse criticism of the book to claim that the scientific literature has not been so carefully reported. As an example of an omission I cite the extensive work of Brockway (1969, in *Bird vocalizations. Their relations to current problems in biology and psychology*. R. A. Hinde Ed.) on the Budgerygah. The effect of the loud and soft warble-call on the male gonads implies that several pairs of Budgerygahs are usually necessary for successful breeding; this is information that I believe all field naturalists and aviculturists would like to have. Another omission from the scientific literature, which is of certain interest, is that of Churchill and Christensen (1970, Aust. J. Zool. 18: 427-437) on the harvesting of pollen by brush-tongued lorikeets. These omissions are not to say that all scientific literature is neglected. The speculation of Cain (1955, Ibis 97: 432-479) that *Purpureicephalus spurius* of Western Australia was congeneric with *Eunymphicus cornutus* of New Caledonia is judged by Dr Lendon 'a fantastic suggestion'. Many will agree that to place these two species in the same genus seems unreasonable and Dr Lendon's contention that *Cyanorhampus* is more happily merged with *Eunymphicus* than is *Eunymphicus* with *Purpureicephalus* is in my view entirely reasonable; yet I am still left with the strong feeling that *Purpureicephalus*, *Eunymphicus*, *Cyanorhampus* and in addition *Lathamus* and *Opopsitta* (?) are all closely related. Are they closer to each other than any one of them is to *Platycercus*, *Psephotus* or *Neophema*? Perhaps the numerical taxonomy of Dr P. Watters or Dr Glenn's studies of the carotid arteries will decide such a question. Anyway, though it is true that aviculture and natural history will continue to make important contributions to the taxonomy of the Psittaciformes, taxonomy is not the book's chief aim.

I found the book interesting to read. This is not always to be expected of a manual or guide. Part of the interest comes from the intimacy of the reporting. Dr Lendon often gives long quotes from other authors or even from letters. For example, there is a large part of an account by J. L. Mitchell of his first breeding of the Red-capped Lorikeet *Psitteuteles versicolor*. Mitchell was awarded the bronze medal of the Aviculture Society of South Australia for this success. The account is detailed, unpretentious and generous. Mitchell speaks of 'a very bleak winter', of an 'inquisitive bird', which 'entered the log of one of the breeding pairs and was promptly torn to pieces', and that 'full credit must go to my eldest daughter Trina (14 years)'. Dr Lendon himself does not hesitate to record his own personal details and observations. His account of his search with A. C. (Sandy) Hunt for the very rare and possibly extinct Paradise Parrot *Psephotus pulcherrimus* touches on the comradeship, transcending ordinary human boundaries, that is often found among people with a genuine interest in birds. He says: 'In May 1965 he (Hunt) and his son accompanied me and my elder son on an all too brief trip to the Burnett district in the footsteps of Chisholm. We were able to locate two elderly Jerrard brothers and learnt from one of them that Cyril, the ornithologist, had been drowned in December 1943; they themselves

knew little about birds and could not recall Cyril's having seen the species for long after Chisholm's visit. Ernest Jerrard was, however, able to locate the spot where his brother had photographed his pair at their nesting mound, and we spent some time walking through this wooded, undulating area, well dotted with termitaria, but to no avail.'

Many fascinating ecological and ethological problems are raised. Dr Lendon draws attention to sympatry of the Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans*, the Ring-necked Parrot *Barnardius barnardi* and the Eastern Rosella *P. eximius* in open (mallee) country. He also reports his observation of sympatry of the Adelaide and Yellow Rosellas and that 'neither on this nor on any subsequent occasions did there appear to be any mixing of the species'. He comments also on his observations, again with Sandy Hunt, of intermediate forms between the Eastern and Pale-headed Rosellas. The distribution of the Yellow Rosella is an exciting enigma; what explanation can be advanced for its peculiar distribution on the Darling and the Lachlan? Detailed long-term studies are called for, along with studies of vegetation, and might be attempted by naturalists living in the area.

Dr Lendon is also to be commended for careful attention to facts of ethological interest. He notes such important behaviour as the way the head is scratched and social preening and he records observations on displays and calls. Naturalists could also accumulate useful data on groupings of parrots and the circumstances in which the groupings occur. Comments on flocking and other groupings occur in the text but are very brief, no doubt because they are rare in the general literature.

This new book emerges from a revered old book. Cayley's illustrations, which I believe are among the best ever done of parrots, are as good as in the first edition. It will be found useful to all who have a serious interest in Australian parrots and it will be a pleasure to read and to have for those whose interests are not so deep in this field of science and natural history.

J. Le G.B.

**Bird Guide of Thailand**, Second Edition, by Boonsong Lekagul and Edward W. Cronin Jr., 1974. Bangkok: Kurusapa Ladprach Press. Pp xvi + 324, col. pl 112, maps 2. 130 x 195 mm. \$US10.00. (Available from the Association for the Conservation of Wildlife, 4 Old Customs House Lane, Bangkok 5).

This field guide revises and brings up to date the first edition. I have had to write this review in North Sumatra without a copy of the first edition because reference material is hard to get here. On the other hand, Sumatra is a reasonable location, just south of Thailand, in which to test this guide in the field.

The book is a pocket-sized guide to all 849 species of birds known from within the political boundaries of Thailand. Its format is similar to some of the newer guides to North American and European birds, with all species illustrated in colour on the right-hand pages with pointer lines indicating the main diagnostic or distinguishing features. A brief description, covering voice, habitat and status as well as a small map showing the range, is placed on the left-hand page, close to if not always quite opposite the relevant illustration. Illustrations of all species are by the senior author and are quite good. The Osprey, No. 93, comes through too yellow in the review copy; but these plates will be useful aids in identifying many species. They ought to be specially valuable in separating the many similar-looking bulbuls and brownish babblers. I find the tinted background of the plates somewhat distracting and would

have preferred white.

The maps of distributions in Thailand should be most helpful, but, because they were compiled from specimens, they probably represent minimum ranges. On the other hand, the influence of man is rapidly reducing the ranges of many birds in Thailand; over sixty per cent of forest has been destroyed in the past twenty years and pressures from hunting and poaching are acute.

Vernacular names have been modified to agree with the forthcoming *Field Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia*; approximately 206 English names have been changed from the first edition. Listed on the last four pages are the names as they appeared originally. A nice feature is the brief paragraph summarizing the characteristics of each family or group, preceding the descriptions of the individual species.

*Bird Guide of Thailand* is one of the best field guides for one country in south-eastern Asia and is specially commendable because it was generated from within by Thailand's most prominent ornithologist. All names of birds are given in Thai as well as in English. It is hoped that it will stimulate the Thais to develop an awareness of, and an interest in, their remarkable avifauna, as well as a greater interest in the need to conserve natural resources. I commend this field guide to anyone interested in the birds of south-eastern Asia; and certainly one should have it before undertaking a trip to Thailand where (to quote the Introduction) 'the Argus Pheasant stalks the deep rain forest floor' and 'Malkohas and Trogons clamber silently through the middle levels, while the Fairy Bluebird calls from the canopy'.

C.C.K.

**Check-list of Japanese Birds** by The Ornithological Society of Japan, 1974. Tokyo: Gakken Co. Ltd, 2 vols: one in Japanese, pp x + 120; one in English, pp viii + 364. Locality map of Japan and her islands inside front covers. Boxed, 220 x 155 mm. 8,000 yen (about \$A20.50; available through International Division, Gakken Co. Ltd, 4-40-5, Kami-ikedai, Ohta-ku, Tokyo 145).

This is the fifth, and revised, edition of *A Handlist of the Japanese Birds* (first edition 1922) but the first *Check-list of Japanese Birds*. Besides Japan proper, the area covered includes the South Kuriles, the Ryukyus and Ogasawara (Bonins) and Iwo (Volcanos) Islands. It deals with eighteen orders, seventy families, 213 genera, 490 species and 626 species-and-subspecies. It follows the Wetmore sequence, so that those who possess Kobayashi's *Birds of Japan* (1956) will have to make adjustments.

It was prepared by a committee of ten members of the Ornithological Society of Japan, the final draft being entrusted to N. Kuroda (Non-Passerines), H. Morioka (Passerines) and K. Kobayashi. The Foreword is dated March 1974; so up to the minute is it that the Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* is recorded as 'rediscovered in Tokyo, Jan. 1974'. (Indeed, it is even ahead of its time: the type specimen of the buzzard *Buteo buteo oshiroi* is recorded as having fled from its owner's pen in 1978—the not the only thing to escape from a pen!)

This checklist is most attractively produced: two pocket-sized volumes in soft covers, one in Japanese and the other, a little more than three times as thick, in English. (The economic implications of this contrast, assuming each contains the same information, are interesting.) I suppose this arrangement is the result of enlightened self-interest, but just imagine if a companion volume of the Australian checklist had to be produced in Japanese or Indonesian; if there were as few apparent mistakes in it as R. De Lapp has allowed to slip past

his revisionary eye into the English version of this Japanese work, the editor might be content. Inevitably, there are some, e.g. 'unseparable' for 'inseparable'; 'Bear's Pochard' for 'Baer's'. That bird with the most romantic of names, the Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus* becomes an 'Antient Auk', but its cousins *Aethia* spp are 'Aucklets'. 'Footzone' is a term new to this reviewer, but one not difficult to interpret.

The publication of this work at this time is of particular interest to Australians, not only because Part I of the first official Australian checklist since 1926 will have appeared by the time this review is printed, but also because, early in 1974, an Agreement was signed between the Governments of Japan and Australia 'for the protection of migratory birds in danger of extinction and their environment'. This Agreement contains an Annex listing sixty birds, all of which appear on the lists of each country, though by no means all the birds that occur in both countries are listed in the Annex. Vernacular names are always sources of confusion and too often of acrimony. The Japanese list shows both American and English usage; of the English names that appear in the Annex, almost a quarter are different from any shown in the Japanese Checklist, from which one might infer that the Annex list was prepared by an Australian. Confusion might matter (because the birds count as game) among the snipe. The Pintail Snipe of Japan is *Gallinago stenura*, of the Annex *G. megala*, which is 'Swinehoe's Snipe' in Japan. The Japanese Snipe of the Annex is *G. hardwickii*, which is Latham's Snipe in Japan.

*Numenius madagascariensis* in the Checklist is Australian Curlew. How many readers, who have been puzzled by the specific name, know, as this Checklist tells us, that Madagascar was Linnaeus's mistake for Macassar? English nomenclature seems to be something in which tidying up is needed among the systematists. In this connexion, it is noticeable that the passerine section of the Checklist is sprinkled with more justificatory footnotes than the non-passerine section. Should we agree with the Japanese to call our Australian Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* Richard's Pipit?

Quite apart from its usefulness as a tool, one can browse through this book, constantly finding new pieces of information or questions to ask. Did you know that Japan has a honeyeater *Apolophteron familiare*? White's Thrush *Turdus dauma* is given a range to 'Australia, and Tasmania' and is clearly equated with the Australian Ground-thrush, currently known in Australia as *Zoothera dauma*. If it is the same species, why and how did this particular passerine get to Australia? Both Japanese and Australian checklists agree that the Caspian Plover is *Charadrius asiaticus*, but what in Japan is considered a Mongolian race of this species (*C. a. veredus*) is called in Australia the Mongolian Dotterel *C. veredus*. One could go on.

Finally, one notes that this excellent publication is 'printed by the GRANT IN AID of the MINISTRY of EDUCATION of JAPAN'. Governments vary.

T.R.G.

**Bird in the Hand** by H. J. de S. Disney and others, edited by S. G. Lane, 1974. Sydney: The Bird Banders' Association of Australia. Pp 130, col. pll 2, fully illustrated with b. & w. pll and line drawings. 265 x 215 mm. \$A4.00.

The series '*Bird in the Hand*', designed to facilitate identification, ageing and sexing of birds on external characters, has appeared regularly in *The Australian*

*Bird Bander* since 1963. This book, essentially a collection of the forty accounts of species and species-groups so far published, revised throughout, will be welcomed by all who have struggled with the identification of a hand-held bird, particularly one in immature or non-breeding plumage. Not only will it be invaluable to bird-banders but also to those who find dead and beach-washed specimens. It has been produced in the same format and on the same quality of paper as *The Australian Bird Bander*. This has allowed a very modest price. There is provision for adding future articles by trimming to a loose-leaf format, which is useful.

Because corrected copy was lost in the mail at a very late stage, some faults of the original articles have not been entirely eliminated. Doubts arise when facing pages are not headed. Page 14 shows wings and primary coverts opposite photographs of the small grebes. Only careful reading finds that the wings are those of the Stubble Quail described on previous pages. The same difficulty occurs on page 52 with a description of what turns out to be the Sacred Kingfisher opposite a drawing of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo.

The description of the Sacred Kingfisher is rather long-winded and could have been condensed. The first page deals with juvenile, then immature in first winter and summer, finally adult in winter and summer. This is followed by an account of plumages of each sex, age by age, which ought to be read in conjunction with the previous part. By integrating the two sections, repetition could have been avoided and greater clarity achieved. The account of the Grey Shrike-thrush covers similar ground but by including information about sexual dimorphism for each age class in turn, it is far clearer. Unfortunately the expression 'plumage phase' is used to describe a type of plumage characteristic of one sex at a given age in this species; in accounts of other species (e.g. Southern Giant-petrel, Masked Owl) it is used correctly to mean distinctive morphs. With the four *Tyto* species, it is not clear whether the summary refers

to the last one only (Sooty Owl *T. tenebriosa*) or to all four: it begins 'This dark brown owl . . .'.

The first section of the book deals with topography of the bird, colours and measurement. It is clear and explicit, but some of the terminology used later should have been included here. Pneumatization of the skull is referred to in the text but there is no explanation of what it is or how it is examined. The ratio of culmen to tarsus of shearwaters is not explained and may cause bewilderment. The terms 'juvenile' and 'immature' should have been clearly defined. At times these seem to be interchangeable, as with the Horsfield Bronze-cuckoo where the text refers to juvenile and the diagram to immature. Does gape refer to the flange of the gape or to the palate? This is not shown on the topographical diagram.

Excellent short summaries of diagnostic features are given for some species, but with a live bird in my hand I would prefer them at the beginning of the article rather than at the end. The identification of similar species has been well explained, particularly with near-impossibilities such as the prions. Another valuable section sorts out the hybrid pardalotes, guaranteed to cause perplexity to all who handle them. An example of succinct and adequate description is the single page covering the Magpie Lark.

The text is greatly enhanced by the liberal addition of line drawings and diagrams, but most of the black and white photographs could well have been omitted with considerable saving of space.

The publication of this book points out how little detailed knowledge is available in accessible form to the field worker. It is a most worthwhile venture on the part of the Bird Banders' Association of Australia and a book no field worker in the Australasian region can afford to be without. Any future edition would benefit from a more compact and durable form suitable for use in the field.

P.N.R.

## AUSTRALASIAN ORNITHOLOGY

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## FICTION

**Wild Goose, Brother Goose** by Mel Ellis, 1973. London: Robert Hale. Pp 159. 133 × 204 mm. \$A4.55.

It is unusual for a work of fiction to find its way to being reviewed in these columns. But it is surely legitimate for ornithologists to be concerned with all types of books about birds; how many members of the RAOU, I wonder, have read Paul Gallico's *The Snow Goose* (1946) and not been moved by it? Are we to be confined to the straitjacket of scientifically established fact? Or may the ornithologist be permitted, occasionally, to indulge himself as ornithophile?

Few other novels about birds have come my way, although I remember the thrill of first reading Fred Bodsworth's *The Last of the Curlews* (1956) fifteen years ago. In fact, surprisingly few novels of the sort where authors have attempted to understand and express the lives of animals in human terms seem to have been written about birds; I suspect they have been almost totally eclipsed by mammals. (Did Kipling write a single *Just So Story* about a bird?) A recent example which

has hit the list of best-sellers is Richard Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* (1970), but that belongs perhaps to a different genre from the type of book considered here.

So to this book: a small thing in itself, to be read in a couple of hours, enjoyed and put away. It is unpretentious in style, unabashedly but not offensively American in idiom and, although anthropomorphic, not to my mind beyond the limit of normal sensibility. Although probability is perhaps stretched rather extremely at times, the author skilfully paints in the annual calendar of Canada Geese in North America and gives the impression that he 'knows his bird'.

Ornithologists, especially those for whom the study of birds is a profession, should read books such as this occasionally. If they do not find a sympathetic emotional response, at least they will be reminded that what birds mean to many people is something very different from their significance to the scientist or, for that matter, to the hunter with camera or gun.

G.W.J.