

Book reviews

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE

By Penny Olsen

2005. Published by CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, Australia. 120 pp., 22 colour plates, 21 pencil drawings. Paperback, \$A39.95, ISBN 0-643-09165-3.

Since the 'Australian Natural History Series' transferred from New South Wales University Press to CSIRO in 2004, we have had *Magpie*, *Kookaburra* (both 2004) and *Heron*s (2005), all reviewed in the last few issues of *Emu*, *Corella* or *Australian Field Ornithology*. Most of these reviews have justifiably criticised, to varying degrees, the level of editorial diligence and care, so *Wedge-tailed Eagle* is an acid test of the publisher's attention to those reviews and its commitment to lifting its performance.

This book is a popularised, rather 'chatty' summary of scientific knowledge on the Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*). I share the author's surprise that it has not been done before for such an iconic species, given the recent monographs on the large *Aquila* eagles of other continents. But then, there hasn't been enough eagle research in Australia to fill a substantial monograph (again surprising, given the plight of the Tasmanian Wedge-tail and the need for comprehensive biological and ecological studies on it).

The books in this series have a highly individualised approach, rather than a rigid format. *Wedge-tailed Eagle* starts with a personal account ('Musings'), then proceeds with brief historical accounts of the eagle in Aboriginal culture and European settlers' perceptions. The next chapter places the Wedge-tail in the global context of the genus *Aquila* (in the recently expanded sense; see, for example, Debus 2005: *Boobook* 23, 4–5; Lerner and Mindell 2005: *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 37, 327–346). Hopefully, thanks to these chapters, we are now rid of the ridiculous folk-name 'eaglehawk', and the Wedge-tail becomes popularly and widely recognised as a true eagle.

Several short chapters follow on the Wedge-tail's distribution, habitat and movements; identification, morphology and voice; and its flight and sensory capacities. Two fairly detailed, though still short, chapters summarise aspects of the eagle's breeding cycle: territory and nest density, courtship, mate choice and fidelity, nests, laying season, breeding success, eggs, and chick growth to adulthood. A chapter on hunting and prey summarises regional dietary studies (though omitting that by Robertson 1987: *Emu* 87, 220–223, because *HANZAB* did so). The final chapter on threats covers the subjects of natural and unnatural mortality, persecution, and conservation.

The book finishes with a list of scientific names of species mentioned in the text, a very comprehensive bibliography (14 pp.), and a comprehensive index. There are about 50 scientific research papers (or two pages' worth of biblio-

graphic entries) on the eagle, so the other titles are mostly anecdotal notes and papers, but include a few little-known (non-scientific) monographs, several unpublished honours theses, and a few overseas publications on other *Aquila* species.

The colour photographs by Peter Merritt of eagles in various poses, along with the many (mostly full-page) sketches by Humphrey Price-Jones, and three historic monochrome photos, between them take up almost a third of this slim book's pages. The plates and cover photos present a comprehensive behavioural gallery, with age-related plumages. The sketches are mostly the artist's impressions of eagles doing their thing, but four usefully illustrate age-specific growth stages of chicks.

The book more than adequately summarises current knowledge on the eagle, and provides a valuable historical perspective too. It is definitely value for money, and eagle students will find Chapters 5 to 11 (and of course the bibliography) most helpful. Some highlights include the personal touches, historical quotes, sensitivity to indigenous people likely to view photographs of deceased persons, and the flagging of gaps in knowledge. Identified research needs include radio-tracking, individual marking, further taxonomic (including DNA) work on the Tasmanian subspecies, and survival of young to breeding status.

There are very few, inadvertent, lapses in accuracy. On p. 30 total length (85–105 cm) is accidentally given for tail length (which should be 35–48 cm), and the caption on p. 59 (bottom) contradicts the text on p. 37 regarding the function of wing slots (the caption should say 'increase lift' or '... stability', or 'reduce turbulence', not 'reduce lift'). The Little Eagle's loud calls, as in display, are hardly 'feeble'; records of Gurney's Eagle on the Australian mainland still require acceptable documentation. The author might have mentioned that the Bald, White-tailed and Philippine Eagles are also larger than the Wedge-tail, and the Imperial and Steppe Eagles are scarcely smaller. On the mainland, Wedge-tail nest-trees include various eucalypts. One could perhaps quibble, too, that surely no one calls the Whistling Kite a 'Whistling Eagle' anymore.

Editorial polish is another matter. One suspects that the author's original text was edited somewhat to fit the series' mould, and that the occasional clumsy sentence (and perhaps the caption on p. 59) is the result of editorial tampering. One such case of editorial carelessness is the last sentence on p. 85, which contradicts the author's original meaning: it should say 'the number of lambs taken rarely justifies the removal of eagles' (not 'recently justifies!'). It must be galling for the author to have her defence of eagles turned into seeming support for their control, and her audience misled into thinking that eagles are still 'removed' when restrictions on culling have been tightened.

In 65 text pages and a photo caption, I counted at least 37 examples of typographical errors, misspellings, duplicated or missing words, errant punctuation, capitalisations (or lack of), and incorrect homonyms ('straightened' for 'straitened', 'taught' for 'taut', 'draft' for 'draught'). That is, a flaw every couple of pages. And an unacceptable gaffe is the author's name misspelt on the book's spine. All these 'cosmetic' mistakes are symptomatic of slack proof-reading by publishing staff, careless cut-and-paste or other changes, and too much reliance on computer spell-check and autocorrect functions (which can miss errors or give an incorrect word or spelling). It seems that, with inexpensive (read 'unprofitable') books such as this series, publishers are not prepared to put in the effort required, even though there is no substitute for thorough proof-reading of hard copy. The publisher evidently has not taken sufficient note of similar criticism of other books in the series, and there is room for substantial improvement.

Scientifically, this very readable book is about as good a summary of the biology of the eagle as one could do within the constraints of the series, which is pitched at a lay audience, and of current published knowledge. A more detailed monograph on the Wedge-tail, equivalent to those on the Black, Golden or Spanish Imperial Eagles (see Debus 2004: *Boobook* 22, 14–15), remains to be done. Such will require further field research, publication of Tasmanian 'grey' literature and unpublished data, and publication of the many honours theses languishing these last few years. As to the series under the CSIRO banner, with more polish *Wedge-tailed Eagle* would be up there with *Kookaburra* as the best so far; one hopes that there is sufficient demand for *Wedge-tailed Eagle* to run a reprint with corrections in due course.

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ERNST MAYR AT 100: ORNITHOLOGIST AND NATURALIST

Edited by Walter J. Bock and M. Ross Lein
2005. Ornithological Monographs No. 58. Published by The American Ornithologists' Union. 108 pp. Paperback, \$US20, ISBN 0-943610-65-6.

This is a unique American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) monograph in that it is about the life of an ornithologist, the results of a symposium celebrating Mayr's 100th birthday, rather than about ornithology *per se*. But the late Professor Ernst Mayr (1904–2005) was truly a most exceptional ornithologist. Mayr's influence, spanning six decades, upon Australasian ornithology in general, and that of New Guinea and Northern Melanesia in particular, is profound. His influ-

ences upon biology and its history and philosophy, zoology, evolution, the biological species concept, and ornithology reach beyond any geographical limits. Many biologists see Mayr as the father of modern evolutionary studies.

The long working life and prolific publications of Ernst Mayr (including many in the present journal) are far too diverse and complex to detail or discuss here; and this is, in any event, partly the focus of the publication under review. A note by John Faaborg, editor of the AOU's monographs, precedes a single page *Introduction*, by W. J. Bock and M. R. Lein, and six substantial contributions as follows: *Ernst Mayr at 100: a life inside and outside ornithology*, by Walter J. Bock (15 pp.); *Ernst Mayr as a life-long naturalist*, by M. Ross Lein (13 pp.); *Ernst Mayr at the American Museum of Natural History*, by Mary LeCroy (20 pp.); *Ernst Mayr and Southwest Pacific birds: inspiration for ideas on speciation*, by Richard Schodde (8 pp.); *Ernst Mayr's biogeography: a lifetime of study*, by François Vuilleumier (15 pp.); and *Ernst Mayr – bibliography*, by Jürgen Haffer (36 pp.).

Amazingly, Mayr's bibliography consists of over 850 (yes eight hundred and fifty) publications (1923 to 2004) including some of the most influential books on evolution published. Clearly I cannot detail any significant part of such a veritable library of work but the following are some major publications of importance to Austral ornithology:

- Mayr, E. (1941). 'List of New Guinea Birds: A Systematic and Faunal List of the Birds of New Guinea and Adjacent Islands.' (American Museum of Natural History: New York.)
- Mayr, E. (1942). 'Systematics and the Origin of Species.' (Columbia University Press: New York.)
- Mayr, E. (1945). 'Birds of the Southwest Pacific: A Field Guide to the Birds of the Area between Samoa, New Caledonia, and Micronesia.' (Macmillan: New York.)
- Mayr, E. (1963). 'Animal Species and Evolution.' (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.)
- Mayr, E., and Diamond, J. M. (2001). 'The Birds of Northern Melanesia: Speciation, Ecology, and Biogeography.' (Oxford University Press: New York.)

There is also a number of taxonomic family accounts within volumes of the cornerstone Peter's *Check-list of Birds of the World*, various books about Darwin, Darwinism, speciation, biogeography, history and philosophy of biology, evolution, and numerous papers on the systematics of birds about the South Pacific, Melanesia, New Guinea and elsewhere.

Within this AOU bibliographical monograph there are 25 fascinating photographs of Mayr and/or colleagues, associated locations, buildings, vessels, etc., and several bird distribution maps from Mayr's publications. With it, attached to its inside front cover, is a DVD featuring a 25-minute videotaped interview with Mayr recorded shortly before his 100th birthday. It shows a sharp-minded man, looking and moving as one a deal younger than his years, clearly fascinated by and preoccupied with the wonders of nature and

evolutionary processes, summarising his career development and contributions.

I have often been surprised and disappointed to find many contemporary Australasian ornithology students completely or largely ignorant of Mayr and his works. This publication should therefore be in all Australasian university biology department libraries, if not readily to the hand of all biology lecturers and students seriously interested in evolution, avian speciation and taxonomy, the history and philosophy of biology and far more. Aside from being intrinsically useful to students of Austral ornithology the content of this publication is fascinating, instructive and highly stimulating in providing as good an example of a highly significant and productive life within biology as is imaginable.

Ornithologists are fortunate that the AOU saw fit to honour Mayr's 100th birthday with the symposium and this resulting publication. I encourage readers to support the AOU's valuable ornithological publishing by purchasing a copy of the present monograph for their institution and/or personal reference library: available from Buteo Books, 3130 Laurel Road, Shipman, VA 22971, USA at a modest \$US20 (\$18 to AOU members) plus \$5 shipping.

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BIRDS IN EUROPEAN CITIES

Edited by John G. Kelcey and Goetz Rheinwald
2005. Published by Ginster Verlag, St Katharinen, Germany.
450 pp., many black and white photographs, diagrams, graphs and maps. Hardback, €29.50, ISBN 3-9806817-2-6.

This is an impressive compilation from 23 expert local authors on the avifaunal communities of 16 European cities, in 11 countries, from Lisbon in the south-west to St Petersburg and Moscow in the north-east. The back cover has a map. The conclusion suggests that these are a representative sample of European cities, with two major gaps. The information is authoritative throughout. The text flows quite well, although reading the whole book gets repetitive. The format is a chapter per city, arranged alphabetically by city name. I feel this sequence is biologically, geographically, historically and culturally irrelevant and unimaginative. The book keeps to its title and stated intent. I suggest it may have been more useful to have more on the basis for the study, then the themes, rather than individually by city. The editors provide a compact introduction, conclusion and glossary that cover the main themes but these should have been much longer. Many issues are relevant to Australian cities and some of the species are the same. Australians may be intrigued to see the Musk Duck, Black Swan, Brahminy Kite, Cockatiel and Zebra Finch included.

The themes covered in varying detail for each city comprise geographic, geologic, cultural, legal and historical background, bird surveys, native or exotic plants, urban/rural gradients, how habitat features influence the number, diversity and abundance of bird species, birds of significance, and alien species. Each chapter has a list of good bird-watching sites and an Appendix list of bird species, either breeding there or present only. The latter give basic coded information about the status of each species but the codes differ between chapters. Thirteen of the 16 chapters include a reference list. These vary from short to several pages. The book is inconsistent as to whether these are cited in the text. Readers may be left wondering how the text detail relates to the references. Most of these references would be unavailable in Australia and many are not in English, so the book compiles much that would not otherwise be available here. As a total package, the depth of information is amazing. There are clear descriptions of how bird communities have changed with historical development or how species use particular habitats and how diversity varies in space and time. Information ranges from broad population trends, detailed statistical data, to almost intimate observations on biology of significant species. There are many case studies of well-studied species, stories that the authors thought worthy, even snippets of notable bird interactions. The text does not sequentially cover species. It describes how groups, such as raptors, ground birds, water birds, insectivores, seed eaters, hole-nesting species, exotic birds, etc. respond to historic or habitat features.

The only major flaw, that is hard to understand, is the absence of an index to citations of bird species or to themes. It does have Appendices, labelled as 'Index English – Scientific' (actually unnecessary as the Appendices for each chapter already provide this) and then an 'Index Scientific – English' (the same thing in reverse). Neither of these provides page numbers. A proper index would be worth the extra pages. Some widespread common species may be mentioned on over 100 pages. One cannot efficiently locate any of the information, about any species, individually, by taxonomic group or location. One can only find all the text for any species by reading the entire book. The table of breeding species may marginally assist by locating the city (hence the chapter) in which a species may be mentioned (if it breeds there). Equally annoying is that each chapter's appendix, the table of breeding species and the 'Index English – Scientific' are all sequenced alphabetically by English first name. The Introduction states that the editors 'decided to use this sequence to make it easier for non-expert ornithologists to use the book'. It isn't. As this is not a beginner's bird book its readers should be comfortable with basic taxonomic concepts. In every other aspect the book presents as a serious contribution to a developing field of ornithology. Thus it is easy to tally the useless fact that out of the 327 species listed, these European cities have 18 species whose name starts with 'Black' and 15 with 'Great'.

But there is no easy way to find how many species of ducks, raptors, owls, finches, etc. occur (apart from Valencia and Vienna, being the only chapters with a list showing this information).

There is a modest sprinkling of minor spelling, typing and word use errors but these hardly detract from the information. Considering the first language of most authors is not English and that several chapters needed translation, the result is quite impressive. Some cross-referencing of tables, maps and figures to text could be clearer.

The question arises as to whether we could do the same for major Australian cities: probably only Canberra has the published basis. This being the trio of books: Taylor, M. and Canberra Ornithologists Group (1992) *Birds of the ACT: an Atlas*, for the regional context; Wilson, S. (1999) *Birds of the ACT: two centuries of change*, for the history; and Veerman, P. A. (2003) *Canberra Birds: A Report on the first 21 years of the Garden Bird Survey*, for the continuous detailed study of this suburban avifauna over a long period.

This probably unique book is a historically valuable compendium of how bird communities cope and adapt to our metropolises. With room for editorial improvement, it is a superb example of how such information should be collected and issued. Australian cities have less history than European ones but their avifaunas show signs of continuing change. This book is an overdue, important contributor to conservation and offers valuable data and insights for contemporary and future students of birds in cities.

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THE BIRD ATLAS OF UGANDA

By Margaret Carswell, Derek Pomeroy, Jake Reynolds and Herbert Tushabe

2005. Published by the British Ornithologists' Club and British Ornithologists' Union, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford, UK. 553 pp., 11 tables, 19 figures. Hardback, £55, ISBN 0-9522866-4-8.

This is a well and attractively bound volume, decorated on front and spine with artwork of a Shoebill (*Balaeniceps rex*) and on the back with a colour photograph of Ross's Turaco (*Musophaga rossea*). The 57-page *Introduction* consists of: 1 *The environment of Uganda* (17 pp.); 2 *A brief history of ornithology in Uganda* (2 pp.); 3 *An overview of Uganda's birds* (6 pp.; dealing with numbers, migrants and residents, forest birds, waterbirds, birds of conservation concern, conclusion); 4 *Planning for bird conservation in Uganda* (11 pp.); 5 *Bird atlases* (3 pp.); and 6 *The bird atlas of Uganda* (18 pp.). Each of these sections has several to many subheadings, including interesting

topics like 1.3 *Seasonality* (of breeding by birds), 1.6 *Human impacts on the natural environment*, 3.5 *Birds of conservation concern*, 4.2 *Endemic bird areas and important bird areas*, 4.3 *Birds as surrogates for biodiversity*, 5.1 *Types of atlas and their uses*, 6.5 *Prediction of habitat suitability*, and 6.7 *Distribution changes*. It would have been helpful to have these subheadings and their pagination listed in the *Contents*.

The book includes maps for all 822 species with five or more records ('waterbirds' were excluded because most 'have linear distributions...' resulting in patterns not 'captured by the variables' at the authors' disposal). An interesting aspect of this atlas is that, because the distribution of actual records of birds was so patchy in space and time 'owing to sporadic insecurity and/or comparative remoteness' a method of predicting bird species range was applied to data sets. Point records (i.e. confirmed localities, almost entirely from the 1990s) and older ones (mostly made during 1891–1989) are clearly differentiated on maps and, significantly, grey shading indicates areas of 'potentially suitable habitat, based upon point records'.

Pleasingly, the endpapers feature a good map of 'Uganda: basic geographic features' and a 'Political map of Uganda ...'. In addition, there are five appendices (*Additions to the Uganda list since January 2000*; *Species whose occurrence in Uganda is poorly documented*; *Species for which published records are considered to be erroneous*; *Estimates of bird populations for the whole of Uganda*; and *Scientific names of species of plants and animals*), an *Atlas gazetteer for Uganda places*, a *Bibliography and references* (18 pp. of compact small type), and an *Index* to both English (6 pp.) and to scientific (12 pp.) bird names.

A basic map (7.5 × 7.0 cm) of Uganda (typically two per page) is dedicated to each of the vast majority of species. In addition to a common and scientific species' name heading there is, where applicable, an abbreviated indication of 'category of threat' and status (e.g. resident breeder, migrant breeder, occasional winter visitor, plus 13 other categories). A brief adjacent text includes information on subspecies in Uganda and their distribution and breeding status: seasonality of migration and breeding are detailed, habitats noted, and relative abundance subjectively assessed.

This finely produced and printed publication will be invaluable to anyone interested in the avifauna of Uganda (a well illustrated field guide incorporating the content of its maps would be the ultimate field tool) and in bird atlas work anywhere. Congratulations to all authors and contributors and to the BOC and BOU for continuing to sponsor and produce such publications.

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**CSIRO LIST OF AUSTRALIAN VERTEBRATES: A
REFERENCE WITH CONSERVATION STATUS**

By Mark Clayton, John C. Wombey, Ian J. Mason, R. Terry Chesser and Alice Wells

2006. Published by CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, Australia. 162 pp., mostly tables. Paperback, \$A59.95, ISBN 0-643-09075-4.

Mark Clayton and his associates at CSIRO have revised a list of Australian vertebrates first published by CSIRO seven years earlier. They claim that the first edition set the standard for 'government agencies, NGOs, scientists' etc., but that this needs updating because of changes in taxonomy. For readers of the *Emu* so long accustomed to the taxonomy of Christidis and Boles (1994, *Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union Monograph* 2, 1–112), such claims seem odd. Not only is this standard taxonomy not referred to but the taxonomic work of Christidis, Boles and their colleagues is entirely ignored. Similarly distributional data is taken not from the latest Atlas of Australian Birds but from HANZAB, which itself draws on the first Atlas data collected a quarter of a century earlier. The CSIRO scientists who have authored this book have made great contributions to Australian science over the years. On the basis of this list, however, they seem curiously selective of knowledge they will accept from others.

Given this idiosyncratic approach to producing a national standard, it is perhaps more sensible to think of reviewing this book for its internal consistency. For birds, the start is inauspicious. Although the authors admit great reluctance in including undescribed taxa, the very first subspecies they list, 'Southern Cassowary (*Casuarus casuarus* subsp. (Cape York Peninsula))', has never before been recognised as taxonomically distinct from *C. c. johnsonii* of the Wet Tropics. But this book cites the collection of no specimen, the analysis of no genetic material nor the publication of any revision, peer-reviewed or otherwise. Even under Queensland legislation the Cape York cassowaries are listed only as belonging to a separate population. However, the authors are not consistent: the officially endangered population of Glossy Black-Cockatoos in the Riverina is not mentioned. Skipping to the back, the final list is of additions to the Australian fauna not including vagrants or accidental

visitors. Among them is the South Island Pied Oystercatcher, which appears to have been seen just three times in Australian territory. The Northern Shoveller, seen more often, remains a vagrant (as it should). In between, the authors have accepted Dickinson's (2003 (Ed.) *The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of Birds of the World*. 3rd ed. Christopher Helm, London) extremely conservative approach to albatross taxonomy but adopted Schodde and Mason's (1999. *The Directory of Australian Birds: Passerines*. CSIRO, Melbourne) splitting of the Crested Shrike-tit, accepted the Capricorn white-eye as a separate species with little evidence but, despite convincing documentation to the contrary, kept the Lesser Sooty Owl. These inconsistencies with the literature would not have mattered, or possibly not occurred, had there been sufficient independent peer-review of the list, acknowledgement of debate and justification of controversial decisions. Once CSIRO was authority enough for a list like this to be adopted uncritically. It is no longer.

The book also includes the status of each taxon in each jurisdiction. In California a large computer daily downloads the entire world wide web as a record for posterity. In some ways this book has done the same, capturing the fleeting opinions of Australian jurisdictions in June 2005. Sadly, with regards to birds, the book is already out of date and will rapidly become more so. Legislation is necessarily slow to respond to biological change, given the level of certainty needed to sustain legal challenge to status determinations, but a year never passes without changes occurring. Similarly the IUCN status, which is based on biology, is now changed annually as a way of monitoring conservation performance. For this information reference to the web will be essential to confirm whatever is in a book like this.

Both this book's taxonomy and the status summary would be curious historical asides of little scientific merit except that they confuse the process of conservation as managers try to decide which entities are worth investing in. Changes in taxonomy are inevitable but need to be fully justified if they are not to confuse, irritate and finally alienate the public and those who allocate taxes to conservation management.

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