

Identify Them, Hobart, Oldham, Beddome & Meredith Pty. Ltd., 1945, price 4/6. No other substantial book confined to one State's birds has appeared, though Leach's *An Australian Bird Book* was, despite its title, really a text-book of Victorian birds. Like Belcher's *Birds of Geelong*, even more limited in area, there is much of 'extra-territorial' interest in the volume under review and bird observers will doubtless pick up a number of pointers from Sharland's pertinent notes.

The author has both written the text and supplied the illustrations. He has presented each bird in a series of paragraphs that cover names, measurements, the most obvious feature or characteristic (an important innovation that presents the bird from a 'homogeneous' point of view—the 'first impression' as it were), detailed description, habits and food, nest and eggs, and general notes. The booklet is of the very essence of compactness, with nothing superfluous.

There is naught to attract adverse comment and very little to require even constructive criticism. The fact that this reviewer feels he can scarcely ascribe to some birds' notes the same 'human' phonetics as the author, is probably only a reflection of variation in calls in different districts. A regret that the name Tailor-bird is encouraged for *Cisticola exilis*, which sometimes, only, haphazardly 'sews' leaves together, is also entirely a personal opinion. The Banded Stilt is known to appear, occasionally, in southern Victoria, but not to breed there, as claimed.

A book that gathers so much together in a mere 117 pages cannot, of course, contain much that is new for the seasoned bird-observer, but there are hosts of Gould Leaguers and boy scouts, of bush tramps and beginners at natural history. To them the volume will be a boon—it will slip into pocket or pack easily, the type is large, the style is clear. The cover is, of necessity no doubt, somewhat insubstantial—ours has come apart consequent upon a perusal for this review.

We hope that others of our members will look to the laurels of their own States and emulate Mr. Sharland's laudable lead.—C.E.B.

Correspondence

TERRITORY AND BIRD SONG

To the Editor,

Sir,

Mr. Angus Robinson, in his useful discussion of 'Territory and the Breeding Cycle' (*Emu*, 45, pp. 100-108), has allowed his interest in a provocative aspect of ornithology to entice him into a somewhat sectional attitude of mind. It is well, of course, to emphasize the importance of the territorial urge as a factor governing bird behaviour, but the prudent observer, I suggest, will avoid having his perspective blurred in any degree by the revivalistic fervour of certain writers overseas.

Portion of a review of a book by E. M. Nicholson, which I wrote in *The Emu* eighteen years ago, is quoted by Mr. Robinson to illustrate what he regards as a 'mistaken' conception of the time, and, the point having been used to demonstrate Australian shortsightedness, I am excused on the ground that my views probably have long since changed. As a fact, however, nothing has developed to cause my

views to change. They remain largely as they were in pre-Howardian days.

The truth is that some of us in this country, watching birds defend nesting-areas from others of their kind, became vaguely aware of a territorial principle of some kind long before Eliot Howard and kindred observers devoted close study to the subject. The writings of those workers clarified and extended our ideas, but they did not dispel the belief that, in certain instances, birds sing or call for other than severely practical purposes. We waited in vain for some keen 'territorian' to relate his convictions to whisper songs, to explain away vocal mimicry on a utilitarian basis, and/or to dispose territorially of autumnal singing by 'holiday-making' birds.

As for what I said in reviewing Nicholson's book (and, by the way, I published Nicholson's reply, from a private letter, in order to give both sides of the question), in taking a couple of selected sentences from their context Mr. Robinson has overlooked the fact that I also wrote this—"No one denies now the powerful influence of territory on bird-life, but in examining this influence it is not wise to subordinate unduly the fact that we are dealing with creatures compact of nervous energy, which may not 'have sense of why they sing,' but which certainly do joy in their singing. . . ." Odd as it may seem, Nicholson himself went much further than that when faced with the problem of vocal mimicry; abandoning then his rigid adherence to the territory-and-song creed, he not only credited birds with *enjoying* mimetic notes for their associations as much as for their sounds, but actually postulated that the mimicry enables the birds to 'recall' past pleasures.

Similar fluctuation occurs in the Robinson article, as for example in the suggestion that an "extra volume of song" on the part of a Rufous Whistler is "no doubt an outlet for his pent-up emotions rather than a 'distance threat' or an advertisement of territory." Expression of 'pent-up emotions' tallies with what I termed 'joyous carolling.' Surely, then, the statements of mine which Mr. Robinson regards as 'mistaken' merely resolve into more or less intelligent anticipation of his own views!

Leaving the matter of territory, I should like to say that whilst I agree with Mr. Robinson that "to get the most out of their observations observers must read everything available on the work being carried out overseas," I think that advice of the kind is most needed by some of our colleagues in other countries, too many of whom, when writing on ornithological subjects of international significance, consistently neglect *The Emu* and other Australian publications. Stuart Baker's recent book on cuckoos fails badly to do justice to what has been written on the subject

here. Certain other bird-books produced in Britain are ill-informed, when they are not merely silly, in their references to Australian birds. Moreover, I have had occasion to write to both *The Ibis* (twice) and *The Auk* correcting statements that would never have been made if their authors had taken the trouble to glance through the pages of *The Emu* and/or through a few books written in this country.

But, alas, we ourselves are not without sin in this matter, for some of us, while quoting from writers abroad, overlook material observations and theories born of the Australian earth. Angus Robinson is mildly guilty in this regard. So, in the same issue of *The Emu*, is my old friend, G. R. Gannon, who in his suggestive article on 'The Nature of Bird Activities' cites observations from other countries that could have been improved upon by references made in Australia. Incidentally, I too have recently fallen into a sin of omission, for when recording the feeding of a young Pallid Cuckoo by a House Sparrow, and stating that I knew of no other instance of an introduced bird's fostering a parasitic species, I altogether forgot that Norman Chaffer had recorded a Bulbul/Cuckoo association in the previous issue of *The Emu*.

The moral of all this appears to be that ornithological study should begin at home and extend to every available source. Given such a foundation, broad-based and well-balanced, we may perhaps accomplish work that will serve as a healthy example, causing even the most insular of ornithologists overseas to awake to the fact that they cannot afford to neglect Australia.

Melbourne,

Yours, etc.,

October 30, 1945.

A. H. CHISHOLM.

Obituary

A. F. BASSET HULL

Arthur Francis Basset Hull, who died at Manly, Sydney, on September 22, 1945, at the age of 83 years, was a philatelist with a world-wide reputation and an ornithologist of note. He published books on the stamps of Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland and was the recipient of many philatelic honours.

His interests in natural sciences embraced oology, conchology (specializing in Loricates), and ornithology. He was a member of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union from 1906 to 1924 and President during 1919-1920. He contributed a number of important papers to *The Emu*. His investigations brought to light much interesting information relating to the distribution and breeding of sea-birds occurring in the coastal waters of New South Wales; he