

## Obituary

H. C. THOMPSON

Hubert Charles Thompson died at his home in Launceston, Tasmania, on June 26, 1953, at the age of 84 years. He was a foundation member of the Union and an honorary (life) member.

Mr. Thompson was born in Tasmania and resided there all his life. He evinced an early interest in birds and retained it until his death. He procured a number of photographs of Tasmanian birds, of which a score or more illustrate F. M. Littler's *A Handbook of the Birds of Tasmania*. He was a contemporary and correspondent of Dudley Le Souef and A. H. Mattingley. To *The Emu* he contributed some photographs and short notes, mainly to the early volumes.—C.E.B.

## Reviews

**Taxonomic Notes on Australian Bower-birds and Catbirds.**—It is probable that Australian representatives of the family Ptilonorhynchidae are studied in the field more than those of any other group of our avifauna. Nevertheless, a good deal remains to be known of their systematic relationships. This is indicated in 'Geographic Variation and Plumages in Australian Bowerbirds (Ptilonorhynchidae)', by Ernst Mayr and Kate Jennings (*Am. Mus. Nov.*, no. 1602, December 12, 1952, pp. 1-18), wherein the authors state that "it is surprising how little is known about the taxonomy of the Australian species." Records in existing literature are regarded as woefully inadequate, and a study of individual variation, of the sequence of plumages, and of measurements is badly needed.

The arrangement is in *Checklist* order, with interesting discussion on the validity or otherwise of the various described geographical races, a few of which are regarded in the *Checklist* as species. The two catbirds (*Ailuroides*) are considered conspecific, as would be expected, and are regarded as the only valid races. However, the authors say that the only two accepted subspecies are "quite different from each other", but they believe that their essential similarity, agreement of habits, and basic difference from *A. buccoides* of New Guinea, the only other species of the genus, makes it evident that they must be considered conspecific, despite a wide range gap in central Queensland.

*Scenopæetes dentirostris* and *Prionodura newtoniana* remain undivided, as would be expected because of their limited distribution. The smaller Satin Bower-bird of the Cairns area, *minor*, is a good race of *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*, and *rothschildi* from the Blackall and Bunya Mountains in Queensland is a distinguishable race of *Sericulus chrysocephalus*.

The remaining genus, *Chlamydera*, occupies more than half the paper. In *C. cerviniventris*, the Cape York birds are regarded as indistinguishable from those of New Guinea, and the species is undivided. Four subspecies are 'acceptable' in *C. nuchalis*—*oweni*, *orientalis* and *yorki*, a new subspecies found in Cape York and the adjacent parts of north Queensland, as well as the nominate race. The Western Bower-bird (*C. guttata*) is made a form of *C. maculata*, and other described forms with this species are placed into synonymy. However, it is stated that there is a conspicuous difference between

*guttata* and *maculata* (and this is supported by an interesting comparative table showing six noticeable differences), and in the Summary it is written that "further work may show that *guttata* has reached species level." Although it is fairly certain that the respective ranges of these two forms never meet, it might be queried that they are separated by 400 to 500 miles as stated. It is claimed that there is no indication of intergradation. Although egg pattern is not included in the tabulated differences, oologists aver that the eggs of *guttata* and *maculata* are noticeably and consistently different.—A.R.M.

**The Extinct Birds of the Mascarene Islands.**—*The Dodo and Kindred Birds*, by the Marquess Hachisuka, sub-title as in the heading, London, H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd., 250 pp., price £6 stg., is a fine book in every sense. It is limited to 485 copies, has eleven colour plates, eleven halftones, and numerous text blocks, and is a well-bound example of modern book production.

Strickland and Melville's *The Dodo and its Kindred* collated much of the writings of the earlier voyagers concerning the *Didus ineptus*, and most of us considered it a 'book of authority' on the subject. Hachisuka presents the same, and much additional, material, including a number of plates, in attractive fashion. Who, by the way, is responsible for the colour plates?

The systematic list of the extinct birds of the islands—Mauritius, Réunion and Rodriquez—includes four of the Dodo type, a grebe, ducks, owls, herons and rails, pigeons, parrots, starlings and the Réunion Fody. There were two Dodos—the 'common' Grey (*Raphus cucullatus*) and the White (*Victoriornis imperialis*), and two Solitaires—those of Réunion and of Rodriquez. The evidence for the White Dodo is limited to the accounts of two voyagers—Tatton (1625) and Bontekoe (1646)—and three 17th century aquarelles; Hachisuka goes to some considerable pains to establish the Réunion Solitaire which Strickland and later writers included with the Grey Dodo.

About one half of the present work is devoted to the remaining extinct island birds. Many of these are founded on bones—often scanty material. Of some of these—as with *Victoriornis imperialis*—Marquess Hachisuka is the scientific name author. The Giant Waterhen, a white bird, with red legs and bill, is said to have been "the largest bird that ever existed outside the Ostrich tribe, standing six feet high". Some of the extinct birds have been queried by earlier writers or assigned to 'rational' species (this one, for example, was considered a Flamingo) but Hachisuka gives reasoned statements for his findings.

Text blocks, chiefly reproductions of early charts and drawings, enhance the work, and there is an extensive Introduction containing geographical and other material which launches the bird descriptions very well. The Bibliography is extensive. An interesting reference is to *The Isle of Pines*, known from a single copy in the British Museum. It refers to Mauritius and deals with some of the island's natural products, including the Dodo. Hachisuka says that the contents have never been examined or published, but Walter de la Mare refers to it in his *Desert Islands* (1930), where, incidentally, he stated that, following Mr. Pine's 'marriage' to all four shipwrecked women, the consequent progeny was a "depressing manifestation of man's rivalry with the rabbit."—C.E.B.

**Western Australian Fauna.**—This publication of the Periodicals Division of Western Australian Newspapers Ltd. deals largely with birds and must, from its nature, prove attractive and thus be useful in further developing general interest in natural history. Photographs are largely by S. R. White and V. N. Serventy, and the latter

provides a pertinent foreword. The cover photograph is an attempt to improve on nature by creating a 'composite' picture. Price 3/- (plus postage 3d.)—C.E.B.

**Guide to Authors.**—This publication of the C.S.I.R.O., August 1953, appeals to us in that so much is in agreement with what has so often been urged, but seldom adopted, as 'rules' for *Emu* contributions. Unfortunately such publications are often not required by those who see them and not received by those who need them. Whilst intended for use by contributors to C.S.I.R.O. publications, much of the contents is of general application.—C.E.B.

**Ornithological Illustration.**—Ornithologists interested in the artistic side of bird study will find an interesting thumb-nail history of ornithological illustration and the various motives behind birds in art from Palaeolithic rock paintings to the twentieth century in an article by W. B. Alexander, M.A., *Endeavour*, July 1953, pp. 144-153.

Audubon, Wolf, Millais, Thorburn, Fuertes, Brooks and Liljefors represent the final achievement, and all are discussed. The thirteen coloured plates from the works of various artists are an excellent and leading feature. The theme of the author, whose ornithological prestige is well known, is not that of the art critic, but includes thoughtful and pertinent comments from the artistic viewpoint.—A.MCE.

**Western Australian Ornithology.**—In vol. 4, no. 1, of the *Western Australian Naturalist* (June 1953) E. H. Sedgwick gives an annotated list of the birds of the Caron district, about 170 miles north of Perth, where he was stationed in 1947 and 1948. Altogether 76 species were observed. In the same number D. N. Calderwood has brief notes on the land-birds of Garden Island and the effect on birds of an intense heat wave. G. M. Storr lists the birds encountered at Yoting during a summer visit, and J. H. Calaby describes unusually large aggregations of Whistling Eagles (up to 95 birds) and other birds, due, presumably, to local abundance of food on drying-off swamps. Attention is drawn to the deceptive similarity on such occasions of flocks of Whistling Eagles to those of Black Kites.

A notable item in vol. 4, no. 2 (September 1953), is the first record of the Dollar Bird south of the Kimberley Division; J. H. Calaby observed a bird at Winning Pool, attributing it to the irruption which has brought so many northern species to the south recently. Calaby has another note on the occurrence of Bourke and Alexandra Parrots in Western Australia. Angus Robinson reports the second record of the Little Whimbrel in the South-west, and P. Slater refers to a small party of Black-tailed Godwits visiting a dam at Kalgoorlie. Rica Erickson gives a lengthy obituary of Oswald Hewlett Sargent, a Western Australian botanist, who contributed a paper on bird pollination to the *Emu*, vol. 27, and published earlier studies on the same subject.—D.L.S.

**Checklist of New Zealand Birds.**—Under this title the Ornithological Society of New Zealand has published (June, 1953; price 7/6) a new and authoritative list of 80 pages which also covers the birds of the outlying islands of Raoul, Kermadec, Chatham, Bounty, Antipodes, Snares, Auckland, Campbell, Macquarie and others. The work, prepared by a committee with C. A. Fleming as convener, lists 336 forms under serial numbers, which include 41 introduced birds and 71 geographical races—an arrangement which actually treats 265 species. Of these 153 are on the Australian List, eight being introductions.

The classification of non-passerine families follows Peters (1931-1948), but passerine families are arranged as in Mayr's *New Guinea*

*Birds* (1941), whilst the Muscicapidae are subdivided according to Mayr and Amadon (*Amer. Mus. Novit.*, no. 1496, 1951).

Fashions change in all fields of human endeavour, and the present List recalls the general format and plan adopted in the latest British List, which has probably set the style of future checklists for years to come. Although an *ideal* checklist should contain a full synonymy, printing costs and perhaps some unwieldiness are sufficient excuse for recent departures from the ideal, and, as pointed out by the present authors, a complete synonymy is available in Mathews' *List of the Birds of Australasia* (1931). Nevertheless, it is felt that the omission of original references and type localities is a fairly serious one and a criticism which is met by the British List.

Commendable innovations in the List which are rarely met with in checklists are the numerous explanatory paragraphs on taxonomic and nomenclatural questions, occurrence, and introduced species. Much attention also appears to have been given to the adoption of vernacular names, and whilst we are inclined to agree with their use in the case of well-marked subspecies (in some instances such a course is inescapable), the allocation of a separate number to each form is confusing, and the system employed by Whittell and Serventy in their *Birds of Western Australia* (1948) is to be preferred. Care is evident in the compilation of data regarding the distribution of each form, although one 'slip' noticed concerns the Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus grieseus*). This bird is stated to breed in 'Bass Strait (rare)', but, as recently recorded by McGill and Keast (*Emu*, 47, p. 199), it has only been reported from Broughton and Lion Islands, New South Wales and Tasman Island, Tasmania.

The work should prove of exceptional interest to Australian ornithologists because more than one half of the species listed are found in Australia and there are numerous nomenclatural and taxonomic innovations. For instance, the Royal Penguin (*Eudyptes schlegeli*) is regarded as a race of the Macaroni Penguin (*chrysolophus*) and this appears to be a reasonable proposal, although not so treated by any other authority. Three races are allotted to the 'Thick-billed' Penguin (*E. pachyrhynchus*), including *sclateri*, the 'Big-crested' Penguin of the Australian List. 'Rockhopper Penguin' is the name adopted for *E. crestatus*, and *E. p. pachyrhynchus* becomes the 'New Zealand Crested Penguin' and *sclateri* the 'Erect-crested Penguin'. All these vernacular names seem most appropriate. The Silver-grey Petrel (*Pterodroma antarctica*) of the R.A.O.U. Checklist is given as Silver-grey Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*), the authors regarding Stephens' name *antarcticus* as indeterminable, whilst following Mathews (1948) and Voous (1949) in the adoption of *Fulmarus*. *Puffinus gavia huttoni* of southern Australian seas is given as 'Hutton's Shearwater', the name 'Fluttering Shearwater' being reserved for the nominate race. This is an example of the difficulties met with when coining names for subspecies. In Australia, the race *huttoni* is known as the Fluttering Shearwater, and it would have been a simple matter to add some qualifying or descriptive word such as 'Hutton's', 'Southern', or 'Australian'. The dilemma of the authors will be appreciated. Should they employ an extremely cumbersome appellation which would probably never gain popular usage, even though appropriate, or should they take a less practical viewpoint and introduce a concise, pleasant-sounding name for a bird which in any event could not be identified with certainty in the field? Perusal of the section on the Procellariiformes will reveal other similar problems, some of which have been satisfactorily solved, others less so, and objections could be raised to the use of such names as 'Snowy Albatross', 'Lesser Broad-billed Prion' (for *salvini salvini*) and 'Pycroft's Petrel'. The last-named (*Pterodroma longirostris pycrofti*) seems to be no more than a race of a bird generally known as the

'Japanese Petrel' or 'Stejneger's Petrel'; outside New Zealand the name 'Pycroft's Petrel' merely contributes to ornithological verbiage. Whilst we feel the name 'Flesh-footed Petrel' is an improvement, a qualifying term such as 'Eastern' or 'Large-billed' should have been applied, the nominate and smaller-billed race being restricted during the breeding season to islands off south-western Australia. *Procellaria westlandica* Falla 1946 is treated as a full species, and the scientific name of the Kerguelen Petrel (*Pterodroma brevirostris*) follows present usage.

The genera *Microcarbo*, *Demigretta* and *Hypotaenidia*, which are still employed in the Australian Checklist, have been dropped in favour of *Phalacrocorax*, *Egretta* and *Rallus*, while *Calidris* replaces *Erolia* (and *Crocethia*) and *Charadrius* replaces *Squatarola* and *Pluvialis*, all changes which it is anticipated will shortly be made by the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee. The extinct New Zealand Quail is regarded as a race of the Australian Stubble Quail, in which case the specific name of the last-named would become *Coturnix novae-zealandiae* Quoy and Gaimard 1830.

Numerous stragglers from the Australian mainland are listed, including the Darter, White-necked Heron, Little Egret, Little Bittern, White Ibis, Maned Goose, Swamp Harrier, Nankeen Kestrel, Silver Gull, Crested Tern, Oriental and Pallid Cuckoos, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Welcome Swallow, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, and perhaps others. Some of these are based on one or two sight records. The use of the name '*novaeguineae*' for the Kookaburra will probably not meet with general approval amongst Australian workers who now regard the question of its rejection in favour of *gigas* as settled.

Despite the numerous minor criticisms which have been levelled at the work in the foregoing, this publication can be recommended to ornithologists everywhere. It is nicely produced, employs clear type, and has a useful table of contents, comprehensive index of scientific and common names, three excellent maps, and a concise introduction which should enable any reader to use the List intelligently.—H.T.C.

**Custody of Type Specimens.**—P. B. Carne, of the Division of Entomology of the C.S.I.R.O., has reviewed this contentious problem from the point of view of entomological workers ('The Problem of Type Distribution in Australian Entomology', *The Austr. J. of Science*, vol. 15, Feb. 1953, pp. 109-112), but some of his remarks are of interest to ornithologists. He points out that in fields like ornithology the type specimen has lost its old value, not entirely for the reason he gives, but because topotypical material is usually quite serviceable, and often better, for taxonomic work. With insects and other invertebrate groups, types are still of paramount importance, and Carne enumerates a number of corrective measures for ensuring their better availability to Australian workers. He warns against one method, however, which has found some favour in the past among certain Australian ornithologists, and his remarks are worth repeating: "There appears to be a minority amongst Australian biologists which, in its endeavours to prevent type-dispersion, favours control by legislative means. This would include making the return of types a condition of entry to Australia by such [*i.e.* overseas] expeditions. The majority, including the writer, are antipathetic towards such a control, which, it is felt, constitutes a form of 'piracy' upon the initiative of others . . . in general it is extremely probable that any legislative control of this type would lead to innumerable difficulties, quite apart from its very undesirable flavour of scientific nationalism."—D.L.S.

The date of publication was December 20, 1953.