

## Obituary

MR. A. M. SULLIVAN

Albert Michael (Bert) Sullivan died in Melbourne on May 31, 1961, at the age of 77 years. A native of Maryborough, Vic., he joined the State teaching service at an early age, and along the years his appointments included schools as far apart as eastern Gippsland and the north-western Mallee. He retired from the service as headmaster of a school at Bendigo.

Bert Sullivan was very sturdy in physique, and when a young man gained distinction as an amateur boxer and oarsman. He enlisted in the A.I.F. in 1914 and served on Gallipoli, where he sustained wounds that resulted, after a long series of operations, in the loss of his right arm. However, that handicap did not dampen either his zeal for teaching or his natural cheerfulness; nor did it prevent him from driving a motor car, even in city traffic.

From early youth "Sull" was interested in birds, and during many years he communicated that interest to the large numbers of children who came under his care. As a member of the R.A.O.U., he wrote in 1911 a breezy and informative article entitled "Some Mallee Birds" (*Emu*, vol. 11, pp. 114-119), and doubtless he would have written more, in later years, but for the loss of his arm. He did, however, contribute to the *Bendigo Advertiser*, in 1939-40, a very readable series of notes under the title "Birds of Bendigo". It became evident from these jottings that his particular favourites were the Crested Bellbird and the Grey-crowned and White-browed Babblers, all three of them possessors of very distinctive voices.

The son and two daughters of our late colleague (who was a widower at his death) have the consolation of knowing that he gave his country sound service, both in peace and war, and that his healthy influence, like that of all good teachers, is certain to have endured.

— A.H.C.

## Reviews

**The Romance of the Lyrebird**, by A. H. Chisholm, 1960, xii and 156 pp., one coloured and numerous black-and-white ill., Angus and Robertson, 27/6d.

As always, Mr. Chisholm has produced a very informative, and at the same time a very readable book, which covers the history of the discovery of this remarkable bird. It is obvious that much research has gone into tracing back the many mis-statements which occurred and were re-copied in the early reports. The latter part of the book outlines the general life story of *Menura*, and tells something of more recent work on the species.

A list of selected references, dating from 1798 to 1959, is a valuable part of the book. Illustrations of early drawings, photographs illustrating the life history of the bird, and a map showing the distribution of *superba*, *alberti*, and *edwardi*, complete a comprehensive and popular review of the Lyrebird.

This book provides valuable background material for the ornithologist, and should also excite the interest of the general reader.

—I.M.W.

**Comparative Breeding Behaviour of Four Species of North American Herons**, by Andrew J. Meyerriecks, 1960, viii and 158 pp., 15 pls. and numerous line drawings, Nuttall Orn. Club, Mass., U.S.A., publ. No. 2.

The past decade has been distinguished, ornithologically, by the publication of a number of monographs on widely different species. Some workers have specialised on certain groups of birds and, with the growing interest in behaviour, have attempted to apply an ethological approach to systematics—for example, Tinbergen and Moynihan with the gulls, and the Cambridge school with the Fringillidae; but Dr. Meyerriecks set himself a formidable task in undertaking a study of the comparative breeding behaviour of herons, for although he had the examples of recent work to stimulate and help him, the herons as a group, and American herons in particular, were relatively unworked. This meant that an intensive study of one species was necessary to create a base line with which other species could be compared. The Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) was chosen for this purpose, and the first half of the book (83 pages) is a monograph—in the style of Lorenz and Tinbergen, and describes in detail the aggressive, sexual and feeding behaviour. Diagrams and tables show the relative importance, and frequency, of various displays as the breeding cycle advances; comparative references are made to other species, so far as present knowledge permits.

Part II of the book deals with three other members of the heron family more briefly and for purposes of comparison; they are the Great Blue and Great White Herons, *Ardea herodias*, the Reddish Egret *Dichromanassa rufescens*, and the Snowy Egret, *Leucophoyx thula*.

Although terminologically correct, the book is most readable and does not give the impression that it has been written in another language, as does some behavioural work. Twenty-seven drawings by the author, from photographs or field notes, add immeasurably to the clarity of the description, and particularly aid the comparison of similar displays in different species; the publishers have not skimped their size, many being full page and the rest half, which enhances their value. Fifteen photographs give authority to some of the drawings and further aid the descriptions.

Hindwood (*Emu*, 1933, pp. 27-43, and 97-102) has described the breeding biology and some other aspects of the Green-backed Mangrove-Heron (*Butorides striatus*), a very close relative of *B. virescens*. Any interested Sydneysider, therefore, has exceptional opportunities for a comparative study, since the species not only nests regularly almost in the city, but the hack-work of both biological detail and behavioural nomenclature and description has already been done for him by Meyerriecks and Hindwood. Further afield, Australia boasts no less than 15 members of the heron family, and these are virtually undescribed so far as behaviour is concerned—certainly no comparative work has been done.

Meyerriecks has produced a basic manual for heron watchers—perhaps it will stimulate comparable studies here.—I.C.R.R.

**Field Guide to the Waders**, by H. T. Condon and A. R. McGill, 2nd Ed., 1960, 36 pp., 8 pls., Bird Observers Club, Melbourne, 2/6.

The first edition (1952) of this Field Guide rapidly became the accepted authority on waders in Australia. In the intervening years our knowledge of the group has been added to by many students. The second edition is more than an up-to-date statement of the species concerned, and of their distribution: it is a much improved guide to their identification, behaviour, and incidence.

A few errors, which appeared in the first edition, have unfortunately been repeated in the present one. The Australian Pratincole (*Stiltia isabella*) does not appear to have a forked tail under ordinary field

conditions: its tail actually has a *convex* outline at the tip, especially when the bird is in flight.

Post-mortem changes take place rapidly in some waders, and result in considerable alteration to the colour of some soft parts. This has misled even reputable collectors, and has resulted in erroneous data being recorded on labels attached to skins. The olivaceous-brown legs of the Curlew-Sandpiper (*Erolia ferruginea*) quickly become greenish-black after death, and finally change to black. It is questionable whether the species normally has black legs in life as described by some authors, including Coudon and McGill.—E.F.B.

**Wideawake Island**, by Bernard Stonehouse, 1960, The story of the B.O.U. Centenary Expedition to Ascension, 224 pp., 10 photographs, plus text illustrations, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 35/- (A51/6d.).

Instead of the centenary celebrations of the B.O.U. being mere exercises in reminiscence and self-congratulation, it was decided to organize expeditions to two ornithologically unexplored spots, and Ascension was one of these. Bernard Stonehouse as leader was assisted by three or four others for varying periods.

The expedition was not of the old style, with the amassing of a skin collection its principal object, but of the modern type centred on the living bird.

The book is purely a general report and summary of this highly organized scientific expedition, and does not cover technical matters, which will follow in papers in the Union's journal.

The Wideawake Tern, Frigate-Bird, Boobies and Boatswain-Birds formed the main subjects of study, but other species, even the few passerines, were not overlooked. To the Australian reader, the excessive depredations of the hundreds of feral cats inhabiting the island should be of salutary interest. Many species formerly nesting on the island have been compelled to leave and breed on stacks, or the isolated Boatswain-Bird Island, where they are free from this danger.

The Wideawake Terns themselves stay on and suffer heavily, particularly at the start and finish of the nesting season, when numbers are less. When countless thousands are nesting they are able to defend themselves more effectively, and only those on the fringes suffer.

Probably the most interesting problem raised in the book is the report, now well authenticated, that the Wideawake Tern breeds every nine to ten months instead of annually.

As well as its birds, Dr. Stonehouse studied the island's history, and includes it in the report. With his readable style and pleasant turn of humour, Dr. Stonehouse has produced a book, not only of absorbing interest to the ornithologist, but equally so to the reader who enjoys an account of a little-known country, although he may not know the difference between a "Kittiwake" and a "Wideawake".

—H.R.O.

**The Zoological Record**, vol. 96 (1959), Sect. 18: Aves, by Lt.-Col. W. P. C. Tenson, D.S.O. Zool. Soc. London, 1960, 73 pp., price 12/-. The Zoological Record with its tradition of almost a century needs announcement rather than review. The only obvious innovation in the present part is the increase in size to a large quarto. Consequently each page contains fifty per cent more text and it has been possible to reduce the number of pages from well over a hundred in the preceding parts to 73 in this part. This will mean an improvement in the bound volumes which were becoming very bulky and difficult to handle.

When looking through the part at hand one can only marvel at the amount of work that has put into its preparation and it is with the greatest diffidence that I venture some mild criticism. In recent years there has been an increasing number of small errors and particularly of misprints in the work. The part Aves is nowadays always the first published in each volume, and the present part, covering 1959, was published as early as July 1960. This prompt publication greatly increases the usefulness of the work, but I feel that if the

editor would delay its publication by only about six weeks, a lot of additional proof reading could be done.—G.F.M.

**Fundamentals of Ornithology**, by Josselyn Van Tyne and Andrew J. Berger, 624 pp., 254 illus., cloth bound, \$11.75 (in U.S.A.). Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, U.S.A., 1959. Van Tyne, who died in 1957 before completion of the book, was curator of birds and professor of zoology at the University of Michigan's Museum of Zoology, and editor of *The Wilson Bulletin* from 1939 to 1948. The book was completed by Berger, associate professor of anatomy at the University of Michigan.

*Fundamentals of Ornithology* is a work of great substance, a really notable synthesis of modern ornithology. It must have been a fearsome task, requiring scholarship and intellectual courage, particularly for deliberate confinement to one compact volume. This review note is being written (June 1961) long after publication of the work, and with the advantage of appraisal of several reviews, some lengthy, published in English language ornithological journals. In the main the reviewers praised the achievement and then dealt with errors and omissions; for, as one reviewer stated, "the probability that this exceptionally well-prepared and useful book will be cited as authority made it seem desirable to call attention to some omissions and questionable generalizations . . ."

Obviously an embracive but concentrated synthesis "first time up" could not satisfy the collective knowledge of competent critics that it is correct throughout or has a complete function—for modern ornithology has an enormous bibliography (in several languages), defined specialities, huge gaps in scientific detail required for comprehensive appraisal, and always a lively practice of contesting dissertation, particularly taxonomic and phylogenetic hypotheses as a centering of ornithological observation and science.

In these circumstances, *Fundamentals of Ornithology* as an original work is an achievement of high order and worth. Its structure is well suited to absorb pertinent criticism in revised editions that are almost certain to be published because of the continuing need for a compact, direct, and reasonably up-to-date textbook by the many non-specialist ornithologists, natural-science teachers, students and lay bird-watchers in English-speaking countries. Each revised issue may be larger but, one hopes, will be kept close to the original structure, despite critics who claim that modern ornithology cannot be covered in one book. (An alternative to *Fundamentals of Ornithology* will be a new *Dictionary of Birds*, now being compiled for the British Ornithologists' Union to replace Alfred Newton's classic of 1896 in other than historical data, but in the same style of alphabetic and encyclopaedic entry as the original work.)

*Fundamentals of Ornithology* comprises 13 chapters, with a glossary of terms, index, and extensive source lists (about 51 pages) which are mainly placed throughout the book at end of chapters, a convenience both in location and grouping of subject. Typography, printing and binding are excellent.

The chapter subjects are Paleontology, Anatomy, Plumage and Molt, Senses and Behaviour, Voice and Sound Production, Bird Distribution, Migration, Flight, Food and Feeding Habits, Breeding Behaviour, Social Relations, Taxonomy and Nomenclature, and finally, The Classification of World Birds by families.

The last chapter is an achievement of scholarship and editing. It occupies 177 pages, nearly one-third of the book, with one page for each of the 168 families recognized by the author concerned (Van Tyne, who used Wetmore's classification other than several changes among Passeriformes). Each page has the same treatment—standing scientific name and English vernacular name of family; number of species; a line drawing (by George M. Sutton) of a representative species, with brief description, and summaries of the family under the headings of physical characteristics, range, habits, food, breeding,

technical diagnosis, classification, references, and synonymy. The result is an entirely new comparative reference of major convenience; but it requires at first revision a departure from the limitation of one page to a family, regardless of number of species and variance of major groups. One reviewer points out concerning families comprising "heterogeneous aggregations of hundreds of species having very different habits and appearance [that] in dealing with these and other complex—and possibly polyphyletic—assemblages, it would have been more helpful to indicate important divergences of major, well-defined infra-family groups (particularly some of those recognized as families by others), rather than merely to list a series of characters (sometimes almost contradictory) found in the family, without designating to which subdivision they applied . . ."

The glossary, vital to most readers, comprises 26 pages of brief explanation of about 800 terms, but omits several terms (e.g. phylogeny) of major use in the book.—J.J.

**Bent's Life Histories of North American Birds.** An abridgement by Heory Hill Collins, Jr., in two volumes, each \$5.95 (in U.S.A.). Cloth bound not illustrated. Each volume is indexed, including bibliography for all of Bent's references used. Volume 1, "Water Birds", 328 pp., 296 spp. (includes also Falconiformes and Galliformes, and full text of "In Memoriam" for Bent, from *The Auk*, October 1955). Volume 2, "Land Birds", 330 pp., 301 spp. Published by Harper & Brothers, New York, U.S.A., 1960.

The publisher describes the two-volume work as being "The best of Arthur Cleveland Bent's monumental work on birds of North America, abridged for convenient reading and reference". The original *Bent* comprises 20 large bulletins (books, really) of the Smithsonian Institution published over the period 1919 to 1958, now mostly out of print and complete sets are a collector's item, expensively so.

The abridgement comprises full excerpts, not condensations, because, as stated by the abridger, "condensation . . . would have killed the spirit of the author, whose strong, free style, fresh with wind and sea, would not have survived the imprisonment of a digest . . . [for] Bent tries to give in each life history the personality of the bird, or its place in the world of man; or sometimes, its place in history . . ."

Massive reduction from 20 volumes to two was achieved by careful choice among the great extent of suitable discursive text, and by almost complete omission of data on plumages, distribution, field marks, eggs and other technical details; the abridger states: "these are well covered in various books already possessed by most bird men". Collins' objective was to provide readily a "richer, full understanding of the world of North American birds, bird watchers and bird hunters" by choice of "passages that show the bird in other aspects of its life, or that discuss the place of the bird in the world in which it lived at the time that Bent or Bent's sources wrote . . . these selections in many cases show conditions as they once were, not as they necessarily are now, [and] where conditions in recent years differ widely from those prescribed . . . a footnote is appended."

Comparison of the abridgement with some of Bent's bulletins show that Mr Collins has substantially achieved his purpose and the great prose descriptions by Bent and his selections from contributors come up with fresh and concentrated force, probably also often with nostalgia for those who knew conditions "as they once were".—J.J.

**Australian Honeyeaters.** Results of a study of some Australian species of honeyeaters are contained in a stimulating paper by Dr Klaus Immelmann on "Beiträge zur Biologie und Ethologie australischer Honigfresser (*Meliphagidae*)" in *Journal für Ornithologie*, 102 (2), 164-207, April 1961. This important contribution to our knowledge collates and synthesises the known facts concerning the feeding and social habits and the song and breeding biology of a number of species. Immelmann was able to observe 29 species in the field and to make notes on the breeding of nine of them.

Important original observations were made by him on the White-gaped Honeyeater (*Stomiopera unicolor*) and the Rufous-throated Honeyeater (*Conopophila rufogularis*) along the Ord River in the Kimberleys region, north-west Australia.

Two erroneous references to Condon in connection with the White-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga penicillata*) should read: Ragless (1954). There is an English summary to the paper, which should be consulted by all serious students of the subject.—E.F.B.

**Spine-tailed Swift.** A current feature in the journal *British Birds* is "Studies of Less Familiar Birds". Excellent photographs from various sources are supported by up-to-date summaries of the selected birds' biology, distribution, etc. The Spine-tailed Swift (*Chaetura caudacuta*) is a recent subject (Vol. 53, pp. 431-435), I. J. Ferguson-Lees being the main author.

Breeding range is now known to extend west to the Vasyugan River, a tributary of the Ob. It has been found breeding at the bottom of tall, hollow trees, no nest being constructed, the eggs (3-7, usually 6) being laid on collected debris. This is a direct contradiction of the usually quoted statement that the species builds a bracket-shaped nest attached to a vertical surface in a crevice or hollow tree. It is significant that the closely related *Ch. gigantea* has similar nesting habits, particularly as early, but not most recent, workers place these two in another genus, *Hirundapus*. This name is still used in the Australian Checklist for *caudacuta*. The doubtful species (*Ch. (c.) cochinchinensis*), similar but for a dark throat, builds bracket nests on cave walls and it is difficult to regard it as a race of *caudacuta* (or even as a species of *Hirundapus*?).—J.N.H.

**Grey-tailed Tattler.** Another subject of the *British Birds* series, "Studies of Less Familiar Birds" (Vol. 54, pp. 30-33, plus plates), is the Grey-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*). It is treated as a distinct species from the Wandering Tattler (*T. incana*). On July 19, 1959, a Russian geologist, J. Y. Livshits, happened across the only nest of this bird that has ever been found. It was on stony forest-tundra, 1050 feet above sea level, near the source of the Makus River, 80 kilometres WSW. of Norilsk. The breeding range is given as from the Putorana mountain plateau in the west, to the mountains of the Kamchatka peninsula in the east, south to the high mountains near Lake Baikal and in the south-eastern parts of the Sayan mountains near Lake Kosogol. In this area the tattler is found along the banks of rivers and streams in subalpine and alpine zones, only a few pairs nesting below the tree line. In the north (Putorana) it occurs from about 325 feet above sea level, and in the south (Lake Baikal) at from 5,000 to 6,000 feet. Photographs of the nest, young, adults and breeding habitat are given.—J.N.H.