

LITERATURE

Edited by A. R. McEvey

BOOKS

A Systematic Review of the Indo-Australian Zosteropidae by G. F. Mees. Zoologische Verhandelingen, Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie te Leiden. Leiden: E. J. Brill. Parts I, 35: 1-204, 1957; II, 50: 1-168, 1961; III, 102: 1-390, 1969. Maps, line drawings, b & w pll. Part III ca \$A15. (Treated for review as a book.)

It is related of the great mediaevalist, Professor W. P. Ker, that he was once walking with a student who asked him the name of a passing bird. 'That's a woodcock', replied Ker. 'That's not my idea of a woodcock', said the student. 'It's God's idea of a woodcock', replied Ker.

Reading Dr Mees's Review of the Indo-Australian Zosteropidae, one feels a similar sense of the absolute. Of revisions that have appeared in recent years this is one of the most detailed and comprehensive, and is the product of at least fifteen years research. Treating the Zosteropidae, silveryeyes or white-eyes, of India, eastern Asia, Indonesia, Australasia and the Pacific, it complements Moreau's work on the African members of this family (Variation in the western Zosteropidae, Bull. Br. Mus. nat. Hist., (Zool.) 1957, 4: 309-433).

The introduction to Part I (published 1957) includes general remarks on the geographic range and taxonomic history of the silveryeyes, and a conspectus of the systematic order of the Indo-Australian species and subspecies to be followed throughout the review. Understandably a few departures are made from this order in Part III (published 1969). There follows the systematic list itself, the section which forms the bulk of the whole work. Each form is treated separately, under the headings of Characters, Distribution, First collector, Figures, Type, Molt, Nidification, Voice and Discussion, with additional notes on geographical variation and ecology being given for species with several races.

Part I deals with eleven species of *Zosterops*, none of which occurs in Australia. Part II treats a further twenty-seven species of which *Z. citrinella albiventris* (formerly *Z. chloris albiventris*), the Pale Silveryeye, and *Z. lutea*, the Yellow Silveryeye, are Australian. Part III concludes the systematic list with the remaining twelve Indo-Australian species of *Zosterops* and the wholly Indo-Australian genera *Tephrozosterops*, *Madanga*, *Lophozosterops*, *Oculocincta*, *Heleia*, *Chlorocharis*, *Woodfordia*, *Rukia* and *Megazosterops*. *Hypocryptadius*, listed in Part I, is removed from the Zosteropidae as a genus *incertae sedis*.

The remaining pages of Part III contain a reflective section entitled Summary and Conclusions, in which Dr Mees discusses various aspects of the taxonomy and zoogeography of the family. Comparative notes are given on the systematic arrangement adopted by the author and that used by Mayr for the Zosteropidae in Volume XII of Peters' *Check-list of Birds of the World*; the vexed nomenclature of *Zosterops rendovae-ugiensis-kulambangrae* (Solomon Islands) constitutes one of the very few differences between the treatments of the two authors. There are also fifty-five pages of additions and corrections to Parts I and II, which have accumulated since the appearance of these parts twelve and eight years ago. The additions far outnumber the corrections. Finally there is a list of all specific and subspecific names

given to the Zosteropidae up to 1969. The maps are very clear and informative, and the worth of the author's careful documentation (there are eight pages of literary references to *lateralis* in the synonymy of its races) will be obvious. In addition, however, and whether his views meet with complete agreement or not, it is in the author's general discussion of the evolutionary aspects of various forms that the value of the work as an expression of the concepts of an able and thoughtful taxonomist is revealed. Only a very lengthy review could attempt appraisal of these opinions, but one can mention as an example, the history of the colonization of New Zealand by *Zosterops l. lateralis* (which he refers to as 'one of the classics of ornithological literature' to be found in 'practically every text-book dealing with dispersal and zoogeography'), the author's belief in the theory of recent colonization, and his interpretation. That is that migrating flocks reached the South Island about 1830, began to breed, and, being migratory, first visited the North Island in the winter of 1856, and rapidly colonized the whole country until Auckland was reached in 1865. Of possible differences between *Z. l. lateralis* of Tasmania, New Zealand and Norfolk Island, he remarks, while recognizing that subtle differences may exist, that the type of *norfolkensis* is a bird collected in April 1913, and since *Z. lateralis* was first seen on Norfolk Island in December 1904, this would imply subspecies formation in less than nine years... Even believers in very fast subspecies formation would not consider that less than nine years suffice to produce morphological differentiation enough to justify a subspecific name.' Significant and thought-provoking comment of this kind is frequent in the author's discussions.

It is Part III, dealing as it does with *Zosterops lateralis*, which will be of the greatest interest to Australian ornithologists. No fewer than eighty pages are devoted to the six Australian races of this species. A startling revelation here is that the yellow-throated, largely sedentary, race from southern Queensland, New South Wales and eastern Victoria, through various quirks of nomenclatural fate, lacks a scientific name; for this Dr Mees proposes *Zosterops lateralis familiaris*. The five other Australian races of *Z. lateralis* accepted by Dr Mees are: *gouldi* (southern Western Australia), *halmaturina* (southern South Australia and western Victoria, intergrading with *gouldi* in the Streaky Bay district and with *familiaris* in central Victoria), *lateralis* (Tasmania and Bass Strait, breeding; wintering on mainland west to Adelaide and north to Brisbane; recent colonist of New Zealand, Norfolk Island and nearby islands), *ramsayi* (north-eastern Queensland from Mackay, where it intergrades with *familiaris*, north to Iron Range) and *chlorocephala* (Capricorn and Bunker Groups, off the southern coast of Queensland). Bird banders will find interesting the notes on the movements of the south-eastern populations, taken from CSIRO banding returns.

Two very minor points in the text are open to question. The first is Dr Mees's contravention of Article 27 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature in the use of a hyphen after *sanctae* in the name *Zosterops sanctaecrucis*, a stand also taken by Dr Vaurie for *Chamaepetes goudotii sanctaemarthae* in his Taxonomy

of the Cracidae, *Bull. Am. Mus. nat. Hist.* 138 (1968): 131-260. The advantages of treating this word as anything more than a common compound are not apparent. The second point, and a frequent error in zoological literature, concerns the failure of the author to distinguish between the adjectives of *nomenclator* (nomenclatorial) and *nomenclature* (nomenclatural).

The Zosteropidae present problems to the classical taxonomist in that they possess only a limited range of characters by which differences in their gross morphology may be expressed. There is also a dearth of information on their comparative ecology and ethology, and the consequent dependence of the systematist on characters shown by study skins will make this revision more a work for the museum-worker than for the field-ornithologist. Completion of this work in parts published over a long period has to some extent affected its structure, but the author's ability to produce a lucid and rounded study within these difficulties sets a splendid example. Dr Mees's concise style, unremitting textual accuracy, bibliographical thoroughness, and even his impatience towards those less rigorous than himself, will be appreciated by all who use this authoritative monograph—a description which can rarely be so readily applied.

S.A.P.

Life Histories of North American Cardinals, Grosbeaks, Buntings, Towhees, Finches, Sparrows, and Allies by Arthur Cleveland Bent and Collaborators. Compiled and edited by Oliver L. Austin, Jr., 1968. U.S. National Museum Bulletin No. 237. 3 parts. Pp. xxvii + 1,889, b & w pl. 78 +, col. pl. 3. 230 mm x 150 mm. \$US8.25. (Treated for review as a book).

This is the twenty-first and final volume of Bent's *Life Histories*, the first having been published in 1919. Herein eighty-eight species are discussed in 247 separate and generally subspecific accounts. Each one comprises two sections: *Habits and Distribution*. The section on *Habits* is divided into subheadings: courtship, nesting, eggs, incubation, young, plumages, food, behaviour, voice, etc. *Distribution* may contain subsections on breeding and wintering ranges, casual records, migration, egg dates, etc. This follows the format of previous volumes, and is a useful aid in locating particular information. Each of the three parts has an excellent full-colour frontispiece. The black-and-white photographs vary in quality of composition and reproduction from superb to miserable; most are good. Unfortunately, the first thirty-two plates were not included in the copy reviewed.

In general each species is comprehensively covered. The coverage is disparate, as life histories of many races are virtually unknown; also, differences in style of more than 110 contributing authors sometimes produce a disturbing unevenness. The flowery and sometimes anthropocentric introductions of Mr Bent and of some earlier and some recent authors will no doubt be objectionable to many in 1970. I feel offended to be told (p. 9) that 'in the cardinal we have a rare combination of good qualities, brilliant plumage, a rich and pleasing voice, beneficial food habits, and devotion to its mate and family.' It is no doubt charming to some to know that the grey and white Slate-coloured Junco is aptly described (p. 1,029) as 'leadens skies above, snow below', but it is annoying not to be told of the many hybrids between *Junco* and *Zonotrichia* that have been described. Much of some earlier accounts is still largely anecdotal, and recent work, where it exists, is not always skillfully integrated. Contrasting with the dated ornithological literary style of a few decades ago, there are refreshing accounts, such as that by Lowther and Falls of the

White-throated Sparrow, based largely on original and systematic research and presenting facts, many of which have not been published, in an absorbingly readable style.

The whole is surprisingly free from typographic errors, but the uncut pages from the U.S. Government Printing Office are as inconvenient as ever. It was a shock to be unable to locate the first reference that aroused my curiosity (Dovitt, 1944b, on p. 2) in the 113-page bibliography. However, a haphazard check of others throughout the work failed to reveal further oversight. On page 164 I learned that the author's name was Devitt.

Reading of the Eastern Cardinal, a species that I have studied recently, I found it odd that only two 'egg dates' are available from Tennessee (p. 15). Laskey, in a paper cited, extends this breeding period by several months. Numbers of broods per season are confounded with numbers of nests on pages 5 and 7. Recent workers are impressed by the low nesting success early in the season; the reviewer has a record of one female who had built at least 5 unsuccessful nests before the season was half over. It has been well-established that Dwight was incorrect in describing a complete post-juvinal moult (p. 7) for this species. An incomplete moult is probably the rule among birds born late in the season, and many breed in this plumage the following year. Misleading information undoubtedly occurs in many older accounts, and the legion of Americans presently studying fringillids will probably find much material frustratingly already outdated. However, this volume contains much indeed that is good, and its completion has been by Herculean effort of editors and contributors. At last we have the literature of the past hundred years assembled in four inches of shelf space. Perhaps another hundred years will see an up-to-date American handbook.

D.D.D.

Australian Flycatchers and their Allies by Brigadier Hugh R. Officer, 1969. Melbourne: The Bird Observers Club. Pp. 108 + index, col. pl. (paintings by Peter Slater) 12, maps, 253 mm x 180 mm. \$A5.

The popularity of *Australian Honeyeaters*, published in 1964, has encouraged Brigadier Officer to produce another and generally similar work, this one covering the flycatchers (Musciapidae), whistlers (Pachycephalidae) and crested shrikes (Falcunculidae), as they are classified in the 1926 *Checklist*. The first two groups are usually considered to show close affinities, but the Falcunculidae are somewhat composite, *Falcunculus* and *Oreoica* probably being near the whistlers, while *Psophodes* and *Sphenostoma* are much closer to the babblers (Timaliidae) in appearance and habits. Nevertheless, in a publication of this kind the inclusion of genera difficult to place adds value. The reviewer would even prefer that the Australian babbler genera *Orthonyx*, *Cinclosoma* and *Pomatostomus*, as well as the thrushes, *Zoothera* and *Drymodes*, were also included. These two groups, poorly represented specifically in Australia, are often believed to link the flycatchers with another large assemblage, the warblers (on which a book will shortly appear), and they might easily be overlooked in BOC field guides, should these continue. The author has travelled widely in Australia, observed all species included in the book, and must have amassed a great many field notes, of which those for species restricted in range or found in areas of difficult access are of special importance. His views on specific distinctness between the Grey and Brown Whistlers, often considered conspecific, are welcome, and could have been enlarged to advantage with clear descriptions of the calls, feeding patterns, habitat prefer-

ences and distinctive markings. The belief that they behave more like robins than whistlers is interesting. It is strange that the Brown Shrike-Thrush and Grey Shrike-Thrush are kept distinct while the Western Shrike-Thrush is placed within the latter species. The specific status of all three has not been altered in any supplement to the 1926 *Checklist*, and possibly the western form differs from the other two in colour and habits more than they do from each other.

The illustrations by Mr Peter Slater of the fifty-six species included are pleasing. Probably there is over-emphasis of distinction between some closely similar species, for example between the male Gilbert and Red-throated Whistlers, and the Brown and Brown-tailed Flycatchers, but generally the colours and arrangement within the plates clearly and appropriately portray the distinguishing characters. The maps are most creditably drawn. On the whole the book is a helpful field guide and a welcome contribution to Australian ornithological literature. It will amply fulfil the aim set out in its introduction, to provide 'for those lovers of birds who want an easily comprehensible description of birds, their habitats and behaviour'.

A.R.McG.

Macquarie Island by J. S. Cumpston, 1968. Australia: Antarctic Division, Department of External Affairs. Pp. xii + 380, figs. 4, b & w pl. 71, maps 8, 255 mm x 180 mm. \$A5.

The birds of the Antarctic and its islands have been a traditional study for Australasian ornithologists. Dr J. S. Cumpston has written an account of the activities of man on Macquarie Island to the time of its declaration as a sanctuary in 1933. The birds are referred to only incidentally, but there is some useful background material for ornithologists, particularly in the copious references to the source material on the penguin-oil trade. The book consists largely of extracts from, and paraphrases of, a wide range of sources, reproduced uncritically and with little connecting narrative. However, the industrious author has collected a great deal of material and embellished it with an extensive index and a worthy bibliography. From this in the future a history of the island can be written. The book production is of a standard no doubt to be excused by the low price.

It is of interest to read in chapters 19 and 20 of the active part taken by the RAOU in Sir Douglas Mawson's ultimately successful campaign to have the island declared a sanctuary.

R.A.B.

SHORTER NOTICES

For simplicity the names of authors of papers are accompanied by initials only.

Australasian Publications

Taxonomy and Families

CONDON, H. T. 1969. A new subspecies of the Western Grass-wren, *Amytornis textilis* (Dumont) in north-western Queensland. *Mem. Qd Mus.* 15: 205-206. The subspecies, *A.t.ballarae*, described from two specimens is restricted to the Mt. Isa area, so far as is known.

D.D.D.

BRAVERY, J. A. 1968. Quail of north-east Queensland. *N. Qd Nat.* 35 (146): 7-8.

This paper discusses Phasianidae and Turnicidae occurring in region, with brief notes on habitat, flight and nesting of some species.

D.D.D.

Issued 11 June 1970.

Region

LAVERY, H. J. 1969. List of birds in Queensland. Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Canberra. Pp. 20, fig. 1. This first comprehensive list of the 545 species occurring in the State supplies distributional information by means of a map divided into eight numbered sectors. Eight very broad habitat types provide some ecological information.

D.D.D.

Ecology

CASSELLS, M. L. 1968. Bird catching spiders. *N. Qd Nat.* 35 (146): 6.

This records a juvenile Fantail Warbler *Cisticola exilis* and a Brown Honeyeater *Lichmera indistincta* caught in separate spider webs.

D.D.D.

Behaviour

CLARKE, J. H. 1968. Observations of Prince Albert's Lyrebird. *Qd Nat.* 18: 105-106.

The behaviour of two lyrebirds, *Menura alberti*, is described and interpreted as a young bird being instructed in the art of mimicry and dancing.

D.D.D.

Overseas Publications

Taxonomy

GOODWIN, D. 1969. A new sub-species of the White-quilled Rock Pigeon. *Bull. Br. Orn. Club* 89: 131-133.

The new form *Petrophassa albipennis boothi* differs from *P.a. albipennis* in its smaller size and in having only obsolescent traces of the white patch on the primaries.

J.L.McK.

Song and Territorial Behaviour

WATSON, M. 1969. Significance of antiphonal song in the Eastern Whipbird, *Psophodes olivaceus*. *Behaviour* 35: 157-178.

Whipbird songs were analysed on a spectrograph. Male song was constant, while female song showed marked geographical variation. It is tentatively concluded that antiphonal song functions in contact maintenance, pair-bond maintenance and territorial advertisement.

D.D.D.

CODY, M. L., and J. H. BROWN. 1969. Song asynchrony in neighbouring bird species. *Nature, Lond.* 222: 778-80.

The varied resources of a habitat, such as food and space, are divided among competing species. The authors, with strong supporting evidence, make the most interesting claim that, by asynchrony of song, the singing time for territorial advertising, or, as the authors aptly call it, 'broadcasting time' is also effectively divided. This significant possibility does not seem to have been studied before.

A.R.McE.

Migration and Orientation

GRIFFIN, D. R. 1969. The physiology and geophysics of bird navigation. *Quart. Rev. Biol.* 44: 225-276.

Although many species orientate themselves by celestial cues during migration, increasing evidence suggests that many birds can navigate without sight of sun or stars, and often of ground. This important review considers the possible use of other sensory means in avian orientation.

D.D.D.