

LITERATURE

Edited by A. R. McEVEY

SOUND RECORDING

Australian Bird calls Index—Series 1, Western Australia by John N. Hutchinson. 12 inch Long Playing Record or One Hour Tape-Cassette. Price: \$A5 each including packing and postage. Available from J. N. Hutchinson, Gascoyne Research Station, Carnarvon, WA 6701.

The use of cassette tape-recorders, now rapidly gaining favour as an aid to field-work, must inevitably be extended to include tapes of bird-song such as the one under review, the first of its kind on the Australian scene. The quality of sound of this recording, a delight to the non-technical ear, was referred to in *Electronics Australia* as highly professional. Calls of other birds can be heard occasionally in the background providing an atmosphere of reality, but there is no disturbing noise.

On the cover of the record and on a printed sheet accompanying each tape, the calls, in Checklist Order, are numbered from 1 to 50 against the vernacular and scientific names. Also shown are localities of recordings and such remarks as 'perched in Boab tree on hot tropical night'. Each call is announced by number and vernacular name, thus enabling swift location on the tape.

In a recording of one hour's duration, the selection of calls must have posed a problem and, although some of them are of birds confined to north-western Australia, the range of species is wide enough to interest residents in other States. Most of the uncomplicated calls are short, but the ideal is reached with the White-plumed Honeyeater *Meliphaga penicillata* in a series of six different calls.

Towards the end of my recent tour of Australia, the tape-cassette was presented to me by the producer for the use of RAOU members and it is now available from the library. Had I had it earlier, it would have assisted greatly in the identification of unfamiliar birds.

Using an inexpensive low-powered tape-recorder, I played the song of the Wedgebill *Sphenostoma cristatum* within the hearing of singing birds in two areas 80 km apart in Western Australia. The reaction was immediate and each time the birds came within three metres. Moving away a short distance, they sang vigorously, sometimes in unison with the tape. When the recording was played close to Wedgebills singing continuously near Menindee in New South Wales there was no reaction. This was not surprising, because the calls in New South Wales sounded very different from those in Western Australia.

On the other hand, although to my ear some of the calls of the Western Australian White-plumed Honeyeater varied from those of Victorian birds, when the recording was played in my garden six birds of this species perched on the low branch of a tree and dived at the tape-recorder. All joined in with agitated alarm calls making it impossible to differentiate between the sound from the tape and that from the birds.

If we can expect, as implied by the title, more such recordings, then they must become as necessary to the ornithologist as the field-guide. Not only can he familiarize himself with calls in advance, but also when a song is in doubt in the field a quick playing of the tape should serve for identification. Often this will bring the bird into sight, though confusion may arise because sometimes other birds will respond to the call of another species or family.

A further application of cassette-tapes may be the delineation of territory; also photography is made easier. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised. Because of the agitated reaction of birds some distress might be caused if they are subjected to this strange phenomenon too often.

P.N.R.

BOOKS

Water Birds of Australia by Gordon Beruldsen, 1971. Rigby Instant Book I 7186. Pp 64, b. & w. diagrams, col. pl 16. 90 × 130 mm paperback, \$A0.35.

The author and publisher are to be congratulated for producing a mini field-guide at a price which even a child can afford. In a booklet that weighs only 40 g 160 species are described. It fits readily into a shirt pocket, which is helpful in Australia's warm climate.

The colour photographs are good and show diagnostic features of the birds. It is a pity that not more of them could be included. Though some of the black and white diagrams are adequate, others are misleading (heads of terns on pages 37 and 39), or wrong (on page 18, wing 4 is that of the Grey-headed Albatross (No. 14) and not the Grey-mantled Albatross (No. 13)). The diagram on page 23 is no help to anyone trying to distinguish between prions, shearwaters, petrels and storm-petrels at sea.

In such a small booklet very little space can be given to each species and so for many there is not enough

information for identification of them in the field. More space would have been available if the rare vagrant species had not been described but only listed by name, as was done for penguins.

A similar booklet on *Land Birds of Australia* is in preparation by the same author and publisher. It appears that the excellent introduction to *Water Birds of Australia* was meant for *Land Birds of Australia*, because it is inappropriate to the study of waterbirds. The section, A Challenge, on page 12 should be revised or omitted in future publications because it is out of date. In any case it does not concern waterbirds.

Unfortunately many of the vernacular names are obsolete and many of the scientific names are incorrect. The author tried to group together birds of similar size, habit and habitat, but failed to do so consistently. As a result of this, a worthwhile attempt in principle, the sequence of species is chaotic and will cause much frustration in the field when one is quickly trying to look up the text about a particular bird.

It is to be hoped that *Land Birds of Australia* and future editions of *Water Birds of Australia* will receive better editing, because there is a definite need for light-weight field-guides of this kind.

G.F.v.T.

Fairy Penguins. A Brief History with Photographs by Pauline Reilly, 1972. Privately printed Melbourne. Pp 32, b. & w. pll 24, 185 × 175 mm, \$A0.75 (+ 7c if posted). Available from the author, 1 Exon Street, Hampton, Vic. 3188.

This book is based on the work of the Penguin Study Group of the Victorian Ornithological Research Group of which Mrs Reilly is leader and is illustrated with her own delightful and informative photographs. The Fairy Penguins *Eudyptula minor* of Phillip Island, Victoria, are visited every year by tens of thousands of people, many of whom have never before thought of making a special journey to see birds. Mrs Reilly has accordingly been concerned to ensure that people whose interest has been aroused by seeing the penguins may learn something of their life history and may also realize that much is known. In this she is entirely successful.

Based as it is on recent field-work, the booklet contains much information which, though previously reported in *The Australian Bird Bander*, will be new to many ornithologists.

Mrs Reilly has the happy knack of combining scientific accuracy with a vivid and affectionate picture of a bird's life.

R.A.B.

Woodland Birds by Eric Simms, 1971. No. 52 of the *New Naturalist* series. London: Collins. Pp xxii + 391, col. pll 4, b. & w. pll 24, figs 27. 216 × 145 mm. \$A8.10.

This excellent volume illustrates one direction being taken by books on birds and is stimulating to Australian ornithologists for that reason. The author, a prominent BBC commentator, has tried to summarize the various major factors that affect one of Britain's threatened habitats.

After considering the palaeographic extent and development of the woodlands and the historical pressures that have affected their present distribution, Mr Simms describes in detail the ecological relations of the various types of woodland and the seasonal changes that occur as well as sampling techniques that he used. This section is followed by an interesting chapter on song, and the concluding chapters examine the role of conservation in preserving and extending the woodland areas and their inhabitants. The appendices contain lists of woodland birds and plants, and an extensive bibliography.

Those who are looking for a field-guide to British birds will be disappointed, although the book is not lacking in excellent illustrations, some in colour. Those of us, however, who are concerned with the environment and ecology will read it with interest and the hope that a similar study will soon be made of major Australian habitats.

N.S.

AUSTRALASIAN ORNITHOLOGY

A continuing and selected catalogue of papers

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New Guinea Bird Society Newsletter (77) July 1972

Sundry brief observations including local records by R. D. Mackay, B. Coates, K. Silva and E. Lindfield.

Excursion to Oyatana (highlights of outing given)

New Guinea Bird Society Newsletter (78) July 1972

Sundry brief observations including local records by W. Filewood, A. Layton, J. Atompa, W. Dyson and J. Atompa, and E. McCrumm.