

## REVIEWS

Edited by G. W. JOHNSTONE  
BOOKS

**A Field Guide to Australian Birds: Passerines** by Peter Slater, 1974. Adelaide: Rigby. Pp xv + 309, col. pll 39, b. & w. ill. 3, numerous maps. 190 x 130 mm. \$A7.95.

It is five years since the first volume of this work dealing with the non-passerines (reviewed in *Emu* 72: 79-80) became available and most people with ornithological interests in Australia and many overseas possess a copy. Therefore the appearance of this volume on passerines has been eagerly awaited. It completes the work, which many will no doubt compare with Cayley's long-standing best-seller, *What bird is that?* However, because of different style in the illustrations, the gap between them of over forty years and particularly the different order of presentation of species fair comparison is difficult. Slater's work bears closer affinity with Macdonald's *Birds of Australia* (1973), although the latter is more of a handbook than a field guide.

The plates will probably be the book's real contribution to Australian ornithology. They are mostly quite good and the birds are presented in a style admirably suited to a field guide. If Plate 25 be taken as an example, the Mistletoebird is depicted in a quite different stance from the accompanying pardalotes, indicating its clear distinctiveness in the flowerpecker family; the pardalotes are shown in typical pose with the diagnostic differences and sexual characteristics clearly indicated. A distinctive race of the Black-headed Pardalote is included for good measure. Opposite each plate very helpful information is given on identification for each species. The plates, therefore, will no doubt be used and studied by most readers far more than the text.

This section, apart from ample notes on plumage and voice, is not so impressive. Some remarks on behaviour, unusual habits, ecological peculiarities, flight, economic values, food, coloration of eggs, more detailed information about nesting, etc. could have added more 'body' such as is given in, for example, *What bird is that?* Nevertheless, the brief discussion when introducing each family or a conspicuous division within a family serves to group related species and obviates some unnecessary repetition. A field guide primarily demands detailed descriptions of plumage and here Slater has succeeded; the additional information concerning females and immature birds is commended.

An author writing a book covering all the songbirds of Australia has one's sympathy when the only official checklist is out-of-date and few people really follow it. A reviewer commenting on taxonomic procedure must be largely guided by personal opinion. Therefore, first and foremost it is regretted that some trinomials have been employed in a book that is clearly intended as a field guide. Macdonald avoided them, even though they would have been more justified in such a work. One can visualize, therefore, a user, finding in the plates a bird that he has seen, happy that it has been given a distinctive vernacular; then, when the relevant text is located, being disappointed that it is only a subspecies. There would be no quibble if, for example, the Black Tree-creeper were called *Climacteris melanota* (as it has been known for well over a hundred years), but it has been awarded an extra name because the author wished to

modernize the book and adopt the views of those who advocate that it is a race of *C. picumnus*. Trinomials appear only about fourteen times, and each could well have been eliminated without offence to the views of such taxonomists.

It is noteworthy that *C. wellsi* was also regarded as a species for many years but, although illustrated, it has been correctly merged under *C. melanura* and has been neither given a separate heading in the text nor awarded a trinomial. The author is justified if in his opinion a bird is not entitled to full specific rank and so is left out of the illustrations and text. If, however, he wishes to illustrate the differences between races, then in the explanatory matter opposite the plate this should be clearly indicated, as with the race *wellsi*. I am mystified as to why *lorealis* was added subspecifically after *Arses telescopthalmus* (there is only one Australian race) but, for example, the equally distinctive Australian representative of *Monarcha frater* has not been distinguished with the subspecific name *canescens*.

The familial arrangement and systematic sequence adopted presents some innovations. The Magpie Lark has been put in a separate family (Grallinidae) between Motacillidae and Campephagidae, but its two mudnest-building supposed relatives, the White-winged Chough and the Apostlebird, have been transferred to Timaliidae. The warblers are divided into four families, the chats rightly composing Ephthianuridae, but they are placed between Pachycephalidae (why is the outmoded 'thick-head' used as a group vernacular?) and Sittidae for the sittellas. Australian wrens (Maluridae, including the bristlebirds) are divided from the Australian warblers (Acanthizidae) by the Old World warblers (Sylviidae). I do not know why Spermestidae has been used for the grassfinch family instead of the usual Estrildidae; the genus *Spermestes* (1837) is usually considered as a subgenus of *Lonchura* (1832), and *Estrilda* is older still (1827). In the systematic sequence it is odd that the Plum-headed Finch separates the Gouldian Finch from its near-relatives in *Erythrura*, which keeps the Plum-head apart from its nearest relatives in *Lonchura*.

Taxonomic decisions that the author must make if he chooses to depart from an established checklist or common usage can cause problems. One is *Zosterops citrinella chloris* for the Pale Silvereye; according to Peters' *Check-list of Birds of the World* (1967, vol. 12: 304), the specific and subspecific names used by Slater should be reversed, as Macdonald also indicated. However, in case I have overlooked recent data giving *citrinella* priority over *chloris* (both were originally given simultaneously by Bonaparte), why is not *albiventris* retained subspecifically for this difficult species-group? Surely after being regarded for so long as a good species, it is still valid as a race; Ernst Mayr thought so in his treatment of the *chloris* group (1944, *Bull. Am. Mus. nat. Hist.* 83: 168-69).

In the review of the non-passerines volume of this work, I criticized the distribution maps, although I understand the author had little to do with them. I expected they would be more accurate this time but there are still too many obvious errors. Maps are neces-

sary in modern field guides and should be encouraged, but their value rests solely on their authenticity. It is much easier to prepare them now in Australia because all States have a handlist or similar publication. Some, of course, have become somewhat out-of-date. However, these publications are included in this book's bibliography and if the author had followed their information with care he could hardly be criticized.

In so comprehensive a work it seems unnecessary for ranges to be described if maps are given for all species but, because this has been done, habitat could conveniently have been combined with distribution in the text. Thus, for the Forty-spotted Pardalote 'mostly observed among outer foliage of eucalypt forests in Tasmania and King Island' would be satisfactory; for the Spotted Pardalote 'usually among outer leaves in eucalypt forests of southern Australia, ranging in the east as far north as the Atherton Tableland', and so on.

I have not checked all distributional data against the maps, but some show notable discrepancies: the map for the Bar-breasted Honeyeater, whose range is stated as 'Northern Australia from Derby, Western Australia to Mackay, Queensland', indicates that it occurs no further east than the central-western shores of Cape York Peninsula; the Rufous-banded Honeyeater is said to occur in 'Northern Australia, as far east as Townsville, Queensland', but the map shows only the far north-centre of the Northern Territory and the western coast of Cape York Peninsula. The Yellow-plumed Honeyeater's range is given briefly as 'Eastern Australia' but the map shows all south-western Australia east only to the mallee country of south-western New South Wales; for the Southern Emu-wren, Tasmania is correctly included in the text but is not shown on the map; all Tasmania is included in the ranges of the Willie Wagtail and Leaden Flycatcher, although each is essentially a casual visitor there, but not for the Magpie Lark with similar status.

Ranges in New South Wales differ from those given in *A Handlist of the Birds of New South Wales* (McGill 1960), noticeably for such species as the Skylark, Greenfinch, Plum-headed Finch, Black-throated Finch, Diamond Firetail, White-winged Chough, and others. When dealing with so many species any author is confronted with a tremendous amount of research, but it is strange that there are so many obvious discrepancies when no fewer than eleven people who 'studied the maps and suggested amendments in the light of their knowledge' are acknowledged. Although Slater incorporates some innovations from *Australian Warblers* (McGill 1970), such as 'sandstone warblers' for grouping together the Rock Warbler and Pilotbird, 'Southern Whiteface' to include the eastern and western birds, considered as conspecific, 'White-tailed Warbler' for *Gerygone fusca*, and although there is a close similarity in specific status between the two books, *Australian Warblers* has strangely missed a mention in the bibliography.

One controversial point needs some comment—the use of the possessive case when for one reason or another proper names still occur in English vernaculars. The general Australian style has long been to drop the 's. Although this was accepted by Macdonald, Slater has preferred Gilbert's Whistler, Macleay's Honeyeater, Hall's Babbler, etc. However, there is inconsistency on the point and Albert Lyrebird, Victoria Rifle-bird and Lewin Honeyeater remain unpossessive. Perhaps the cumbersomeness of writing Prince Albert's Lyrebird and Queen Victoria's Rifle-bird proved too much. If followed consistently, the practice would create a problem with the Lesser Lewin Honeyeater, which would have to be written Lesser Lewin's Honeyeater, meaning in simple English 'the honeyeater of the lesser Mr Lewin'. Heaven

forbid! Surely those who speak of Hall's Babbler will now think twice; *Pomatostomus halli* sufficiently recognizes merit rightly bestowed and either Black-bellied or White-throated Babbler is a suitable vernacular (both have already been suggested and used).

My copy of this guide to Australian passerines (which has noticeably fewer pages and is more strongly bound than the non-passerine volume) will remain a valued possession and I will often wish to consult it. Instead of endeavouring to weigh its merits against some predecessors, I know that it contains data not available in *What bird is that?* and *Birds of Australia*. It will take its place beside those two books and its non-passerine partner as a worthy addition to my library.

A.R.McG.

**Seventy Years of Birdwatching** by H. G. Alexander, 1974. Berkhamsted: T. & A. D. Poyser. Pp 264, b. and w. pl 8, maps 6, many drawings by Robert Gillmor. 224 x 142 mm. £3.80.

Autobiography and books on travel are notoriously dangerous. A writer has to be some sort of a genius like Benvenuto Cellini or Apsley Cherry-Garrard to reach the heights and to have more sensibility than most of us to avoid banality and sentimentality. HG, to equate him with his brother, WB, who was probably better known to Australians, will not be offended, one hopes, if this is said, because he does not aim for the heights and certainly has not fallen into the traps of this form of writing. He admits to having written primarily for his own amusement and seems almost surprised that he found a publisher, a diffidence and modesty that is evident throughout the book. It would have been a pity if he had failed to get it published.

In fact the book is autobiographical only incidentally. After the first two chapters, which give a brief background of some of HG's early life and an appraisal, if you like, of some eminent ornithologists with whom he was associated up to 1940, the rest of the book is mostly an account, arranged more or less chronologically, of straight birdwatching and recording in several areas in England, India and America that he has known intimately. But one chapter on the populations of birds in the Kentish Weald and others on migration and on identification of particularly difficult species go much beyond mere birdwatching. The whole is larded with personal views on many ornithological matters and these may be the less satisfactory parts. Curiously, HG suggests that his Wealden section may be less readable than the rest, but for various reasons I found it almost the most interesting and important chapter of the whole book, though that may depend on what one means by 'readable'.

A review for Australian readers is going to be different from one for readers elsewhere. It is no use burking the fact that most Australians will not be interested in records of British birds on 1 January over the years or in what may be seen on reservoirs in the English Midlands and that inevitably in places the text becomes something of a catalogue. It is the unemphasized, even unstated, background that is so interesting and from it there is a great deal to be learned. To my mind the book is far more important than it seems because HG has played down his own role in the development of British ornithology at a critical period.

Probably he has been less prominent after than before World War II and there may be a sad possibility that the importance of his contributions to ornithology are no longer well remembered. The book does not altogether correct this. It shows plainly enough, even if readers

did not know it already from first hand, that HG became a specialist in critical and meticulous identification of birds in the field and in acceptable recording of sight-records so that future ornithologists could appraise them, but it is less explicit about the part he played with Witherby, Tucker and others in formulating rules and setting standards by which field observations were vastly improved. (He quotes an interesting example of a most unlikely bird for Britain, given in 1900 without any details at all, still appearing in Witherby's *Handbook*, albeit in brackets.) This was all built up by painstaking observations over many years and to some extent developed from the field identification of two species of tit *Parus* spp and some other difficult birds. The processes of the identification are discussed in Chapter 5, but what they led to is only implied. As a result the Records Committee of the BOU eventually came into being, but so long ago that the hard work and thought that went into formulating the principles behind it, much from HG himself, are no longer so vividly remembered as once they were. Indifferent field observations and uncritical acceptance of records have not entirely disappeared from the Australian scene and we could benefit from an Australian HG, as we did from an Australian WB.

Apparently, too, HG and another brother, Christopher, became hooked on migration, as we might now say, by the accident of coming out of the shell at a time when enquiries were being organized throughout Britain in this aspect of ornithology. They took part enthusiastically, but I suspect that if the enquiry had been on a different aspect they would have been equally enthusiastic in another direction; if this guess is right, it seems that there is a parallel with amateur ornithology generally in Australia where so much talent and enthusiasm were absorbed by the introduction of banding and mist-netting that little is still available for other pursuits. It is still more interesting to note that the Alexander brothers from this interest in migration went on to map the occurrence of breeding summer migrants in parts of Kent, Sussex and elsewhere. This is what makes the chapter on the Kentish Weald so interesting. Clearly the brothers came within a whisker of anticipating by forty years or so what is now one of the most useful weapons in the BTO armoury, the Common Bird Census. One wonders what they might have done if Christopher had not been killed so tragically young in Flanders and HG had not moved away from Kent; this is where additional biographical details would have helped to make a better assessment of what is quite important. It is only too easy to dismiss their efforts as clumsy and inadequate in the light of what is being done today, but they ought to have the credit for pioneering valuable methods, even if they did not master them, and for showing us again what we are liable to forget, that amateurs contribute basically to ornithology. Moreover, if in 1910 the brothers had had the advantage of being able to go to even an embryonic organized field station their ideas would certainly have developed rapidly. In any case, HG's account and details of the work are a valuable record of what birds once lived in part of the Weald with some appreciation of their numbers that can help studies of changing status and distribution even today.

There is space to mention one other contribution by HG. He and his brothers were inveterate regular keepers of notes on most things natural, by 'regular' meaning 'daily'. Thus, HG recorded the songs of birds and by so doing was able eventually to contribute the information on song-periods to Witherby's *Handbook*. Careful daily notes of this sort in one area often become tedious and

may seem aimless, but they nearly always pay handsome dividends, as did HG's.

One realizes from the book that the Alexanders pioneered other things like seawatching, but most of all that birdwatching, now sometimes almost a term of opprobrium, is fundamental to much field work, that if it is an art it can be carried out with great scientific usefulness and that it will be a sorry day if ever there are no people like HG to do just that.

S.M.

**Saint Francis: Nature Mystic.** The derivation and significance of the nature stories in the Franciscan Legend by Edward A. Armstrong, 1973. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of Calif. Press. Pp. 270, b. & w. pl 19. 225 x 150 mm. \$US12.00.

Although birds play a significant role in this survey the extraction of references to them would not serve a useful purpose. The main justification for reviewing the book here lies in the historical association, however tenuous, between the mystical attitude to nature and the study of natural history.

The aim of the study is to reach a closer understanding of the Franciscan Legend (the Saint's loving affinity with animals) and as the author points out, this calls at times for 'the methods of the folklorist, as well as those of the historian, theologian, psychologist, and naturalist'. Probably no one is better able to carry out such a study than the Rev. E. A. Armstrong, a retired Anglican clergyman, a distinguished ornithologist and a worker of notable scholarship in historical and associated fields.

His point of view, naturally, is a Christian one and his definition of the Christian nature-mystic is 'one whose mystical experience, whatever form it may take, is based on Christian beliefs and involves an appreciation of Creation as God's handiwork'. As he remarks, there 'are many gradations between the pangs of delight and thankfulness in the presence of earth's loveliness felt by ordinary Christian folk and the raptures of such as Saint Francis'. Through careful consideration of factors, historical, zoological and psychological, and attention to many sources, the author develops his thesis that St Francis, when stripped of legend, remains not a magician and not a naturalist, 'but a man whose loving sympathy for all aspects of Creation invigorates his insight, pioneering the way for poets, artists, and scientists'.

Armstrong's main theme, strongly presented, is to show that the traditional animal-stories of the Franciscan Legend (e.g. the Wolf of Gubbo) were not intended to be taken literally but were, in part, expounded to reflect symbolically a Christian ideal of harmony between man and the wild beasts, and the superiority of man over the brute forces of nature through gentle sanctity. The author also presents strong evidence for the influence of itinerant and nature-oriented Celtic monks upon the Franciscan stories, pointing by contrast to the artificiality of the animals in stories of the Saint that are purely or chiefly Italian in origin.

That the Franciscan Legend has touched a wide audience is no doubt true and something akin to its ideals lies perhaps at the core of the twentieth century nature-lover's creed. More specifically Armstrong sees St Francis as the patron saint of those 'who, taking pleasure—sometimes rising to ecstatic delight—in the exuberance and diversity of Creation, thankfully regard them as expressions of divine splendour . . . '.

From this nature-inspired joy in St Francis the author draws the ideal of selfless enjoyment of nature and points an important moral for conservationists, namely that 'it is a measure of how materialistically minded we have become that conservationists' arguments for the

preservation of the earth's flora and fauna are so often based on self-interest; the need to preserve plants and animals for man's use and enjoyment'. As a Christian he would see Nature 'preserved and revered because of its variety and beauty—for its own sake as the handiwork of God—only secondarily for our benefit, though the two ideals cannot be separated'.

There are many different ways in which man reflects closeness to, insight into, or feelings of affinity with, animals and some are quite unassociated with conscious religious motives. The pursuit of these is not the aim of the book; the study of the Franciscan expression is and from the naturalist's viewpoint it is timely. Whether one accepts a Christian viewpoint or not the wonder and joy to be found in contemplation of nature, so characteristic of the poor Saint, are attributes admirable in man as ones distinct from, but potentially sister to, his pursuit of science. Many naturalists, including ornithologists, will be glad that Armstrong has written this significant book and, as usual, has enlivened it with numerous and interesting footnotes.

A.R.McE.

**The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland** by Stanley Cramp, W. R. P. Bourne and David Saunders, 1974. London: Collins. Pp 287, col. pl 4, b. & w. pl 12, b. & w. ill. 24, figs 2, maps 32. 155 x 223 mm. £3.50.

This long-awaited book draws together the results of the ambitious Operation Seafarer. The object was to census seabirds at all coastal breeding colonies of Britain and Ireland, including the geographically unrelated Channel Islands, depending largely on the enthusiasm of a small army of amateur observers. The fieldwork was organized by the British Seabird Group and had the good fortune to profit from disaster in that money resulting from the Torrey Canyon Appeal Fund, following the tragic and infamous oil-spill in March 1967, paid for a full-time organizer, David Saunders, between 1968 and 1971. All the right people seem to have had a hand in the work, but it is sad that James Fisher, until his death chairman of Operation Seafarer and without doubt a leading source of inspiration, neither saw, nor had what might have been a most valuable hand in, the final product.

There is no doubt that a great deal of work has gone into the book. Facts are well presented on the whole, though mostly in summary, except for some selected data in more gritty form in twenty-seven tables. I would have liked more of this sort of thing and less of the saleable aspect, which may have been dictated by the publishers wishing to ensure the book's financial success. However this may be, the space used for information on the census itself and the results obtained seems to have been restricted. Also, there is a degree of secrecy in presenting certain information, but I suspect this is a problem, more imagined than real, that especially haunts publication of precise details of localities in the United Kingdom.

The species covered are those that Fisher and Lockley (1954, *Sea-birds*) would have included as primary seabirds. These amount to four procellariiformes, three pelecaniformes and seventeen charadriiformes (thirteen larids and four acids). Not an impressive list by southern-hemisphere standards, but a goodly proportion of the seabird fauna of the northern North Atlantic. In this region the British Isles figure prominently as a breeding centre, rather as New Zealand does for some groups within our own area. On my reckoning this list is about thirty per cent of the whole North Atlantic seabird fauna, though Fisher and Lockley, like this book, included species that are not obligatory seabirds

in the narrowest sense.

The first two chapters say something about the biology of seabirds and comment on various threats to their future. Next comes a summary of the status and numbers of the twenty-four species whose separate accounts follow. It is remarkable that the total numbers of the most abundant seabirds within the British Isles are dwarfed by what we are accustomed to in Australia and New Zealand. The Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*, for example, rates a breeding population of 'over 175,000 pairs' or Order 6. Seven other species come within this top rating, but the most abundant, the Guillemot *Uria aalge*, is claimed to have over half a million pairs. Techniques for censusing this species were regarded with caution and very considerable errors of counting may have been involved. The top-scoring seabird, whose numbers appear to be reasonably accurate, was the Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* at 470,000 pairs in 1969-70. Difficulty in censusing some species was clearly a problem. Unfortunately, three of the four procellariiformes, being nocturnal ashore and not nesting on the surface, defied the ingenuity of the Seafarers and census figures were not obtained. The Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, however, was more obliging and in any case the project could follow the precedents of many earlier surveys, notably those drawn together in James Fisher's life-long work.

The account of each species includes identification, food and feeding habits, breeding, movements and world distribution, the value of which is doubtful in a region of the world so well endowed with handbooks and field guides. Four colour plates by Robert Gillmor depict all species, but most are shown only in definitive breeding plumages. There are also black-and-white illustrations of each species, all very nice but not very useful.

The real interest lies in examining the section on census methods together with that on status in 1969-70 and past history. These sections are supported by a fine series of thirty-two maps, depicting distribution and sizes of coastal colonies. Inland colonies were ignored; so, species like the Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* are considerably misrepresented. Superficially, there is much similarity between Parslow's maps in the *Reader's Digest Book of Birds* (1969), Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow's *Birds of Britain and Europe* (1972) and particularly Parslow's *Breeding Birds of Britain and Ireland* (1973) and those produced painstakingly by Operation Seafarer, which nonetheless contain far more information. Other maps indicate such features as the importance of localities in terms of numbers of seabirds and of species. In the latter respect Westray and Papa Westray in Orkney top the list with nineteen species against eighteen for Fetlar in Shetland.

The book's main value is in the tables, together with anything that can be gleaned from the text that could be compared with new data when again a census is attempted locally or nationally. But to what extent we can rely on its figures is the question that might have been better answered.

The Seafarers and their elected authors must be congratulated on carrying out the census and then presenting some of the results in this useful contribution to the literature on seabirds.

P.J.F.

**Bird Ringing** by Chris Mead, 1974. British Trust for Ornithology Guide Number Sixteen. Pp 68, b. & w. pl 13, maps 31, line illustrations, graphs and histograms. 209 x 152 mm (stapled). £0.50 (obtainable from BTO, Beech Grove, Tring, Hertfordshire).

The purpose of this small book is stated by Sir A. Landsborough Thomson in his introduction: 'It is not ad-

dressed primarily to the dedicated ringer. . . . The guide is aimed, rather, at the birdwatcher who is not a ringer but may be interested to know more about this special activity – its objects, its methods, and certain of its results.

Though many bird-ringers (banders in Australia) will be conversant with much of the information, most will find it convenient to have it gathered together in one publication in abridged form. Chapters cover such aspects as the history of marking birds (it began with the Romans), rings, ringers, keeping records, recoveries, migration and movements.

All this is interesting but of greater value are examples of data readily collected by banders and, more importantly, suggestions of how to analyse such data, a frequent cause of vexation to the amateur. Maps deal with recoveries of species relevant to the United Kingdom. They reflect the dedication and geographical concentration of European banders and, one suspects, the patterns of movement of their birds, which often can be reasonably predicted. In comparison, the number of Australian banders is small and many of our birds move unpredictably and are far less co-operative; but we are fortunate in being so well served by the tabulated results and selected recoveries contained in the Annual Reports of the Australian Bird-banding Scheme.

This book ought to assuage the injured sensibilities of the opponents of bird-banding. It stresses that the safety and welfare of the bird is of utmost importance; and shows how results of bird-marking are an asset to conservation. It is a useful addition to the birdwatcher's library.

P.N.R.

**Scarce migrant birds in Britain and Ireland** by J. T. R. Sharrock, 1974. Berkhamsted, England: T. & A. D. Poyser Ltd. Pp 191, b. & w. p. 12, line drawings by P. J. Grant 25, many maps and figs. 223 x 142 mm. £3.80.

This book is based mainly on articles published in *British Birds* during 1969–73. Generally, it records occurrences of twenty-four selected species over the ten years 1958–67, but there is brief mention of additional American waders and American landbirds in Chapter 5, where the Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* and Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*, which outnumber all the others, are comprehensively mapped and discussed. The twenty-four species were chosen to fulfil the 'scarce' qualification, being neither 'very scarce' nor 'very common' migrants; they are usually annual visitors to Britain and Ireland, 'in numbers ranging from a handful to a hundred or more'. Furthermore, as Dr Sharrock states, 'nearly every record of these scarce migrants is published in the excellent series of annual county and regional bird reports which covers the

whole of Britain and Ireland, and they supply ideal data for detailed analysis'.

Five of the twenty-four species are known also in Australia: Richard's Pipit (considered the European race of the widespread *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, now generally considered to include the Australian Pipit *A. australis*), Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (a widespread breeding bird in Australia), White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucoptera* (an irregular but at times not uncommon migrant in Australia), Pectoral Sandpiper (an uncommon visitor here) and Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicauda* (very few local records). Thus, wide-ranging distribution does appear to be over-emphasized, considering that approximately 20 per cent of those selected for detailed migration study in England also occur in or migrate to Australia on the opposite side of the world.

Occurrences are excellently detailed, species by species. Graphs depict counts of populations for every month and the status during spring and autumn for each of the ten years. Also, nearly full-page maps, outlining the counties of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, clearly convey the abundance of each species recorded from every county by varying sizes of black circles (14 in all and differing in the numbers each represents for each species) ranging in diameter from slightly under two to nine millimetres. For example, for Richard's Pipit, the map indicates that only in County Cork (4-6 birds) was it noted in Ireland; there were no occurrences in Scottish mainland counties although forty-five to forty-eight were recorded in Shetland, four counties in Wales listed from one to six birds each, and of the eighteen English counties where these Pipits were found, only in Yorkshire, Norfolk and the Isles of Scilly were more than twenty-two and up to forty-eight birds observed. For most species a map shows both autumn and spring counts.

This great accumulation of data has resulted largely from the network of bird observatories round the coast, together with the efforts of numerous individual bird-watchers, and makes one realize that only when such sources are available could any country hope to gather such comprehensive information. A map indicates the number of observers in each county who contributed (up to 280 in some). In Australia, with its great size and comparatively few qualified observers, a ten-year migration census would be virtually impossible, except for some closely populated areas.

The newly formed RAOU Committee for appraisal of records and those who will be seeking its assistance, specially the conveners of some of the Atlas surveys in operation, will undoubtedly find useful information and methods of operation in this book.

A.R.McG.

## PAPER

**The Biology of the Vestfold Hills, Antarctica** by G. W. Johnstone, D. J. Lugg and D. A. Brown, 1973. ANARE Scientific Reports, Series B (1) Zoology, Pubn No. 123. Pp 62, b. & w. p. 35, figs 2, maps 4 plus separate colour map in pocket. 248 x 174 mm. \$A1.30. (Available from Australian Government Bookshops.)

This report reviews the biology of an area of the Antarctic coast close to the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions station at Davis (68°S, 78°E). The Vestfold Hills, a roughly triangular ice-free enclave of rock and water occupying about 400 km<sup>2</sup>, is low-lying, hilly, deeply indented by inlets and studded with

lakes and tarns. Numerous small islands fringe its coastline.

The report deals with the geography, geology and climate, the scant flora and invertebrate fauna, seals and birds. Twelve species of bird have been recorded at Davis. Breeding species include the Adelie Penguin with several colonies and an estimated breeding population of 130,000 pairs. The colony of Southern Giant-petrels at Hawker Island, where there are usually about 30–40 pairs, is of particular interest because at 68°38'S it is the most southern breeding site known for the species. Other breeding birds are Cape Petrel, Snow Petrel,

Wilson's Storm-petrel and South Polar Skua. The available information is well summarized in sections dealing in turn with each of these species and the others, recorded as visitors to the area. Maps of breeding locations and tabulations of pertinent data are given,

with an appendix giving details of bird-banding and recoveries from this region of the Antarctic. Photographs throughout the text have been commendably selected to emphasize various important features.

P.J.F.

### AUSTRALASIAN ORNITHOLOGY

*Contents of other periodicals selected by M. G. BROOKER*

**The Sunbird** 5 (4) 1974

Studies of the Apostlebird at Inverell. Part 1: general behaviour (M. Ledger) 77

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Observations on the behaviour of the Yellow-breasted Bowerbird (S. Diczbalis) 95

Movements of Australian Gannets past Caloundra (K. McArthur) 99

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