

BOOK REVIEWS

AUSTRALIAN HONEYEATERS by Brigadier Hugh R. Officer; Illustrations by Peg Maltby. Published by the Bird Observers Club, Melbourne, 1964. 86 pp., 12 color plates. Price 19/- posted.

Brigadier Officer is one of Australia's most experienced bird observers, and as is claimed inside the dust-cover, is probably the only ornithologist in the world to have had field experience of all the Australian Honeyeaters. He must also be a leading contender for the title of having observed the most Australian birds in the field. This, his first book is a valuable and welcome addition to the growing list of good books on Australian birds.

Although the book is designed mainly for field observers it is not claimed to be a "Field Guide" in the strict sense; the size, 9½" x 7½" is not one that would fit the pocket, and all the birds in each plate are not in identical poses. The nomenclature and order used is that of the R.A.O.U. Checklist, although this order is not followed strictly in the plates, where birds likely to be confused are grouped together. The author has wisely not gone beyond the species level. Each species is similarly treated—vernacular name, scientific name, a description of those features that are observable in the field and other information under the headings of Length, Field Identification, Distribution, Habits and Voice, Nesting Habits and General. Where there are several species in a genus comments are made on the characters of the genus. One feels that to have given the plate number after each species heading would have facilitated reference to the plates.

The twelve color plates each illustrate from four to seven species, mostly six, and are on the whole very good; the birds are large enough to show field characters clearly and are not overcrowded. The practice of arranging the birds in most of the plates on branches of flowering native trees and shrubs might offend a few "purists," but in no way detracts from their value as identification guides and tends to make each plate a pleasant picture, not just a collection of birds.

The following comments refer to South Australian species only:—

The distribution given is, in a number of species very vague—giving the impression of a much greater range than is actually the case, e.g. "South Australia" for several species whose range does not extend north nor west of Port Augusta, and "Southern Australia" for the Yellow-faced Honeyeater whose Australian range does not extend west of Spencer Gulf.

The only call given for the White-naped Honeyeater, "a rather peevish lispings 'tserp tserp'," might intimate that this is the only call of the species which actually has a quite varied repertoire.

"It prefers the rather hotter inland areas" for the Black-chinned Honeyeater certainly does not apply to South Australia.

Young Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters lack the heavy streaking of the breast and could easily be confused with the Yellow-fronted species although the conspicuous blackish line above the yellow ear plume of the latter is a reliable distinguishing

feature. This line is much fainter in the Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, not absent as is claimed by the author.

It would perhaps have been advisable to illustrate the female Crescent Honeyeater.

Although the text states that the tail of the Noisy Miner is much lighter at the tip the illustration shows no indication of this. Actually the tail tip is almost white—sufficiently so to appear in the field as a broad white tip to all but the two central feathers.

No mention is made in the text of the conspicuous white tip to all but the central tail feathers of the Yellow-throated Miner, whereas the statement "whitish tips to the tail" for the Dusky Miner would indicate that this is a field character, whereas in the reviewer's experience the absence of a conspicuous white tail tip is an additional clue to the identity of the Dusky Miner of the eastern mallee areas of this State.

The above points are of but minor importance and are in no way intended as derogatory criticism of the book. In the reviewer's opinion the book adequately fulfils the function for which it was intended—an observers' guide to the Honeyeaters, and should be considered a must for the bird-watcher's library. It is sincerely hoped that this will not be Brigadier Officer's only bird book; a number of other groups of our birds badly need similar treatment.

B. G.