

BOOK REVIEWS

A FIELD GUIDE TO AUSTRALIAN BIRDS NON-PASSERINES, by Peter Slater, published by Rigby Ltd., Adelaide, 1970; xxxii + 428 pp., 64 plates (43 in colour), 47 + text figures, distribution maps. Price \$5.50.

The book for which Australian bird observers have waited so long has at last been published; it has been well worth the wait. Having been associated with the preliminary stages many years ago as one of three South Australian advisers, the reviewer has a personal interest in this book, which is without doubt the most important book of its type ever to appear on Australian birds. It compares very favourably with Roger Tory Peterson's field guides to North America and Europe. It is worthy of note that the Australian Conservation Foundation made a grant to defray part of the expenses, and that part of the royalties will be donated to the Foundation.

This volume deals only with the non-passerines. To have included all Australian birds in one volume would have necessitated reducing the amount of material on each species or increasing the size of the book considerably. As it is, with 460 pages it is as bulky as a field guide could be, and still remain a field guide in its intended sense.

The text is by eight authorities, the illustrations by Peter Slater and maps by Eric Lindgren. The area covered is Australia, Tasmania and Lord Howe, Norfolk, Christmas, Cocos-Keeling, Heard and Macquarie Islands, and the oceans near Australia. Also included are certain additional species which could conceivably be recorded in the future, and the swallows and martins, for comparison with the swifts and swiftlets.

The illustrations are excellent, showing almost everything that a field worker could possibly hope for. The plates show sex and age differences, breeding and non-breeding plumages, birds perched and in flight where necessary, close-ups of heads of penguins, albatrosses and some petrels and prions and the wing angle when gliding of the larger raptors. The text figures include an eight-page 'visual index' of typical representatives of each group, nine pages of outlines of sea bird bills arranged around the page so that the bills of collected birds can be laid on them for direct comparison, underwings of the gadfly petrels, wader flight patterns and bill shapes, evening silhouettes of nightjars and a number of drawings of birds, mostly extra-Australian species not included in the plates. With so thorough a coverage one wonders why both sexes of the two Bronzewing Pigeons and the Plain Wanderer were not illustrated, nor both breeding and non-breeding bill colouring of the Pied Cormorant.

The text contains information on the various orders and lesser groups, and each species is treated under Looks, Voice, Habitat and Range; the information given is brief but adequate, most species occupying somewhat less than half a page.

My only major criticism is of the distribution maps. Considering only the South Australian ranges there are a number of major inaccuracies—Peaceful Dove, Crested Pigeon and Cockatiel to name but three—and a considerable number of

minor errors and inconsistencies. It is to be hoped that users of the book take up the author's suggestion and notify him of any such inaccuracies.

The proposed production of a periodic newsletter of additions and corrections is a worth while idea.

Notwithstanding the inaccuracies in some distribution maps, this book is highly commended; no serious observer of Australian birds could afford to be without a copy.

BRIAN GLOVER.