

*EVERY AUSTRALIAN BIRD ILLUSTRATED*. Edited by Peter Wade; published by Rigby, Adelaide, 1975; 320 pp., 563 colour photographs, 24 b. and w. photographs, 131 paintings. Price \$24.95.

Birds, being attractive to look at and usually colourful, make excellent subjects for 'coffee table' books and *Every Australian Bird Illustrated* fits readily into this category. Sadly, for keen ornithologists at least, there is no shortage of this type of book on the market, whereas publications contributing something of real value to Australian ornithology appear rather less frequently. It is a pity therefore that publishing companies continue to use their

resources to promote picture books, while good reference works are so thin on the ground.

Like so many similar publications this book has little to offer the experienced ornithologist. Moreover, at the risk of sounding pompous, I feel it could do a disservice to birdwatching generally by taking \$24.95 from the pockets of people who might otherwise spend their money on something more useful, such as the two field guides or Macdonald's *Birds of Australia*.

The point is that the initial interest of would-be birdwatchers is more likely to be encouraged if they are able to identify a reasonable number of species. After reading the sales screed inside the front cover, a novice could be misled into thinking that the book is a valuable guide to identification; such is not the case.

The first few pages are devoted to describing the habitats of Australian birds. This section is too short to be of much use and contains nothing substantial. Photographs of the various types of habitat are a good idea but the accompanying descriptions are rather repetitious and say very little when one examines them. For instance, the caption for the photograph illustrating rocky terrain states:

"Rocks, of any shape or size, have their own charm, . . . being the sole haunts of a number of species who seek no habitat other than rocky country."

As the title suggests, the bulk of the book contains page after page of illustrations; just what this achieves is open to debate. On the one hand, to obtain photographs of practically every Australian bird is in itself no mean feat, even though many of the rarer species are illustrated with paintings. On the other, one could argue with some justice, that in an attempt to include as many photographs as possible the editor has substituted quantity for quality.

Some of the photographs are excellent but many are very poor, both from an artistic viewpoint and as an aid to identification. It is obvious that a number have been taken in a zoo (Darter, White Egret, Straw-necked Ibis, etc.), and others in an aviary (some parrots and most cockatoos). I cannot understand why the editor chose photographs of these species in captivity when surely there are many suitable pictures in existence taken in natural surroundings. Other species, particularly some sandpipers, are illustrated with poor photographs taken in the wild, yet in view of the similarity between these birds, the editor could have been excused for 'cheating' here in order to get detailed close-ups.

M. F. Lewitzka's photograph of a Barn Owl with prey, p. 153, had me green with envy until I noticed the wire fencing in the background. Personally I prefer the photographs by Mr. G. Chapman, pages 255, 256, 265, etc., who makes a point of capturing his subjects away from the nest. Mr. J. Ferrero's magnificent photograph of a Common Noddy in flight, p. 114, also merits a mention.

Finally, the text on each family is probably sufficient and the captions to the colour photographs on average adequate, bearing in mind the likely market. Much as I regret to end on a negative note, I can only recommend this book as a gift for a friend overseas.

— JOHN BRANSBURY.

\* \* \*

Commendably, the compilers of this book endeavoured to ensure that each illustrated bird was accurately identified by obtaining the expert opinions of members of the Adelaide Ornithologists Club on the identification of the illustrated birds. While almost all large works undoubtedly have some errors, the theme of this work is centred around the illustrations. The publishers claim (inside cover) "Every illustration gives clear details of colour, plumage, beaks, and other aids to recognition. The large format of the book and the sizes of the illustration enable easy identification of birds." Therefore any error in the illustrations conflicts with these statements.

While many photographs are of birds (or even fledglings) on nests, not showing the subject clearly, others display so little of the bird's distinguishing features that the photographer's word has to be taken on their correct identification. Of these, many are disputable. Despite precautions taken, the following obvious slips have been made by vetters and printers: p. 101, the Knot is a Great Knot; p. 149, captions wrong (upper is Oriental Cuckoo, lower is fledgling Pallid Cuckoo); p. 163, painting by Gould is of Grey Swiftlet and not the Glossy Swiftlet; p. 166, Forest Kingfisher is a Sacred Kingfisher; p. 174, Skylarks are a painting by Gould of Little Thrushes; p. 203, Mangrove Warbler is a White-browed Scrubwren.

Three photographs are of dead or dying birds, two are of fledglings, and at least 68 photographs are of birds in captivity.

Thus little can be said for *every* (and might we ask why the Black-winged Petrel is not included, as it has bred in Australia for about six years) bird being illustrated, or of their being in natural habitat. — J. B. COX.