

BOOK REVIEW

READERS DIGEST COMPLETE ATLAS OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS, consultant editor H. J. Frith. Published by Readers Digest Services Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1976. 616 pp. Price \$33.00.

Apart from short sections on where birds live, naming and identifying birds, classification by order and family, and the life of birds, the bulk of this book consists of "descriptions of the habitat, behaviour, appearance and distribution of every species of bird that breeds in or regularly visits Australia. There are photographs of all but 23 of them." Following this is a list with a few lines of information about 66 additional species of rare visitors, escaped captives and unsuccessful introductions. The text is the work of 50 different contributors.

Each species has about half a page of text—several paragraphs of general information plus condensed sections on other names, identification, voice, nesting and distribution. A map shows the species' normal Australian distribution.

The photographs range from double-page to as small as c. 50 x 50 mm. Most are of high quality (although some colours seem to have suffered somewhat from bird to published product) and of adequate size, and if a few are of indifferent quality this is no doubt because no better photographs are available. Most are from the National Photographic Index of Australian Birds.

The classification used is that of the 1975 RAOU *Checklist* and *Interim List* (of Condon

and Schodde respectively), with some changes in common names and in sequence of species within a genus.

The book is not without its errors. The captions to photographs of the Red-eared and Red-browed Firetails have been transposed, and the names to the White-lined and White-throated Honeyeaters in the photograph on p. 476 have been reversed.

I found no obvious errors in the text on the selection of species that I read. There are inaccuracies in some of the distribution maps, but far fewer than in Slater's *Field Guides*.

It is interesting to compare this volume with the somewhat similar *Every Australian Bird Illustrated* edited by Peter Wade and published by Rigby in 1975. Although of the same page size, the Rigby book has little more than half the number of pages, very little text information and no distribution maps; the illustrations include many reproductions of paintings by Gould, Matthews *et al*, but these like the photographs are generally of high quality. The taxonomy is very out of date by generally accepted standards. Of the two, the Readers Digest publication is certainly better value for the price.

This is by far the best book of its type to be published on Australian birds, and Readers Digest and the printers, Adelaide's Griffin Press, are to be congratulated on a magnificent publication. — BRIAN GLOVER.