

## BOOK REVIEWS

*BIRDS FOR BEGINNERS. HOW BIRDS LIVE AND BEHAVE* by J. D. Macdonald, 1980. Sydney: Reed. Pp 173, col. illus. 57, b & w figs 48, tables 17. 140 x 215 mm.

This is a book of information about birds with a deliberate bias toward Australian birds. It is therefore a welcome addition to the books of similar scope (e.g. *The Life of Birds* by J. C. Welty, 1975. W. B. Saunders Co.: Philadelphia.; *Fundamentals of Ornithology* by J. Van Tyne and A. J. Berger, 1959. John Wiley and Sons; New York.) with the usual European or American bias. The format is a departure from the conventional "bones first" approach. The author begins with the more vital and interesting in the sequence; territorial behaviour, breeding biology, population problems, post-breeding activities, flight, distribution, habitats and adaptations, plumage, anatomy, senses and evolution. The pragmatic view of the use of common names followed in the book is explained in an appendix. There follows a useful list of references and an adequate index.

**BOOK REVIEWS (Continued)**

The author offers some imaginative and thought-provoking interpretations of aspects of bird biology. For example, he suggests that Blue-faced Honeyeaters may be evolving the habit of nest parasitism and that some communally breeding species may be evolving towards a social structure typical of ants and bees. Such suggestions, even if not universally agreed upon, may well encourage some observers to begin to inquire as to why different birds live and behave the way they do, how they evolved and, something we consider perhaps less frequently, how they may subsequently evolve. If the book so helps to sharpen the approach of a birdwatcher, it will do ornithology a great service.

Although the book is well laid out, an introductory, rather than a concluding section on evolution by natural selection would better orientate the reader for what lies ahead and perhaps further unify the book.

In attempting to reduce some principles to simple terms, the author may confuse some readers. For example, he remarks loosely and quite incorrectly on page 72 that races of a species are genetically identical while on page 162 notes more correctly that no two members of a new generation of a population will be genetically identical (although the exception of identical twins should be noted).

The title, *Birds for Beginners*, is perhaps unfortunately similar to the recent *Learning About Australian Birds* (R. Blamford 1981; Collins; Sydney). The two books are vastly different. Blamford addressed the problem of bird study itself whereas Macdonald presents a well organised fund of knowledge and therefore should gain much wider acceptance and use.

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