

BOOK REVIEWS

THE DYNAMIC PARTNERSHIP: BIRDS AND PLANTS IN SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA
H.A. Ford & D.C. Paton (eds.), Government Printer: South Australia, 1986, Plates, Figures, pp 199. Price \$15.50.

There is an urgent need for a more thorough understanding of many aspects of Australian ecology if effective conservation strategies are to be developed. This handbook addresses that need in the area of bird-plant relationships. It also aims to bring to a wide audience an awareness of the rapid development of studies of these relationships.

Sixteen papers of varying length and depth are presented. Although they are treated as chapters as in a single text, with the editors achieving a degree of cross-referencing and bracketing them with an introduction and conclusion designed to draw attention to common elements and concerns, it is, nonetheless, essentially a collection of individual papers. The aspects of bird-plant relationships which are discussed, the research methods described and the extent to which the papers are either speculative or presenting "hard data" vary greatly. For example, D.C. Paton's "Evolution of bird pollination in Australia" is essentially speculative, while R.H. Howe's "Bird distribution in forest islands in northern-eastern New South Wales" offers a detailed description of a specific research project.

Similarly there is a considerable range in the degree of "technicality" of the papers. Some require much more specialised knowledge than others, not so much for a basic understanding as for a critical reading. For example, in contributions by both editors (D.C. Paton "Honeyeaters and their plants in south-eastern Australia", H.A. Ford "Birds and eucalypt dieback in north-eastern New South Wales") methods for estimating the food intake of birds based on their energy requirements are described. While these will be generally informative to the lay reader, no doubt the professionals will look much more critically at the premises, methods and conclusions which these estimates involve.

This should not deter the lay reader. Much of the technical information is presented in the copious tables and graphs which accompany the text. This is generally well written and well within the grasp of the amateur ornithologist, botanist or ecologist. It will be of special interest to those whose interests range widely over these areas.

For the ornithologists, both professional and amateur, one of the strengths of this handbook is that it suggests many lines and methods of research. The amateur whose chief resources are likely to be skills at observation in the field may wish to follow up aspects of the methodology employed by Howe in his forest island studies, or by R.J. Green in her research for "Native and exotic birds in the suburban habitat". On the other hand a wider range of resources and expertise would be needed to pursue further research along the lines described in N. Reid's "Pollination and seed dispersal of mistletoe (Loranthaceae) in South Australia" or P.A. Paton's "Use of aquatic plants by birds in the Coorong, South Australia".

No doubt many considerations influenced the editors' choice of papers. Some areas of current research and interest are not covered. One that has attracted great public interest and comment is the relationship between birds and cash crops: rosellas, lorikeets and silvereyes in orchards; galahs, cockatoos and corellas in seed and grain crops. Another of interest in species conservation is the Orange Bellied Parrot's need for particular food and shelter plants. That these have not been included perhaps underlines the editors' comment that there have been rapid developments in this field. In reading through what they have brought together here we are led to think about many other areas of bird-plant relationships which require special study. This handbook serves both as an introduction to the range of research and speculation in this field as well as a handy reference to data which have already been collected. Hopefully it will encourage further useful work and its subsequent publication.

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