

SOUND RECORDING REVIEW

A FIELD GUIDE TO AUSTRALIAN BIRDSONG, PARTS I & II, Compiled and edited by Rex Buckingham and Len Jackson, published by the Bird Observers Club: Victoria. Each part is a 60 minute cassette with accompanying folio. Price \$8.50 (\$10 with postage).

This project undertaken by Buckingham and Jackson must rank as a milestone in Australian Ornithology. Ever since birdsong first attracted attention, writers, musicians, and scientists have attempted (mainly unsuccessfully) to describe the calls of birds via the printed medium. The advent of modern recording techniques has overcome the obstacles which were encountered until a few years ago, so that now, with the aid of a cassette player the actual song of almost any bird may be heard in the comfort of one's own home. The editors co-opted 40 or so recordists who have generously contributed their recordings of Australian birdsong.

The first two of the projected seven cassettes are now available. The folio accompanying each cassette gives details of each recording, as well as the descriptions of each call taken from three major bird books: *A Field Guide to Australian Birds* by Peter Slater, *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds* and *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by Graham Pizzey. This enables the listener to read the descriptions while hearing the song, thereby making sense of the verbalizations.

Species are presented as in "Recommended English Names for Australian Birds" *Emu* 77: 245-313. English names only are voiced by Len

Price in a clear, concise manner. Latin names are contained in the associated folios.

The first cassette (Emu to Striated Heron) contains the calls of many sea-birds whose calls are seldom heard in Australia. However, their inclusion is important. Cassette number two, (Rufous Night Heron to Chestnut Rail) is of much more interest to the average bird observer, as this cassette gives the calls of ducks, raptors, quail and four of the rails.

The problem of selecting what is considered to be a "typical song" of each of the Australian species must have been an unenviable task, and will no doubt be open to discussion in some circumstances. However I am assured that the recordings were carefully selected and checked by observers familiar with each species. The combined resources of the recordists represented have failed to produce every call in a high quality form. However even a poor quality call usually contains enough information to give a clue as to the identity of the bird.

If upon hearing the call, an observer is able to anticipate the species, the problem of accurate identification is made much easier. When visiting an unfamiliar environment, the cassettes and accompanying text could become as valuable an aid to you as your favourite field guide book is at present. I look forward to hearing the rest of the series and hope that future cassettes will become available at a faster rate, now that many of the initial teething problems of production have been overcome.

H.W. CROUCH