

Book Review

Australian Bird Names: Origins and Meanings Second Edition

IAN FRASER AND JEANNIE GRAY, 2019

CSIRO Publishing, Clayton South, Victoria, \$54.99
Paperback, 368 pages, ISBN 9781486311637
Black and white illustrations

This unusual reference book provides both practical and esoteric information on the derivation of Australian birds' names and much else besides. The book is arranged in a systematic fashion, starting with ostrich, emus and cassowaries and ending with buntings. Both native and introduced bird species are included. The text is clearly set out and the derivation of the name of each relevant family, genus and species is considered.

As the authors mention in their introduction, only six years have elapsed since the publication of the first edition. However, much has changed during this period, with the addition of some 55 species to the national list and there have been taxonomic changes as well.

Featured in the book are 'mini biographies' of several prominent names in Australian ornithology, from John Latham and John White to John Leach and Gregory Mathews, not omitting John Gould. There are briefer notes on many others, including Louis Baillon [Baillon's Crake], Nicolas Baudin [Baudin's Cockatoo], John Gilbert [Gilbert's Whistler] and William Macleay [Macleay's Honeyeater]. Those classically inclined will be pleased to see references to Aristophanes' *The Birds*, Aristotle's *History of Animals* and Pliny's *Natural History*. In



short this is a scholarly work but as the authors bear their learning lightly, consulting the book becomes an enjoyable experience.

The striking black and white illustrations are from the half-forgotten works of Silvester Diggles, whose *magnum opus* entitled *Companion to Gould's Handbook; or, Synopsis of the Birds of Australia* was published in Brisbane in 1877.

The book will appeal especially, of course, to those who wish to know how birds' scientific and common names were derived. For example: *Microeca fascians* Jacky Winter – while the origin of the common name is uncertain, it may have been so-called because it sings in the winter when most birds are silent!

Microeca Gould, 1841 – 'dweller in a small home', from Greek *mikros*, small, and *oikos*, house.
fascians (Latham, 1802) – Latin *fascino*, enchant

Australian Bird Names has comprehensive indexes and a useful list of references to published works.

The book can be recommended as a useful work of reference.

David Hansman