

BOOK REVIEWS

A FIELD GUIDE TO AUSTRALIAN BIRDS: PASSERINES by Peter Slater, published by Rigby, Adelaide, 1974; xv + 309 pp., 39 colour plates + 3 pp. black and white illustrations; distribution maps, index. Price \$7.95.

This volume has the same format as the first on non-passerines, but is confined to birds of Australia and Tasmania; two sections are omitted, the visual index and the checklist (the latter I think is a pity). The text on each species is brief but adequate. The ranges given for some species are perhaps too condensed or vague, and at least one, the Variegated Wren, differs markedly from the distribution map. Likewise, the South Australian range of the Blackbird is merely stated as "Adelaide," yet the map shows a truer (although not fully accurate) range. The distribution maps are generally more accurate than in the first volume (considering S.A. ranges only), although there are still too many in which there are

fairly major inaccuracies — either too wide a range shown as in the Western Whipbird, too small as in the Superb Blue Wren and Weebill, and far too sweeping as in the White-tailed Warbler for which there are so few S.A. records (which include Lower Eyre Peninsula which is not included on the map — and very recently the northern Mount Lofty Ranges).

The illustrations to quote the author "are intended to be an aid to identification, not works of art"; they serve their purpose admirably, and, apart from a few unfortunate inaccuracies (see below), there is very little ground for criticism. If some colours are not quite accurate, we are assured that it has occurred in the printing process. Apart from the typical illustrations of each species, the six Wood-Swallows shown in flight from below (on plate 36) and Figure 1 (No. 82-83) depicting identification of *Corvus* spp. in the hand (by bill and throat hackles) will be found particularly useful.

The taxonomy used contains inconsistencies for which the author states ". . . I make no apologies

— taxonomy is the only science in which opinion is as important as other criteria." With few exceptions the book fulfils its purpose of enabling the field worker to give a name to visually distinctive bird populations — whether it be a full species or a subspecies should not concern the non-taxonomist. Nevertheless, it does nothing to help solve the confusion into which Australian avian taxonomy has fallen over the last few years. It is to be hoped that when the new R.A.O.U. Checklist does eventuate a revised edition of both Field Guide volumes can be published.

There are a few bird forms which I feel should have been included — e.g. the Little Treecreeper of North Queensland has been overlooked completely (even as a race of the White-throated); the distinctive Brown Currawong of Eyre and Yorke Peninsulas does not get a mention. This and the Black-Winged Currawong are both distinctive enough to warrant separate treatment as has been given the Clinking Currawong, and forms of various other species throughout the book.

There are a number of inaccuracies in plates and text. The following corrections have been supplied by the author:—

- p.34 numbers 7, 8 and 9 transposed. 7 should be 8; 8 should be 9; 9 should be 7.
- p.48 numbers 6 and 7 transposed. 6 should be 7; 7 should be 6.
- p.61 Heading should be 'Typical Honeyeaters.'
- p.67 Line 12 should read 'The next *three* species occur in the northern areas of the Northern Territory.'
- p.89 Rufous Scrub-bird: bill, eye and leg colours similar to Noisy Scrub-bird.
- p.126 Mallee Emu-wren should be *Stipiturus ruficeps mallee*.
- p.134 Reed Warbler line 2 '8 cm' should read '80 mm.'
- p.135 Great Reed Warbler line 2 '8 cm' should read '80 mm.'
- p.144 Mangrove Warbler; map — northern population race *levigaster*; eastern population race *cantator*.
- p.144 Brown Warbler; map — northern populations race *mouki*; southern population race *richmondi*.
- p.160 Yellow-throated Scrub-wren. Range should read 'Mt. Bromedary, New South Wales.'
- p.164 Rock Warbler. Range: omit 'Queensland.'
- p.166 Lines 1-2 should read: 'Three species, the Brown, Lemonbreasted and Yellow *Flycatchers* . . .'
- p.196 Line 1 omit word 'family.'
- p.200 Gibber Chat: eye colour should be 'pale yellow.'
- p.206 Map Red-browed Tree-creeper: spot in Northern Territory is a misprint.
- p.207 White-throated Tree-creeper: Range add 'A small race *minor*, sometimes called the Little Tree-creeper, occurs on the Atherton Tableland between Mt. Spec and Mt. Amos above 300 m.' This race was also omitted from the map on p.207.
- p.237 White-naped Honeyeaters lines 4-5 should read: 'considerably enlarged and covering the whole face in the Blue-faced Honeyeater.'

In addition to these, in Plate 32 the Black-eared Miner does *not* have a white tip to the tail as depict-

ed, and in the Friar-birds the Silver-crowned is the species with a prominently frilled nape, not the three species depicted (and described in the text).

Two introduced species should be mentioned. The Red-whiskered Bulbul has never become established in Adelaide, and should never, therefore, have been placed on the official S.A. birdlist many years ago. The Grenadier Weaver (Red Bishop) does not occur at the "north-west bend of the Murray, South Australia" as stated by Slater. This species formerly occurred along the Murray between Murray Bridge and Tailem Bend, but there have been no reports from anywhere in S.A. for many years. It has been claimed that the birds along the Murray disappeared during the 1956 floods.

Notwithstanding the inaccuracies, this is an essential book for Australian bird observers. At last, one can go on an extended field trip with only two bird books instead of a case full.

BRIAN GLOVER.

breeding strategies. Wrens and Choughs have forms of co-operative breeding where more than two birds assist in the raising of the young, while in the Mallee Fowl, where the eggs are incubated in a mound, neither parent is at all interested in the progeny.

Establishing that the birds were residential was often the prerequisite to analysing the territorial behaviour, intricate social behaviour and breeding biology of the species. Most of the studies summarised in the book were dependent on individually marking each member in a group of birds. The first appendix outlines trapping methods, different banding techniques and other equipment which could be useful in such studies.

The third section covers the migratory and nomadic birds. Except for the detailed study of the Short-tailed Shearwater, little is known about our migrant birds. Nomadic birds are also poorly understood, and usually a paragraph discusses a particular species or group. However, there are some exceptions, and some species of waterfowl and seabirds are considered in more detail.

The second appendix I find the most useful in the book. It outlines general reference books, Australian reference books and the various journals — both overseas and Australian — in which Australian ornithological research may be and is often published. Information is also given on regional societies and their publications.

My only criticism of the book is that the arrangement of the plates is most annoying. Most are placed well ahead of the relevant passages in the text. This defect could surely have been avoided.

As many of the species discussed are common and conspicuous (e.g. the Magpie) or familiar (e.g. the Kookaburra and Mallee Fowl), the book will give much enjoyment to the person who has little ornithological background but wishes to know more about the birds around him. I recommend this book to the student (primarily because of the comprehensive bibliography) and draw his/her attention to the appendices. To the amateur the book illustrates that there is more to ornithology than identification and species lists. Watching closely the behaviour of birds, and perhaps asking "Why this?" and "Why that?", may be equally rewarding and satisfying.

If this is a typical example of books in the Australian Naturalist Library Series, I look forward to reading the others.

D. C. PATON.

AUSTRALIAN BUSH BIRDS IN COLOUR. Irene and Michael Morcombe; published by A. H. and A. W. Reed, Sydney, 1974; 108 pages, 48 coloured plates. Price \$4.95.

As the title suggests this is essentially a book of coloured photographs, although the accompanying text does go a good deal further than most other publications aimed at the picture book market.

The coloured plates are generally of excellent quality and the standard of photography leaves little to be desired. There are a few exceptions however, for instance the rather poor photograph of a Galah on p. 35; but, as anyone who has tried bird photography will know, such a fine collection of photographs takes years to assemble even if most are of birds at the nest.

The notes on photographic technique, p. 13, are not so helpful as the publisher's comments on the inside front cover would have you believe. They contain nothing new for the experienced bird photographer and little to enlighten the beginner. A brief note alongside each plate, giving a few details such as the speed and aperture, the type of camera and film, and whether a telephoto lens or hide was used, would have served a more useful purpose.

Some of the black and white line drawings, such as the Southern Yellow Robin on p. 46, are really quite valueless. An obvious error concerning the Black-fronted Dotterel, which the author says in one paragraph is never found on ocean beaches and in another is a terrestrial bird which runs rapidly along beaches, casts a shadow over the otherwise plausible text.

Not a book for the serious ornithologist but one which, hopefully, will encourage interest amongst the unconverted.

JOHN BRANSBURY.