

*BIRD LIFE* by Ian Rowley. Collins. The Australian Naturalist Library, Australia, 1975. Pp.284, Figs. 26, Tables 8, Colour pl. 12, B & W pl. 16, Price \$A9.50.

*Bird Life* summarises most of the detailed field studies carried out on Australian birds over the last 25 years. Most of these studies have only appeared in scientific journals which are not readily available to the general public. *The Mallee Fowl, the bird that builds an incubator* (Frith, 1962) and *Kookaburras* (Parry, 1970) are two exceptions which have been published as popular books. Rowley makes many of these studies intelligible to the layman, expressing "scientific fact with a minimum of technical jargon." The general reader will enjoy reading the fascinating life histories of some of Australia's better known birds, and there are many additional references for those interested.

The book is in three sections. The first five chapters introduce ornithology, outlining briefly but clearly scientific concepts such as speciation and zoogeography, summarising the Australian climate and its habitats and discussing bird behaviour, breeding biology and basic life styles in relation to the Australian environment.

In Australia most species are residents, a few are migratory and the rest are nomadic. Resident species are the most easily and thoroughly studied because they remain in the same habitat all the year round. The second section describes the life histories of some resident species, with individual chapters on the Superb Blue Wren, Australian Raven, Australian Magpie, White-winged Chough, Tasmanian Native Hen, Kookaburra and the Mallee Fowl. Rowley's approach is to outline the general biology (taxonomy, habitat preference, food, feeding habits) of each species and to concentrate on breeding biology and social organisation, selecting only relevant information and relevant tables from the published articles, and often adding additional observations of his own. Amongst the species studied there is a great diversity in social organisation; for example, the five different types of territory of the Australian Magpie, the family group in the Superb Blue Wren and the simple pairs of the Australian Raven. There is also great variety in

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.

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