

**BOOK REVIEWS**

*PIGEONS AND DOVES OF AUSTRALIA* by H. J. Frith. 1982. Adelaide: Rigby. Pp 304, col. illus. 7, b & w figs. 90, 287mm x 220mm.

This book provides the most detailed information available on the Australian Pigeons and Doves and is obviously aimed more at the serious student of ornithology than at the casual bird-watcher. Nevertheless, Frith avoids scientific jargon, and provides an easily understood text, making the book suitable for both amateur and professional. The author's stated aim is to summarize and interpret what is known about Australian pigeons to 1979, as a basis for further research on the birds and to aid in their conservation.

The book opens with a short account of references to pigeons by early explorers in Australia and moves on to a general summary of the effects of European man on pigeon populations. Frith also points out that there is no zoological distinction between pigeons and doves, although doves tend to be smaller.

The first two chapters deal with pigeon biology and aviculture, while the remaining 25 chapters are each devoted to a single species. The information presented in these chapters includes: relationships, size, field identification, voice, habitat, routine, distribution and movements, food, display postures, breeding and status. Sonograms of calls, maps showing distribution and black and white diagrams of postures and displays are given for most species.

The author's interest in behaviour and breeding biology and the consequent extent in the book of data relating to those aspects combine to set the book apart from many of the other recent works on various Australian birds. Similarly, it is pleasing to be able to find detailed information on the food of Australian pigeons assembled between two covers. One looks forward to the day when the biology of all Australian birds will be as well documented as that of many of the pigeons in this book.

Also valuable are the sometimes sobering historical accounts of the interplay between species such as the Flock Bronzewing and Spinifex and Squatter Pigeons, the pastoral and mining industries, feral animals and natural climatic irregularities. Based on these accounts, Frith expresses concern for the future survival of some arid and tropical species and also for the seemingly secure temperate zone species, the Brush Bronzewing.

There are seven colour plates illustrating all species and different plumage phases of some. Frank Knight's paintings are outstanding. Excellent black and white photographs show the habitats preferred by the different pigeons, ranging from subtropical rainforest to mulga woodland and spinifex grassland. Additional black and white photographs illustrate various species engaged in daily activities like drinking, displaying, preening, mating, and also the nests, eggs and young of some species.

The text is easy to read and, for the species we know, free from error. The quality of the paintings is variable. The black and white drawings are adequate for their purpose of showing the displays and postures of individual species, but some of the colour plates are marred by poorly-shaped birds. Nevertheless all species are recognizable and it is useful to have the different age and sex categories illustrated.

PENNY PATON  
LEO JOSEPH