

BOOK REVIEWS

THE BIRDS OF WALLACEA (Sulawesi, The Moluccas & Lesser Sunda Islands), by C. M. N. White and Murray D. Bruce. British Ornithologists' Union Checklist Number 7, pp 254, map 5, no illustrations. 1986. Price 35.00 English pounds.

This scholarly and long-awaited book is essentially an updated review of the distribution and taxonomy of the birds of Wallacea. It is not a field guide and has no illustrations of birds.

Wallacea denotes the Indonesian islands lying between the Sunda Shelf of continental Asia and the Sahul Shelf of Australia-New Guinea. It was named after Alfred Wallace who, while working in the region last century, independently of Charles Darwin derived a theory of evolution by natural selection. The region is of interest to zoogeographers in that its fauna is transitional between that of continental Eurasia and Australia-New Guinea. This book is the first to deal monographically with the region's birds.

The 676 species-accounts, which constitute the core of the book, occupy 344 pages and the bibliography another 57 pages. The 69 introductory pages present discussions of the climates, habitats and zoogeography of Wallacea. This should convey an idea of the book's size and depth of coverage.

The book was commenced by the late Charles White. Following his death in 1978, it was carried on to completion by White's colleague, Sydney ornithologist Murray Bruce. Bruce has an extensive knowledge of the region's avifauna, derived from his own field and museum studies and admirable command of the literature. Throughout the book, authorship of the various contributions is clearly indicated as being that of White or Bruce. Bruce has frequently re-appraised White's accounts or simply added to them.

While perhaps not likely to be a frequently used book by many Australian birdwatchers and ornithologists, the South Australian Ornithological Association is nonetheless fortunate to have a copy in its library. The book should become a regularly consulted and important reference for those interested in the distribution and taxonomy of species common to Australia-New Guinea and Wallacea or indeed any species in the South-East Asian region, many migratory species of waders and northern Australian and Papuan species in general. It is one of the most important checklists to appear on the birds of this part of the globe in a long time.

Other reviewers will present more detailed reviews in other journals in the near future.

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