

"Australian Honeyeaters" by Brigadier Hugh R. Officer, illustrations by Miss Peg Maltby. Published by Bird Observers' Club, Melbourne, 1964; 83 pages, 12 coloured plates, 2 line drawings, one map. Price 16/- (postage 3/- extra) direct from B.O.C., 59-A Upton Street, Windsor, S.I. Victoria; also available through booksellers.

It would appear that interest in ornithology and just plain bird watching have increased considerably in recent years and Cayley's "What Bird Is That" is in the "best seller" class. There should then be a very good market for bird books in Australia and what we appear to lack is not readers but authors. The Australian market is very poorly served, as those familiar with overseas work on this subject will realise.

The arrival of a new book, particularly one on the typically Australian honeyeaters, has been eagerly awaited. Two questions come to mind immediately; the first - "How does it measure up to the standards of work currently being produced overseas"; and the second - "Will it be of assistance to the Australian ornithologist and bird watcher".

By current international standards of work on ornithology "Australian Honeyeaters" does leave something to be desired. Taxonomic argument has been strictly avoided; Peg Maltby, who is responsible for the illustrations, is not in the class of Roger Tory Peterson; and the rendition of colour is not as accurate as one might desire. The latter may be a combined fault of artist and printer, but generally the effect, particularly in the shades of yellow and green with which we are so familiar in the honeyeaters, is one of flatness. Economy has of necessity had to be considered though this has obviously been a minor matter. A desire to keep the illustrations large and a need to keep the number of coloured plates down has resulted in a few off balance illustrations and as well as some poses which are not normal for the bird. One could wish too for more precise detail on distribution, particularly after the work of Roscoe Gannon (1962) in this field, and for more detail of juvenile characteristics. Here, however, one must remember that identification in the field was the criterion.

Any published work on ornithology must of necessity be judged by the highest current standards irrespective of how high or low the author aimed; but the reviewer would be hard indeed to view "Australian Honeyeaters" only from such a standpoint. To put the matter in proper perspective, one must read the preface to understand the rather humble attitude of the author, and also one should be familiar with the artist's other work. Peg Maltby's prints of **chubby** aboriginal children, native flowers, etc., are probably familiar to most of us. This is evidently her first effort at scientific accuracy in

illustration. Brigadier Officer has offered the book, not as an ornithological monograph, but primarily as a field guide for the bird observer. With these points in mind one can really welcome an excellent work.

To most of us, honeyeaters are a most interesting group. Brigadier Officer makes a vast fund of knowledge of the birds available to us and as most of us lack knowledge on quite a number of the species, there is something in it for everyone. Each species is dealt with in a uniform manner and each is illustrated in colour. There are twelve coloured plates. Despite minor inaccuracies on the part of the artist, the illustrations will be a tremendous help to those interested in identification of honeyeaters in the field. Beginners can relatively easily identify a bird as a honeyeater; with this book, identification of the species will be much easier. The treatment of individual species under the sub-headings of description, field identification, distribution, habits and voice, nesting habits and general remarks is very good for the book's purpose, the text is very readable and easily and quickly referred to. While Check List order has been followed, birds resembling one another have been grouped together on the plates, thus providing a ready comparison for identification purposes. The author offers it on the basis of filling the want "until something better comes along". One can safely predict that this offering will be readily accepted for what it is by Australians interested in birds, no matter what their standard of competence, and that it will be a standard field guide for bird observers for many years to come.

The Bird Observers Club is to be congratulated on their enterprise in sponsoring the publication; the M.A.Ingram Trust should be thanked for providing a grant to enable publication at such a remarkably low price; Brigadier Officer's competence and wide experience in the field is reflected in every page; and Peg Maltby's illustrations will assist both beginners and the more advanced in their problems of identification with the honeyeaters. The book is a must for every Australian interested in birds. - S. J. Wilson.

Reference: Gannon, G.R., "Distribution of the Australian Honeyeaters", Emu, 1962, Part 3, pages 145-166.

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