REVIEWS

Australian Birds, by Robin Hill. Thomas Nelson (Australia) Ltd, Melbourne, 1967. xxviii + 281 pp., approximately 1000 illustrations in colour of some 700 species, map. Price $16.00.

This is a big, showy and expensive book in large quarto. It has received extensive publicity and the publishers claim it to be 'the most modern and comprehensive work on Australian Birds' to appear. It is similar in size and format to *Birds of the World* by Oliver L. Austin (1961).

In his preface, the author gives as one of his reasons for writing and illustrating this book his desire to make more people aware of our bird-life and thus, one hopes, excite them into taking an interest in conservation. Probably this objective will be achieved to some extent, mainly through the visual excitement he has endeavoured to convey in his illustrations.

For ornithologists, a closer look is needed to provide a sound assessment of the book. The section 'Classification of Birds' is helpful. An introduction to the basis of classification presents some of the systems used by leading ornithologists and concludes with the *Official Checklist* of the RAOU and H. T. Condon's *Handlist of the Birds of South Australia*.

Some of the illustrations are attractive but far too many are technically inaccurate and others are quite misleading. Two pages of corrigenda cover birds wrongly captioned or, though illustrated, omitted from the text, facts which, despite the corrigenda, must lead to many incorrect identifications and records in the future. The captions to all three plovers on pages 64 and 65 are incorrect. The corrigenda indicates that the captions of two of these, the Spur-winged and the Banded Plovers, have been transposed, but this only partly corrects the original mistake.

Several species, including a number of honeyeaters, are shown in flight with upturned ends to the primaries. This character of flight-pattern is seen in some birds of prey such as harriers but in most other species it is never observed in the field and only rarely seen in high speed photographs.

Some aspects of the book are difficult to understand. For instance, illustrations of Golden Whistlers (page 212) are captioned male, female and immature; it is known that the female and immature of this species are very similar in the field and the plumage differences are slight. The one definite diagnostic character, the rust-colour on the primaries of immature birds is not shown in the picture as that area is completely hidden by the figure of the male bird.

The male and female of the Grey-crowned Babbler on page 171 are shown wrongly with entirely different plumages. Even in the hand it is impossible to determine the sex of these birds by plumage alone.

The illustrations of the 'black and white' cormorants (page 15) are very confusing. Two figures are captioned 'Yellow-faced Cormorant' yet neither has a yellow face!; nor are the black flanks, common to both *Phalacrocorax various* and *P. fuscescens* shown in either instance, though this pattern appears in the painting of the latter species on page xviii.

The text will confuse readers further as the vernacular name has been given as the 'Yellow-faced Cormorant', yet on page 16, without any explanation, both 'Yellow-faced' and 'Pied' are used for the same species.

Both species of Log-runners (page xv) are shown the same size (7½ inches) whereas the Black-headed species is a noticeably larger bird. A. J. North gives the sizes as 10.5 inches and 8.3 inches respectively with the females smaller in each instance. The Fluttering Shearwater on page 10 is out of proportion in relation to the other shearwaters figured on the same page. A small figure shows the 'light phase' of the Wedge-tailed Shearwater, but is there any evidence that this phase has ever occurred in Australia?

Other matters of concern are a Jacana (page 74) shown perched on an elevated mangrove (?) root, completely out of keeping with its habits; the picture of a Scarlet Honeyeater (page 118) perched on the head of a supposed young Oriental Cuckoo and the picture of an adult Oriental Cuckoo (page 119) at the nest of a White-throated Honeyeater are not only misleading but superfluous, especially in view of the remarks in the text (page 118), '. . . it is actually unlikely that the Oriental Cuckoo nests in this country'. The Lewin Honeyeater (page 223) is wrongly shown with a blue and yellow ear-patch and the Painted Honeyeater (page 237) is illustrated with a narrow, blackish bill whereas it has a rather stout (for a honeyeater) fleshy-pink bill.

The White-breasted Honeyeater figured on page 234 is incorrectly captioned White-eared Honeyeater. The Scaly-breasted Lorikeet (page 90), the Pilot-bird (page 194), the Black-eared Cuckoo (page 119), the Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo (page 121), and some of the honeyeaters such as the White-plumed and Fuscous (page 225), are the more obvious instances that bear little or no resemblance to the species stated.

There have been several excellent articles and photographs published in the *Emu* and elsewhere during the past 12 years of the Golden Bower-bird and its unusual bower. The bower has been described as a maypole of sticks with a horizontal display perch, liberally decorated with lichen and occasionally with the yellowish flowers of *Melacope broadbentii*. The author's illustration (pages 160 and 161) is completely 'out of character' and erroneous in detail. The shape of the bower and its decorations of pink flowers and a blue button as well as the feather protruding from the crown of the male bird, may be artistic but convey a completely wrong impression of the species. Those ornithologists who have watched this bird at its bower will be amazed at the artist's interpretations.

Unfortunately there are many similar instances and numerous species are disproportionate in size or in unnatural and unusual attitudes. However, some of the parrots and a number of the pigeons are attractively tralia are treated within relevant orders, sub-headings illustrated.

The text, which is generally easy to read, follows the style of Austin's book but as all species found in Australia are treated within relevant orders, sub-headings or bold type for each species would have made reference much easier.

Again, while the text generally follows the detail of N. W. *Cayley's What Bird Is That?*, considerable improvement and avoidance of errors would have resulted if more time had been spent in research.

The Sooty Shearwater is stated to nest 'on Broughton Island, N.S.W., Tasman Island and other Tasmanian

Islands', yet it has been recorded breeding on at least three other islands off the coast of N.S.W. Similarly, the White-faced Storm-Petrel is recorded only as breeding in 'The Abrolhos and other islands off the West Australian Coast'. No mention is made of its breeding range in south-eastern Australia.

Referring to Silvereyes, the author states that 'in winter, the flanks of these birds become a much richer, tawny-buff colour than is present in the summer dress'. However, the only plumage change in this species is a slight one due to moult. In 1958 Dr J. A. Keast indicated the error of the belief in a summer/winter plumage change, an assumption which resulted from the mixing of southern (Tasmania and Victoria) and northern (N.S.W. and Queensland) breeding birds during their migrations and autumn/winter flocking.

The author is quoted as saying that the work took him 2 years to complete. It is my opinion that in such a relatively short time, justice could not possibly be done to a work of this magnitude.

Ornithologists will regret that this book has failed to achieve the standard necessary for reliable reference. It will still be necessary for bird students to consult earlier works to obtain accurate and detailed information. They certainly cannot rely on Robin Hill's book, despite the publisher's claim that it is 'the most modern and comprehensive work on Australian Birds'.

S. G. LANE, Lane Cove, N.S.W.

Seasonal Distribution and Ecology of Migrant Bird Populations by Mist-netting and Banding in Korea. Won, Pyong-Oh, Woo, Han-Chung, Ham, Kyu-Whang, and Yoon, Moo-Boo. 1967. *Misc. Rep. Yamashina's Inst. Orn. & Zool.*, 4: 405-44. (In Japanese with good English summary.)

The senior author, Won, is a team leader in the Southeast Asian MAPS programme (see *Aust. Bird Bander*, 1966, 4: 53-55) and was awarded the 'top bander's cup' at the MAPS Kuala Lumpur Conference in 1965 for the outstanding efforts of his team in Korea.

From June 1963 to December 1966, 123,242 birds of 124 species were banded in Korea (mainly near Seoul); 196 recoveries of 22 species have been reported in Korea, all representing movements, and seven recoveries of five species from abroad, including a House Swallow that migrated from Seoul to Mindoro, Philippines, in three months.

Information is given on roosting sites and behaviour, migratory status, seasonal food preferences, habitats, and sex ratios of passerines, especially of Pied Wagtail, House Swallow, and several species of *Emberiza* (buntings). There are 11 tables and 12 figures, including photos of banding sites (cornfields and pear orchards mainly), and of decoys, which apparently are very successful in attracting buntings to catching areas.

W. B. HITCHCOCK, Canberra, A.C.T.

A Guide to Moult in British Birds, by D. W. Snow. British Trust for Ornithology Field Guide No. 11, pp. 30, July 1967 (obtainable from B.T.O., Beech Grove, Tring, Herts, U.K., price 3s sterling).

Moult is as much a part of a bird's annual cycle as breeding and migration and is just as much worthy of study. Yet, by comparison, moult has received little attention. With the re-discovery of the mist net, moult is no longer the preserve of the museum worker with access to series of skins.

This booklet provides a good introduction to moult as a field study, well within the capabilities of most banders. Emphasis is placed on the moult of the flight-feathers which spans the entire period of the complete moult. The stage of moult can be assessed numerically without difficulty.

As the title implies, existing knowledge of moult in British birds is summarised. Much of this information is equally applicable to Australian birds, particularly in non-passerines with a wide distribution, such as waders. A useful bibliography is provided.

This guide is thoroughly recommended as an introduction to a fascinating and important branch of field ornithology.

D. G. THOMAS, Moonah, Tas.

A Pocket List of Australian Birds, prepared by P. J. Fullagar; available from S. Marchant, 36 Arthur Circle, Forrest, A.C.T., 2603. Price: six for $1.00 or 20 cents each.

'This Pocket List is intended to simplify the recording of field observations. It covers the birds of continental Australia and offshore waters, but does not include those restricted to neighbouring oceanic islands. . . .

'The Pocket List can be used to tally the species recorded in a particular area, but with intelligent use it can be of much more value in building up information such as the occurrence of breeding and seasonal changes in distribution and numbers of the birds seen in the localities visited. While such information is particularly required from parts of Australia seldom visited by ornithologists, careful and consistent observation in any area is of great value.'

This quotation, taken from the back cover of the Pocket List, gives an indication of the intended method of use.

The species are set out in systematic order which, in the main, follows Peters' *Check List*. Those who are familiar with this arrangement will find it useful and probably time-saving. Other workers will spend time locating the species required and initially their recording will be slow. But it will provide them with and assist them to know a recognised systematic order.

Five columns permit minimum recording space for five locations, five occasions at one location or a combination of these. Banders who are carrying out surveys based on observations as well as banding will find the Pocket List helpful, as also will those requiring to record field lists.

S. G. LANE, Lane Cove, N.S.W.

Notice to all Members

Banders are licensed by CSIRO and State fauna authorities to trap, band and release birds in connection with the Australian Bird Banding Scheme.

All members are requested to be on the lookout for illegal trappers. The possibility must be considered that some of these may endeavour to cover their clandestine operations under the guise of banding.