

REVIEWS

The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds by D. L. Serventy, Vincent Serventy and John Warham, A. H. and A. W. Reed, Sydney, 1971, pp. 256, with 4 pp. of coloured plates and numerous photographs. \$8.95.

The need for a standard reference book on Australian sea-birds has been evident for some time. Thus when it was announced that such a work was being undertaken by the three authors, whose experience in this field is extensive, a high standard was anticipated. The long awaited result is not a disappointment.

The book consists of two parts. The first by way of introduction outlines some geographical aspects, discusses some rather miscellaneous biological topics and concludes with brief chapters on current research work and conservation problems. The main part is given over to a systematic account of the 13 families comprising the Australian sea-bird fauna. Where adequate data are available the 104 species (42 breeding) are described in handbook style under the headings: Field Characteristics and General Habits; Status in Australia; Migration; Voice; Display; Breeding; Enemies and Mortality and Breeding Distribution. The treatment varies from half a page for rarer visitors to six pages for the more intensively studied breeding species. It is generally of a high standard the information being drawn both from the authors' personal observations and a wide range of references which are detailed at the end of the book. Measurements are given for each species with those for wingspan and body length in inches; weights would have been more useful quoted in grammes.

In the preface it is claimed that it has been additionally possible to provide a field guide; this is not fully realised since although there are many excellent photographs and diagrams these do not form a sufficient substitute for a full range of identification illustrations as found in typical field guides. The text is also lacking in some areas; for example under Wedge-tailed Shearwater no mention is made of the characteristic wing shape and method of flight by far the most useful means of distinguishing it from the other dark shearwaters.

Figure 37 is misleading in showing Grey-headed and Black-browed Albatrosses with widely differing underwing patterns. In my experience the adults of these species have closely similar underwings, a point confirmed by the photographs in figures 35 and 36. Figure 38 wrongly depicts a Yellow-nosed Albatross with equally broad anterior and posterior underwing margins. It is implied that only the race *salvini* of the White-capped Albatross shows a dark mark at the base of the leading edge of the underwing, however, a photograph in an earlier paper (British Birds, 59:376-84) by one of the authors clearly shows the nominate race with the same feature. There are cases where we are informed

that similar species may be separated by explicit features e.g. wing formula but not told how.

In other areas errors are few and minor in nature e.g. the culmen measurement for the Kermadec Petrel is clearly too small. However, there are numerous omissions particularly in the section on status. For New South Wales alone notable records are missing for Royal, Buller's and Grey-headed Albatrosses, White-headed and Cook's Petrels and Buller's and Flesh-footed Shearwaters. Some of these may be accounted for by the delay apparent between the completion of the text and the actual date of publication. During this time several important discoveries have been made including the breeding of the Black-winged Petrel in both Queensland and Lord Howe Island and the regular occurrence off Sydney of the race *impavida* of the Black-browed Albatross as suggested possible in the text.

A particularly pleasing feature is the detailed treatment of breeding distribution. Here as well as giving an accurate summary of world distribution an attempt is made to list every coastal station for the Australian nesting species. Although this leaves the authors open to omissions, and there are several, it forms a most worthwhile foundation for future work on this topic. A useful map on the endpapers details many of the islands mentioned and all the important ones with the exception of Cabbage Tree Island.

Apart from the front dust cover the colour plates are excellent; the black and white shots, several of which have been published in earlier works, are also of a high standard and portray some seldom photographed species.

The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds is produced on good quality paper, is well bound and finished with a durable cover. With its wealth of information it will prove an invaluable reference to the growing band of sea-bird enthusiasts both in Australia and over-eas. In view of the fact that it covers approximately one seventh of the species on the Australian list no serious ornithologist in this country can afford to be without a copy.

A. F. F. ROGERS, Lane Cove, N.S.W.

Corrigendum

On page 78 of Vol. 9, No. 4, the graphs for Figure 3 and Figure 5 should be reversed.