REVIEWS

Checklist of the Birds of Australia, Part 1 — Non-passerines by H. T. Condon, Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, Melbourne, 1975, 311 + xx pp. 2 maps, price $10.50.

Considering that it is almost fifty years since an official R.A.O.U. checklist has appeared, there is more than ordinary interest in this publication, which clearly indicates the change in taxonomic evaluations during the intervening period of time. The wisdom of publishing a checklist in two parts may be queried, but considering the size of this non-pas erine section, the same comprehensive treatment throughout would have meant either a much larger page-size or an over-thick single volume.

It is pleasing to see some stability in the systematic sequence of families in this and other similar compilations. The only notable exceptions by Condon in the higher order and family treatment are that the larger Ratites, with sound reasoning, are brought into a single Order and the parrots (considered a single entity by Wetmore and in Peters' *Check List*) are divided into six families, a decision that somewhat devalues that taxonomic category. The use of Plataleidae for the ibises and spoonbills is welcome and supplants the frequently-used, but no doubt erroneous, Threskiornithidae.

At the generic level a few decisions call for comment. Different genera for each of the grebes savours of unnecessary 'splitting', for adopting Storer's proposal to recognize *Tachybaptus* means that *Poliocephalus* must be used for the Hoary-headed Grebe, or make it and the Crested Grebe congeneric. In my opinion the two smaller grebes are more closely related and scarcely warrant different genera. Surely the three grebes do not differ more than the moorhens, native-hens and bush-hens do between themselves, yet these have all been 'lumped' into a single genus. This latter 'innovation' is even more odd because *Porphyrio* is left unaltered, although it seems nearer in appearance, life-cycle and behaviour to *Gallinula* than does *Tribonyx*. The merging of *Garrodia* with *Oceanites*, *Casarca* with *Tadorna*, *Excalfactoria* and *Synoicus* with *Coturnix*, *Hypotaenidia* with *Rallus*, *Lobibyx* and *Zonifer* with *Vanellus*, *Squatarola* with *Pluvialis*, *Xenus* with *Tringa*, *Crocethia* and *Erolia* with *Calidris* (what keeps *Limicola* out?), *Catharacta* with *Stercorarius*, *Gabianus* with *Larus*, *Eurostopodus* with *Caprimulgus* and *Alcyone* with *Ceyx* appears to be sound. However, *Esacus* with *Burhinus*, *Megaloprepia* with *Ptilinopus*, *Lophophaps* and *Geophaps* with *Petrophassa*, *Opopsitta* with *Psittaculirostris*, *Cacomantis* with *Cuculus* and *Misocalius* with *Chrysococcyx*, appears to be less warranted. With the pigeons I consider it quite wrong, as anyone with field experience of all three groups must see similarity between *Geophaps* and *Phaps* whilst *Lophophaps* and *Petrophassa* are peculiarly different in so many ways.

The retention of *Ardeotis* (in place of *Eupodotis*), *Erythrogonys*, *Psitteuteles*, *Barnardius*, *Poliolimnas* and *Irediparra* (not *Jacana*) is commended, although reintroducing *Alisterus*, *Northiella*, *Syma* and *Morus* hardly seems necessary. It is pleasing also to see *Dupetor* retained and not merged with *Ixobrychus* as has been suggested.

The arrangement of species is, however, "the basic unit of classification" as has been correctly stated in the Introduction. Therefore discussion should centre more around that category, and it is most pleasing that there are far more instances where a species has been retained than where one has been suppressed. It would have been easy to give a published reference in defence of relegation to subspecific status for any of the following, which have remained species—*Eudyptes robustus*, *E. atratus*, *Diomedea chlororhynchos*, *Phoebetria fusca*, *Pterodroma nigripennis*, *Pachyptila salvini*, *P. crassirostris*, *Procellaria parkinsoni*, *P. westlandica*, *Puffinus gavia*, *P. huttoni*, *Morus serrator*, *Botaurus poiciloptilus*, *Threskiornis molucca*, *Oxyura australis*, *Elanus notatus*, *Coturnix pectoralis*, *C. australis*, *Turnix maculosa*, *T. olivei*, *Haematopus fuliginosus*, *Charadrius veredus*, *C. ruficapillus*, *Numenius minutus*, *Tringa brevipes*, *Calidris subminuta*, *Glareola maldivarum*, *Stercorarius maccormicki*, *Sterna saundersi*, *Anous minutus*, *Procelsterna albivittata*, *Calyptorhynchus baudinii*, *Trichoglossus rubritorquis*, *Barnardius barnardi*, *Psephotus dissimilis*, *Chrysococcyx russatus*, *Tyto longimembris*, *Collocalia terraereginae* and *Halcyon macleayii*.

On the other hand, those reduced to geographical races and which no doubt will cause concern and objections by field workers as well as editors of our various parochial journals, include *Eudyptes schlegeli*, *Circus gouldi* (*approximans*), *Vanellus novaehollandiae*, *Fti'inopus alligator*, *P. ewingii*, *Macropygia phasianella*, *Petrophassa rufipennis*, *Trichoglossus moluccanus*, *Psittaculirostris macleayana*, *P. coxeni*, *Platycercus flaveolus*, *P. adelaidae*, *Chrysococcyx plagosus* and *C. minutillus*. It is surprising that *Anhinga novaehollandiae* not only disappears as a species but also is considered not a recognizable race, being a synonym of the African *rufa*, with the Asiatic *melanogaster* (correct species name although *rufa* has so often been used) geographically in between.

Because of the fifty-year break a comparison between this publication and that of 1926, as regards numerical data, is warranted. Actually 461 species are included in this part checklist against 376 for the same section

of the previous one (not the 'last' checklist as stated in the Foreword but the 'last' published checklist). Six (of the 461) are not numbered, indicating their doubtful occurrence, etc., ten are introduced birds which have become established and rightly included with similar data to resident ones, and fifty-two are known from fossils only. This detailing of fossil birds will give lots of added interest, but specific recognition of so many has received a set-back in an article by Olson (*Emu* 75: 49), released only a few days after the *Checklist* became available, in which he considers that six fossil rails placed in three genera and a fossil duck are all referable to one recognizable extinct mainland race of the living Tasmanian Native-hen.

The remaining 393 species are numbered and form the nucleus of this modern non-passerine list. The 1926 *Checklist* included 376, but 27 were not numbered as they were either doubtful or had not been recorded three or more times. Of that 27, sixteen have been accepted in the 1975 publication so 365 can be safely estimated to comprise the specific total of 1926, covering the same section as the 393 of 1975. Nineteen of the previous *Checklist* have disappeared as species — Rose-crowned, Chestnut-quilled Rock- and Red-plumed Pigeons, the two swamphens are united, Snowy Albatross, Spur-winged Plover, Red Mangrove Heron, the four boobook owls become one, Tasmanian Masked Owl, the two lorilets are united, Adelaide and Yellow Rosellas, Cloncurry and Twenty-eight Parrots, Little Blue Bonnet, Plumed Frogmouth and Golden Bronze-Cuckoo.

Thus there are 47 additional species to the Australian non-passerines over the past 49 years. These are Gentoo, Chinstrap, Adelie, Snares Island and Macaroni Penguins, Royal and Buller's Albatrosses, Northern Giant, Kermadec, Trinidade Island, Tahiti, Kerguelen, Black-winged, Cook's and Westland Petrels, Medium-billed, Slender-billed and Fulmar Prions, Hutton's, Manx and Grey-backed Shearwaters, Leach's Storm-Petrel, South Georgian Diving-Petrel, Cattle Egret, Banded Crake, Sarus Crane, Caspian Plover, European Curlew, Red-shank, Asiatic Dowitcher, Pectoral, Baird's, Western and Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Dunlin, Ruff, Northern and Wilson's Phalaropes, South Polar and Long-tailed Skuas, Southern Black-backed Gull, Black, Common, Arctic, Saunder's and White Terns, and Grey Ternlet. It is surprising that the Sooty Storm-Petrel, *Oceanodroma matsudairae*, has been omitted, although accepted by various other authors.

The vernacular names used will give few causes for argument, although there are far too many possessive names and some real attempt should have been made to replace them. *Puffinus huttoni*, e.g., fully bestows the merit the describer intended and to just repeat this by calling it Hutton's Shearwater shows little imagination and a 'simple way out' attitude. Although an apostrophe is used in such cases, Gould Petrel got through on p. 24. It would be interesting to know just where a common name differs from that proposed by the Vernacular Names Committee, which "was appointed in 1938, with A. H. Chisholm as Convener, and remained in office until 1971" (p. x). I know that use of the possessive case when proper names were used was rejected by that Committee, which was one fully representative of all States.

The 'resurrection" of so many old synonymous scientific names is perhaps unfortunate. I heard this condemned a few times at the recent Canberra International Congress. Such are available in the 1926 *Checklist* and in Mathews' *Systema*, should they be required. If a decision had been made to only use names proposed since 1900, e.g., then the saving of space in this 1975 *Checklist* may have permitted the inclusion of passerine species also and remain substantially the same size.

Distribution data are greatly improved compared with that of 1926, and the inclusion of subspecies makes the present *Checklist* far superior on both counts. Range is not only given in detail for the species as a whole but for each geographical race that has been considered acceptable. Of particular and beneficial interest are the brief descriptions given for every subspecies, indicating how each differs from the nominate race. In many instances references are detailed for isolated occurrences. Some discrepancies will no doubt be found in such comprehensive information. Under *Tringa terek* (p. 129) it is inferred as only being recorded at the two places mentioned for New South Wales, but there is ample published evidence that it is found annually at the Hunter River estuary in good-sized flocks. Mathews' *Chrysococcyx barnardi*, which was secured near Rockhampton (Qld.) in 1912, is placed in the synonymy of *C. malayanus*, yet the distribution of such states that it extends east only as far as the Leichhardt River. Furthermore, Bowen is the stated southern limit of *C. russatus*, although there are some published records that it occurs in the Brisbane area, and specimens of the *malayanus* complex have been taken in north-eastern New South Wales.

The actual checklist data end on p. 237. Following that a list of References occupies 4 pp., a Gazetteer continues to p. 257, with indices for both vernacular and scientific names continuing to the end. A map of Australia and one of the Antarctic, extending north to 30° south, are also most helpful.

Overall, this is a carefully-compiled, informative and comprehensive publication, which every working ornithologist will need. Although there are listed acknowledgements to numerous other persons for assistance, I feel sure the final decisions in most matters are 99% H. T. Condon's. Just whether a one-man official checklist will be accepted by the many taxonomists, all with differing ideas, in Australia or abroad, only time will tell. Personally, I feel that with a few birds again reinstated as species this *Checklist* could be acceptable by all for some years, and I trust that the passerine section, when available, will be modelled somewhat similarly. Above all, the author must be congratulated on a long and painstaking task.

A. R. McGILL, Moorebank, N.S.W.

Bird Life by Ian Rowley. Collins, Sydney, 1975. Pp. 284 col pll 31, b & w pll 37, figs. 26, 220 x 150 mm. $Aust.9.50.

As the author of one of the first three titles [*brief reviews on the other two follow* — Hon. Ed.] issued in the new Australian Naturalist Library, Ian Rowley has maintained the high standard set by the publishers' well established New Naturalist Library.

Five chapters introduce ornithology and the Australian environment. A remarkable amount of information is included in a comparatively small space, with appropriate references for further reading. The typical bander will find much that is familiar, but will enjoy the use of Australian examples as the normal instead of the occasional curiosity, and will learn from the concise and informative classification of familiar facts.

The balance of the book describes a variety of Australian bird life-styles; much of the work described is comparatively recent, and will be familiar to many banders, not only from their reading, but from personal participation in the work described (Wandering Albatrosses, Little Penguins, silvereyes, shearwaters, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Flame Robins are only some of the species whose life-styles are discussed; few Australian banders have handled none of these. Understandably, more detailed accounts are given of some of the species on which the author and his colleagues in CSIRO have worked in recent years.

All banders will find interest in the Appendices on 'Methods of Study' and 'What to do Next'. The copious illustrations cover an impressive range of species, behaviour and habitat.

For the Australian bander, this book is a delight to read because of the light that it sheds on the familiar. Even more important, it is at last, the ideal book to give to the intelligent lay friend, who really wants to understand what you are trying to do. Almost all life-styles described have been worked out by banding or some other form of marking. It is what it sets out to be, a readable and accurate account for the interested Australian of what is known and not known in 1975 of Australian bird life.

ROSEMARY BALMFORD, Melbourne, Vic.

Living Insects by R. D. Hughes. Collins, Sydney, 1975. Pp. 304, col pll 43, b & w pll 17, figs. 69. $Aust.9.95.

Dr Hughes has adopted an ecologist's approach introducing the reader step by step in the first seven chapters to the problems of regulation of insect populations, concluding with chapters on flight, classification, roles in ecosystems and relationship with man. In each chapter different insects have been chosen to illustrate the points under discussion, and as a consequence a remarkable coverage has been achieved.

This is a good book and is recommended to those who wish to obtain an understanding of the lives of insects, the food of many birds.

M. D. MURRAY, Pymble, N.S.W.

Fish of the Ocean and Shore by J. M. Thomson. Collins, Sydney, 1975. Pp. 208, col pll 39. $Aust.8.50.

Fish to most people are food, and catching them is a form of frustrated relaxation, just as dangerous as playing golf. This book concentrates on the Australian scene, and traces the history and development of the major fishing industries of today, e.g. crayfish, prawns, crabs, oysters, tuna, sharks. There are chapters on fish of the coral reefs, and of freshwater, and on those that are dangerous. It concludes with a chapter on 'The Art of Angling' with a plea for commonsense to avoid the frequent tragedies, and one on 'Research and the Future'.

This book has an extensive list for further reading on each chapter which makes it a useful introduction to local problems. It should be read by those interested in seabirds.

M. D. MURRAY, Pymble, N.S.W.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held in Canberra, A.C.T. on Saturday 17 January, 1976 at 2.00 p.m. Members planning to attend and wishing assistance with accommodation or transport in Canberra should write to the Hon. Secretary before 1 December.

An informal social function will follow the Annual Meeting and those planning to attend this function are asked to inform the Hon. Secretary before 21 December, 1975.

Further details of both functions will be published in the December issue.

New Members

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