

REVIEWS

Fifteenth Annual Report of the Australian Bird-banding Scheme. July 1968 to June 1969, by D. Purchase, Division of Wildlife Research Technical Paper No. 21. (CSIRO (Melbourne) 1970.

The issue of the Fifteenth Annual Report in July 1970, following publication in 1969 of the three reports immediately preceding, brings this series satisfactorily up to date.

The Report is in some ways more interesting than its predecessors: in part, because it is dealing with comparatively recent events; in part perhaps because the author, having brought the reports up to date, was able to devote more time to its preparation. But basically it is because fifteen years of banding is bearing more mature fruit.

The general arrangement of the Report follows that of previous reports and as in the past the "Selected List of Recoveries" (197 are dealt with) is in many cases annotated at some length. By that means, the significance of a particular recovery can be better appreciated and this has become the most interesting part of the Report. However, the numbers of each species banded in the year under review (84,355 birds of 373 species), the total number recovered in that year (11,980 of 222 species) and the total numbers banded and recovered since the inception of the Scheme in 1953, are all very useful for reference.

An innovation is Table 3, "Recovery rates of species whose banded totals have exceeded 1,000 during 1953-1969". There are 101 species in this category, out of the total of 670 species that have been banded altogether.

It appears that these rates are based upon the number of birds recovered, not upon the number of times birds were recovered. The data from which the rates are derived were of course presented in previous reports, but the author has done us a service by making the necessary calculations.

Four species (Black-backed Magpie, Spotted Turtle-dove, Senegal Dove and Wood Duck) have recovery rates of over 30%. Analysis shows however that less than 13,000 birds have been banded of these four species together, although for each of 19 other species over 10,000 birds have been banded. The 19 represent between them almost five-eighths of the total number (861,753) of all species banded since the Scheme began. The recovery rates of the 19 species range from 23.1% in the case of the Black Duck to 0.55% in the case of the Straw-necked Ibis.

The author points out that many of the species with a high recovery rate are sedentary and have been the subject of intensive study for several years. Putting on one side sedentary birds, the rate of recovery for a particular species must depend in the long term upon a variety of factors: among them, the degree to which a bird is conspicuous, the degree to which a bird resorts to places where it is likely to be found by humans and the degree to which banders seek to recapture birds. Only the last of these factors is within our control.

In this context, the recovery in Japan of an injured Japanese Snipe banded in N.S.W. or the recovery at

Bambaroo, Qld of a dead Reed Warbler banded at Coleraine, Vic. (both dealt with in this Report) are interesting and valuable, but as it were accidental. On the other hand, the recovery at Point Hut, A.C.T. of a live Yellow-faced Honeyeater banded three years nine months before at Grafton, N.S.W. (also dealt with in the Report) indicates the kind of result that can reward intensive effort.

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The Life of the Kookaburra and other Kingfishers, by William Eastman. Angus & Robertson Ltd, Sydney, 1970; pp. 1-64, colour and half-tone plates and line drawings. Price \$3.75.

This well printed book is a general account of the habits and the distribution of the ten species of kingfishers found in Australia. William Eastman has based his remarks largely on his own field experiences and on relevant literature. The many photographs reproduced illustrate aspects of the lives of some of the species discussed and are by several photographers: those by the Author, although interesting enough, are rather indifferent technically and are inclined to be repetitive. A spread in colour (repeated in part on the jacket) of the White-tailed Kingfisher in flight is an outstanding example of bird photography. No acknowledgement of it is made, though presumably it is by Peter Slater.

The figures in the six colour plates by the Author are broadly painted and are rather amateurish; they would be useful enough for identification purposes if the colours were accurate, which they are not in several instances (Sacred, Mangrove, White-tailed, Little, Red-backed and Yellow-billed species etc.).

The distribution maps given for each species do not always agree with the text. An instance is the map for the Little Kingfisher which shows a block distribution on Cape York Peninsula, whereas the text states that the species occurs "over most of the wooded streams of coastal and near coastal areas of northern Queensland and the Northern Territory". It is also remarked that the Mangrove Kingfisher is found ". . . down as far as Brisbane in Queensland", yet the map extends the range about 200 miles further south into New South Wales. The few recorded N.S.W. occurrences are much closer to the border.

On a two-page series of photographs of the Forest Kingfisher is an illustration of a Red-backed Kingfisher titled "Male pauses at nest tunnel . . ." without any indication of the species: a confusing presentation.

Misstatements about sexual differences in plumage lessen one's confidence in the book. According to the Author the female Laughing Kookaburra has a brown rump and buff over the eye, and the male a blue rump and white over the eye. Examination of a series of specimens indicates that such remarks are misleading and that the sexual characters given do not apply to the species. The male Sacred Kingfisher is stated to have a white collar and the female "no white collar". The fact is that both sexes have a similar nuchal collar and in most instances it is buff, not white.

The inaccuracies evident in this book detract from its interest and value. Written with more care it could have been a useful publication.

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