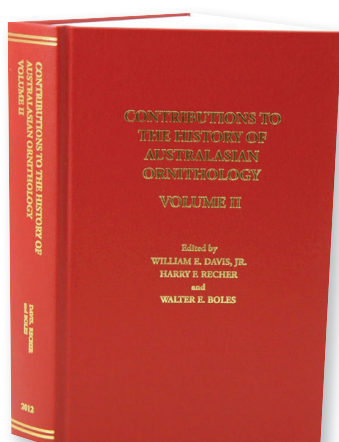


Book Reviews



Contributions to the History of Australasian Ornithology, Volume II

Edited by William E. Davis Jr, Harry F. Recher and Walter E. Boles 2012. Nuttall Ornithological Club (Cambridge, Mass, USA). Hardback, 532 pp, monochrome photographs. ISBN 1-877973-49-1. RRP \$A55.

This is the second in a planned series of three volumes (see *Corella* 34: 22–23 for Vol. I). By covering a further four museums in Volume II, including pivotal ones in Australian ornithology (Australian Museum; Museum Victoria and its H. L. White Collection; Macleay Museum at Sydney University), the series thus far has covered most such institutions. Volume II covers the region's professional ornithological body; the decline of New Zealand's avifauna; ornithology at the above-mentioned museums plus the Canterbury Museum (NZ); the field research section (Terrestrial Ecology) of the Australian Museum; and research in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. Again, the chapters are mostly 'court histories' by insiders with knowledge of the subject matter, providing anecdotal material that is mostly descriptive rather than interpretive. Each chapter has an exhaustive reference list, and the book finishes with a comprehensive index.

Chapter 1 (by Libby Robin) covers the personalities, issues, phases, publications and activities of the RAOU/Birds Australia from 1901 (Federation) to 2011, then the merger with BOCA in 2012 to become BirdLife Australia. Not simply a repeat of 'The Flight of the Emu' (also by Robin, MUP 2001), it is essential reading for members of either or both organisations. Who knew, for instance, that BOCA arose in 1905 from the Melbourne field observers of the (then) AOU (the 'Royal' part came later), and was the recipient of members offended by divisive activities like specimen collection on field outings; that there were then no Sydney members because of the rivalry between Campbell and North (who thought the AOU too populist); that early AOU office bearers were ex Field Naturalists Club of Victoria; or that an initial co-editor of *Emu* was Henry Kendall?

Chapter 2 (by Ian Abbott) is an insightful discussion of the early causes of decline of New Zealand's birds, drawn largely from a hitherto unpublished, unknown letter by William Colenso from the 1840s. Colenso was a missionary-naturalist, fluent in the language of his Maori informants, and had met Charles Darwin. Abbott uses Colenso's substantial letter (to Lord Derby) to deduce that the initial declines were likely caused by (overlooked) avian diseases introduced with poultry, followed by predation by Black and Brown Rats, along with cats and pigs. A must-read for a new perspective on that nation's avian losses.

Chapter 3 (by Wayne Longmore) covers the growth of ornithology (global collections, staff, expeditions) at Museum Victoria and its H. L. White Collection. Although originating with White in New South Wales, the latter collection went to Victoria because of a falling-out with North at the Australian Museum, and restrictions on interstate loans of its specimens are still unresolved. There is much more, of course, including the intriguing possibility that the McCoy ex Gould series (still in storage!) may contain type specimens, if anyone were to check.

Chapter 4 (by Walter Boles) is the long, rich and detailed history of ornithology (and staff, collectors, artists and expeditions – and a huge theft!) at the Australian Museum, to some extent complementing Chapter 3, owing to the ructions concerning Campbell, North, White and Mack. A printing error has the title as '... Stuff Birds', but the story is certainly much more than about stuffed birds. Nevertheless, Boles concludes that his chapter is only an introduction, and that there is scope for repeating J. P. Cahill's effort (on North, in *Australian Birds* 31: 57–83) on the many other figures and events, from the unpublished material in the Museum Archives and the Mitchell Library (notably, the Ramsay papers).

Chapter 5 (by Paul Scofield) is the story of ornithology and staff at the Canterbury Museum (New Zealand). It thus complements Chapter 2 of Volume I on the Auckland Museum, so completing the profile of the greats in New Zealand museum-based ornithology, and the development of the respective museums and their collections.

Chapter 6 (by Graham Fulton) profiles the Macleay Museum, located at Sydney University but probably obscure or unknown to many, although it contains one of the country's largest natural-history collections. Founded and expanded by two generations of Macleays in Sydney's early years, William S. (son of Alexander) had met Darwin, Lamarck, Vigors and Gould, and passed the collection to cousin William J. (nephew of Alexander) who was a trustee of the Australian Museum (and thus knew Masters at the AM, as well as John McArthur). The Macleay Museum was bequeathed to Sydney University with its own dedicated Macleay Building, but in a betrayal of trust the building has been commandeered for other uses and the collection relegated to a makeshift storage attic. The collection's future depends on its being used by researchers (it is open to the public), with the prospect of future discoveries therein.

Chapter 7 (by Harry Recher and Graham Pyke) details field ornithology at the Australian Museum, from its beginning as the Department of Environmental Studies assisting the new National Parks and Wildlife Service with conservation priorities, reserve selection and natural area management, and investigating the impact of logging, habitat fragmentation and fire. Becoming the Department of Terrestrial Ecology, its environmental impact assessment role thus devolved to Australian Museum Business Services (the consulting arm), while studies continued on avian ecology, including modified environments, threatened species and threatening processes, off-reserve conservation, and natural history involving citizen science. In a by-now familiar story (like the above museums), the unit was downsized then merged

with Terrestrial Vertebrates to become purely collection-based. As the authors note, this gutting and retreat from controversial public involvement was an abrogation of responsibility for informing and educating the public without fear of political consequences (maybe the repeated restructuring to 'extinction' was a political consequence!). Another must-read.

Finally, Chapter 8 (by Barbara Wienecke and Knowles Kerry) is the story of ornithological research on Australian territory in the Antarctic and subantarctic, mainly concerning the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions, but starting with Mawson and featuring ABSA figure Durno Murray and, of course, polar seabirds.

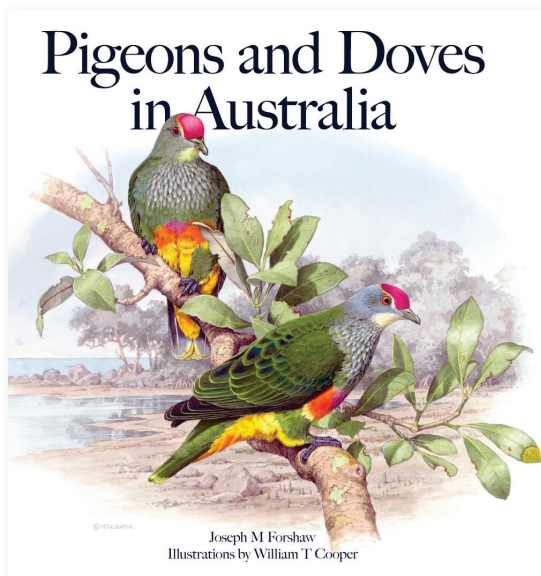
Overall, Volume II somewhat lacks the editorial polish of Volume I, with more typos, lapses in punctuation and syntax etc., one suspects a symptom of haste to meet publishing deadlines. Notable is that bugbear of the digital age (to which authors and editors should ever be alert): unwanted autocorrect in Word, which tries to turn scientific names into the closest English word (typically '-us' and '-a' endings to '-es', and '-e'). Nevertheless, the historic (and recent) photos are a real plus, and this volume (like Vol. I) is a readable and important record

of our ornithological heritage, essential for understanding ornithology in the region. Important, because museums and their research and educational activities are inextricably linked with conservation of our avifauna, as several authors point out.

This history, especially the early decades, is as much about personalities as events. Hopefully, Volume III will include the Queensland Museum, South Australian Museum, and Queen Victoria Museum (Launceston). One anticipates sadly, though, that their stories will repeat the tales of cost-cutting, downsizing, and bureaucratic and governmental indifference and hostility endured by the museums discussed so far. At least they now have computerised databases and have embraced DNA taxonomy via their tissue collections, as these histories relate.

On another sad note, this volume is dedicated to the memory of the late Ivor Beatty OAM of Surry Beatty and Sons, a great supporter of publication in ornithology, zoology and conservation (including *Corella*).

Stephen Debus
Division of Zoology
University of New England



Pigeons and Doves in Australia

Joseph M Forshaw and William T. Cooper, 2015. CSIRO Publishing. Hardback, numerous colour and other illustrations, 360 pp. ISBN 9780643096332. RRP \$185.

For over 40 years Joe Forshaw and William Cooper collaborated in a world renowned author/artist partnership to produce detailed reference texts accompanied by arguably the most accurate, life-like illustrations of birds in their natural environments. The first was *Parrots of the World* in 1973, followed by *Birds of Paradise and Bowerbirds*, *Australian Parrots*, *Kingfishers and Related Birds*, two books on Turacos, *Cockatoos: A Portfolio of All Species*, and this, their last project together is a superb finale – sadly William T. Cooper passed away shortly after publication of *Pigeons and Doves in Australia*.

In this book Forshaw, as is his usual style, has thoroughly researched and summarised current knowledge of each of the 32 species of Australian pigeons and doves, including those from Christmas, Lord Howe and Norfolk islands and extinct species, in their natural environment. Like in some of his other books, he has also presented a précis of each species in aviculture.

Cooper's illustrations of pigeons and doves are equal to all his other splendid artwork, which present the subjects in natural poses in their typical habitat. Numerous 'field sketches' appear throughout the book depicting specific plumage characteristics and aspect of the behaviour of many species.

The detailed species profiles are preceded by a comprehensive introduction which explains taxonomy and discusses distribution and habitat preferences, movements, social behaviour, feeding and drinking, vocalisation, courtship and mating, nesting and conservation. A chapter is also devoted to Australian pigeons and doves in aviculture.

The individual species accounts contain descriptions of plumages, distribution, general notes, including historical observations, field notes relating to habitat, diet and feeding, courtship and mating, nesting, natural habitats and detailed information relating to their history and husbandry in aviculture.

This book will not appeal to everyone as it is basically a 'coffee table' précis of material that has been published elsewhere. Apart from the presentation of some personal observation, it does not appear to deliver any important new information. However, it is a beautiful book and brings all current information and superb illustrations of the Australian members of the family *Columbidae* into a single volume that belongs on the bookshelf of every ornithologist and serious bird observer.

Jeff Hardy
Ermington, NSW