

Contributions to the History of Australasian Ornithology

Edited by William E. Davis Jr, Harry F. Recher, Walter E. Boles and Jerome A. Jackson 2008. Nuttall Ornithological Club (Cambridge, Mass, USA). Hardback, 490 pp, monochrome photographs. ISBN 9781877973437. RRP \$A95.95, available from Andrew Isles or CSIRO publishing.

This compilation had its genesis in a symposium of the Association of Field Ornithologists in the USA. The chairs were Davis and Jackson, and the outcome was a history of North American ornithology, in the *Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club*. Boles reviewed Parts I and II for *Emu*, and concluded that a similar volume could usefully be compiled for Australasia, as a companion to 'The Flight of the Emu' (Libby Robin, 2001, Melbourne University Press). Davis was by then a visiting scholar collaborating with Recher in Australia and, taking up Boles's comment and with his help, they recruited authors for this Australasian volume, which, they said, will 'hopefully be the first of several'.

This volume (no. 14 of the *Memoirs*) profiles a selection of key figures in Australasian ornithology and, in some cases, also the growth of the institutions or disciplines with which they were associated. It is characterised as 'court histories' by insiders (e.g. staff or former staff of museums and CSIRO). It thus supplements existing biographies of John Gould, the 'father' of Australian ornithology, by concentrating on other people and spanning the Gouldian era to the present.

Chapter 1 is an extensive biography of John Gilbert, especially his collecting exploits for John Gould. It is pleasing to see such a detailed account of Gilbert in Australia, by an expert on the subject (Clemency Fisher, Liverpool Museums, UK). Gilbert is intimately connected with the Paradise Parrot, a saga ending in all-round tragedy with Gould's rejection of '*Platycercus gilberti*', Gilbert's murder while collecting on Cape York, and the extinction of the parrot (e.g. *Australian Field Ornithology* 25: 102–108).

Chapter 2 (by Brian J. Gill) is a history of ornithology at the Auckland Museum, New Zealand, and the growth and development of that institution. It is an essential part of the Australasian aspect, and in part a who's who of New Zealand ornithology.

Chapter 3 (by Ron Johnstone) is a history of the Western Australian Museum, with respect to development of its buildings and collections and the achievements of its staff, who include several key ornithologists and biologists in Australia.

Chapter 4 is a history and brief biography, by the late Ian Rowley, of the 29 people employed by CSIRO (26 in the Wildlife Division) who have published papers in ornithology over 50 years since 1949, among these the first scientific studies of Australian birds. It also traces the direction that research has taken, from investigation of 'pest' species to conservation biology (and 'pure' research in spare time, or CDK: 'Chief didn't know'). Included are the Australian Bird Banding Scheme and its personnel, and banding studies by CSIRO staff.

Chapter 5 (by Leo Joseph) reviews the history of systematics and biogeography in Australian ornithology, and

the development of modern (e.g. molecular) taxonomic methods. It traces the development of the discipline from the checklist era, through theories on the origin of the Australian bird fauna, to concepts of speciation, and the phylogenetic implications of DNA comparisons.

Chapter 6 (by Richard Schodde) is devoted to the CSIRO's Australian National Wildlife Collection [of museum specimens] in Canberra. Although the Collection includes mammals and reptiles, the chapter focusses on birds, and the staff associated with developing the series of specimens from humble beginnings to its great worth today. As with other, similar 'insider' chapters (e.g. Chapters 3 and 4), it also reveals the personalities, and the struggles to develop the institution (and indeed to keep it alive in the face of indifference or hostility by the bureaucracy).

The final chapter, by Stephen Garnett and Gabriel Crowley, is a history of threatened birds of Australia and its islands. As well as tracing the patterns of decline and extinction, and highlighting many of the people involved in rediscoveries of rare species, or in modern recovery programs, it also tabulates the change in conservation status of nationally threatened species in 50-year blocks from 1750 onwards. After comparing the effect of conservation management, it culminates with predictions for 2000–2050. Both of these tables are sobering: for instance, the number of species in Table 6 that would have been extinct or critical in 2000 without intervention, or the number in Table 7 predicted to be extinct (Night Parrot), critical (e.g. Australasian Bittern, Swift Parrot) or endangered (e.g. Flame Robin!) by 2050.

Each chapter finishes with an extensive bibliography (e.g. Chapter 4 must be everything published by CSIRO on birds) and, in the case of Chapter 1, an exhaustive list of endnotes (233) that individually give the source for, or a comment on, a particular historical aspect of the Gilbert story. The book finishes with a comprehensive index to species, places, names and certain publication titles. I found it well-written, and the typescript virtually error-free.

To anyone, professional or amateur, interested in the history of scientific bird study in Australasia, this book is essential reading, not least for its human dimension. For instance, much of it could equally fall into the category of adventure reading, e.g. the Gilbert story, or Schodde's tales of his exploits in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. It is most enlightening to read the profiles of the greats in Australasian ornithology, both historical and contemporary. Among them, readers of *Corella* would find many friends, colleagues, acquaintances or mentors. And the many photos put faces to names, and thus bring the pages to life.

This volume nicely complements 'Flight of the Emu', and indeed it prompted me to read that book. (As an aside, the latter book is wrong on a few counts on p. 310: the RAOU Red Goshawk project was hardly a 'spin-off' of BOPWatch; the illustrated Red Goshawk (on left) was not, by a century, the first live hand-held one (J.B. White hand-raised a fledgling in 1873); and 'she' is a nestling (left) and an adult male (right), not the adult female! Hopefully, these mistakes are not symptomatic of the whole book.)

I hope this volume is the first of several on Australasia, and that future volumes will, among other things, correct any errors, shortcomings or omissions (e.g. the Birds Australia regional and special-interest groups) in 'Flight of the Emu' (cf. *Australian Bird Watcher* **19**: 205–207). Possible topics might include histories of the various other state museums, e.g. the Australian Museum, Queensland Museum, Museum Victoria and its H.L. White Collection, and the South Australian Museum; profiles of academic ornithologists and their work at the various universities; and perhaps a history of the Australian Bird Banders Association—ABSA and its publications (*Australian Bird Bander—Corella*) and key personnel. I would also like to see an exposé of the incompetence, by an inept bureaucracy, and persecution of Julian Ford, after his great service to ornithology, that ultimately led to his tragic and untimely death: an ugly blot on our ornithological history.

It must be a sign of the times, and of the Australian ethos, that this book was produced offshore rather than in the country whose history it relates. Would that funding sources, governments and publishers see fit to produce future such volumes here! Finally, it is appropriate to acknowledge that two of the featured greats, Ian Rowley and Allen Keast (not Allan, cf. Chapter 5), died soon after the book was published: a sad finale to the story so far, though their work will influence the playing-out of future chapters for years to come.

Stephen Debus
Division of Zoology
University of New England

RECOVERY ROUND-UP

This section is prepared with the co-operation of the Secretary, Australian Bird and Bat Banding Schemes, Australian Nature Conservation Agency. The recoveries are only a selection of the thousands received each year; they are not a complete list and should not be analysed in full or part without prior consent of the banders concerned. Longevity and distance records refer to the ABBBS unless otherwise stated. The distance is the shortest distance in kilometres along the direct line joining the place of banding and recovery; the compass direction refers to the same direct line. (There is no implication regarding the distance flown or the route followed by the bird). Where available ABBBS age codes have been included in the banding data.

Recovery or longevity items may be submitted directly to me whereupon their merits for inclusion will be considered.

Hon. Editor

The following abbreviations appear in this issue:

AWSG – Australasian Wader Study Group.

CWS – PORG. Canadian Wildlife Service – Polar Oceans Research Group.

VWSG – Victorian Wader Study Group.

Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*

CF43795*. Nestling banded on Kerguelen Islands, Terres Australes et Antarctiques, France (49°21'S 70°13'E) on 22 March 2009. Recovered dead at Lucky Bay Beach, Cape Le Grande National Park, WA (33°59'S 122°14'E) by D. Gosper on 14 Oct. 2009. 4540 km NE.

* French Banding Scheme band.

Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta*

(a) 280-10825. Nestling banded by N.P. Brothers on Albatross Island, Tas. on 20 March 1988. Recovered dead on Three Hummock Island, Tas. on 30 Dec. 2009, over 21 years 9 months after banding. 16 km ESE.

(b) 280-11181. Nestling banded by N.P. Brothers on Albatross Island, Tas. on 1 May 1987. Recovered dead, at Waratah Bay, South Gippsland, Vic. on 10 Dec. 2009, over 22 years 7 months after banding. 212 km NNE.

Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchos*

121-35759. Immature (1) banded by M.H. Waterman at sea south of Kangaroo Island SA (36°30'S 138°00'E) on 15 Dec. 1995. Recaptured, released alive with band on Amsterdam Island, Terres Australes et Antarctiques, France (37°41'S 77°31'E) on 8 Dec. 2009, over 13 years, 11 months after banding. 5268 km WSW.

Southern Giant-Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*

(a) 1048-22553*. Nestling banded by the CWS-PORG near Palmer Station, Anverse Island, Antarctica (64°46'S 64°04'W) on 24 Feb. 2009. Recovered sick, is alive in captivity with band at Waterman, 15 km north of Perth, WA (31°50'S 115°45'E) on 17 July 2009. 9271 km S.

(b) 1048-22853*. Nestling banded at Palmer Station, Anverse Island, Antarctica, USA (64°40'S 63°50'W) on 27 Feb. 2009. Recovered dead, at Ceduna Jetty, SA (32°07'S 133°40'E) on 10 June 2009. 9143 km S.

*USA Bird Banding Scheme band

NOTE: This bird and band has been lodged at the South Australian Museum

(c) 1009*. Nestling banded at Cape Geddes, Laurie Island, South Orkney Islands, Antarctica (60°41'S 44°34'W) on 3 April 2009. Recovered dead near Gregory, WA (28°10'S 114°14'E) on 10 July 2009. 9947 km SSE.

(d) 1078*. Nestling banded at Cape Geddes, Laurie Island, South Orkney Islands, Antarctica (60°41'S 44°34'W) on 3 April 2009. Recaptured exhausted, is in rehabilitation with band at Singleton Beach, WA (32°27'S 115°45'E) on 17 July 2009. 9503 km SSE.

*Argentine Banding Scheme band.