

## REVIEW

**The Birds of Sumatra.** J. G. van Marle and Karel H. Voous, B.O.U. Check-list No. 10: British Ornithologists' Union, 1988; 265 pp.

This volume is the tenth of the British Ornithologists' Union's ongoing series of checklists of diverse parts of the world. This is the second from Indonesia, following the recently published *The Birds of Wallacea*, by C. M. N. White and M. D. Bruce.

The manuscript was started by J. G. van Marle, and upon his premature death, completed by K. H. Voous. Introductory sections present background information topography, climate, and vegetation, supported by detailed maps, and discuss

aspects of Sumatran ornithology: endemism, zoogeography, breeding seasonality, migration and history of previous work. The bulk of the book is the annotated list of the 600 species recorded from the island. The annotations for each species include the status, habitat, distribution and nesting information as these relate to Sumatra, key references, and, occasionally other notes.

This volume maintains the high standard set in previous ones. It will be a valuable reference for anyone interested in the birds of this part of Southeast Asia.

W. E. Boles, Sydney, NSW

## OBITUARY

Dr D. L. 'Dom' Serventy died in Perth on 8 August 1988, aged 84 years, having been born at Brown Hill, Western Australia on 28 March, 1904.

He graduated B.Sc. with first class honours from the University of Western Australia in 1931 and obtained an 1851 Scholarship to the University of Cambridge. After completing his doctorate there in 1933 he returned to Australia to an appointment as assistant lecturer in biology in the University of Western Australia. From 1937-38 he studied fisheries biology at the School of Fisheries, University of Washington, while holding a studentship of the Commonwealth Science and Industry Endowment Fund. On his return he joined the C.S.I.R. Division of Fisheries. In 1951 he transferred to the new Wildlife Survey Section of what was then the C.S.I.R.O., where he stayed until his retirement in 1969.

Dom was a very active researcher and an early conservationist at a time when such people were generally regarded as cranks. He belonged to many organizations, held numerous posts in ornithological and biological societies, and gained major awards for his work.

His list of publications is impressive, beginning with 'Birds of the Pallinup Estuary, Western Australia' in *Emu*, 26: 64-69 (1926), although he had contributed popular articles to the local papers before that. By the time that he graduated he had 15 papers to his credit, most of them on birds and mostly in *Emu*. He had catholic interests but was more than anything a marine biologist and when with the Fisheries Division worked on tuna populations and their associated seabirds, as well as on problems concerning cormorants and fisheries.

Dom Serventy's classic long-term study of the Tasmanian Mutton-bird (Short-tailed Shearwater) was begun when he was in the Fisheries Division, his banding of the birds at Fisher Island, Bass Strait, beginning in 1947. It is the publications that came from this work by which Dom is best known among

seabird biologists. These included a major and oft-quoted account of the migration of the young birds and the gonad cycle of the adults in *Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond.* 127: 489-510 (1956) and an experimental demonstration of an internal rhythm of reproduction (*Nature* 184: 1704-1705 [1959]), both written with A. J. Marshall. At about the same time he devised a method for sexing the birds (*Emu* 56: 219-221 [1959]), which has since been widely used with petrels generally.

His recaptures of banded birds enabled him to unravel the breeding patterns of the mutton-birds and, in due course, to discover the duration of their immaturity. He read an important paper on their egg-laying timetable to the 13th International Ornithological Congress (*Proc. 13th Int. Orn. Congr.*: 338-343 [1963]). Addressing a plenary session of the Congress four years later, he was able to cover a range of aspects concerning the population ecology of the species, including the age composition and timing of the birds ashore, the extent of the pre-laying exodus and mortality patterns (*Proc. 14th Int. Orn. Congr.*: 165-190 [1967]). His most recent publication on this species about breeding success, recruitment and dispersal, based on 30 years' data, was published in 1984 with P. J. Curry (*Emu* 84: 71-79).

Among his major interests was the problem of how Australian inland birds adapt to their arid environment — see his chapter on 'Biology of Desert Birds' in *Avian Biology* Volume 1 (1971). Many other topics engaged his attention from time to time — on Moas and the origins of flight, on the shell deposits created by gulls dropping molluscs to break them, on the histology of the avian testis and on birds zoogeography — for example. He also made valuable contributions to avian nomenclature, correcting some of the errors in this field committed by Gregory Mathews and others.

Dom Serventy had a big influence on young naturalists, inspiring them by his enthusiasm and by contacts in field and study, but also because he produced (with H. M. Whittell) the first handbook to the birds of his state — *The Birds of Western Australia*. This first appeared in 1948, the last, fifth edition in 1976. This work enabled many people interested in natural

history to identify the birds around them and it included an important history of Western Australian ornithology, as well as a study of the bird geography of the area. His later *Handbook of Australian Sea-birds* (1971), written with Vincent Serventy and the writer, was well received; a second edition is currently in the hands of the publishers.

Dom was a very early bird ringer, active before the official Commonwealth banding scheme was started. He was a founder member of the Bird Banders' Association of Australia, and also of the Western Australian Naturalists' Club, being elected their first secretary/treasurer on 3 July 1924.

Dom Serventy's departure marks the end of an era in Australian ornithology and we shall greatly miss his humour, keenness and comradeship. Our sympathies go out to brother Vin and sister Lucy, and to his sons Wilfrid, Conrad and Peter.

John Warham

electric Scheme he was even lowered over the sheer mountain side on a small trolley to carry out necessary surveys. He was first to observe the occurrence of the Eastern Bristlebird on the Laminton Plateau, which formed the basis of one of his first published articles in 1946. In the same year, Jack wrote a short note on the Brown Honeyeater; over thirty years later, his last paper was again on this species.

As one of the first authorized bird banders in the early 1960 era, he took full advantage of this opportunity to study in the hand many birds. He concentrated on Silvereyes, Brown Honeyeaters and Mangrove Honeyeaters at his Wellington Point home, and his comprehensive notes have been used extensively as the basis for study by other ornithologists, as well as for his own publications. A Silvereye banded by Jack in the summer turned up in Canberra in the following winter, and its capture by Canberra bird banders was recorded by a television team doing a segment on bird migration — quite a surprising flight. Sadly, his sight had faded badly, yet only four days before he died, he said to a visitor that the Welcome Swallows calling outside his window were nesting under the eaves of a nearby building — birds were his love and inspiration to the end.

Vernon Cooper

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## OBITUARY

**John Stephens Robertson** died in Brisbane, on 16 July 1988, at the age of 90. Jack was a very competent ornithologist, a long time member of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, and a foundation member of the Bird Banding Association of Australia through its change into the Australian Bird Study Association until his death. His detailed, methodical observations of birds were a source of much new information, invaluable to the bird watching fraternity.

As a Main Roads Department engineer in Queensland, he was in charge of the construction of many major bridges and important projects. While working on the Barron Falls Hydro-

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## New Members

EMERY, P. A., Kingston, SA  
ROBINSON, C., Albury, NSW  
HINES, H., Armidale, NSW