

Nomenclature and Classification

From the commencement of 1979, the following policy covering nomenclature and classification will be adopted by this Association:

The *Checklist of the Birds of Australia*, Part 1, (RAOU 1975) by H. T. Condon and its amendments (*Emu* 76: 216-217; *Emu* 78: 80-87) will be followed for non-passerines; for passerines, the *Interim List of Australian Songbirds, Passerines*, by R. Schodde (RAOU 1975) will be followed. English names will follow 'Recommended English names for Australian birds', *Emu* 77 Supplement (1978).

Authors may make use of trinomial classification where sub-species are morphologically identifiable in the field.

This policy has been decided in the interest of standardisation in the publication of our Journal, as these lists have been adopted by both the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union and the Australian Bird-banding Scheme.

Hon. Editor.

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Reviews

Rails of the World, by S. Dillon Ripley, illustrated by J. Fenwick Lansdowne. M. F. Feheley Publishers Ltd., Toronto, 1977. Pages xx + 3-406, 41 colour plates, 17 maps, 5 pages monochrome photographs, 26 text figures, with an additional chapter on fossil rails by Storrs L. Olson. 360 mm x 255 mm, U.S.\$75.00.

This is a large, well illustrated, expensively produced volume of a similar approach and scope to Forshaw & Coopers' *Parrots of the World*, Brown & Amadon's *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World* and several others published in recent years.

Lansdowne's 41 paintings portray most species, with one plate illustrating the downy young of eight species. They are by a true master and are superb. The layout of the plates is artistically beautiful, although I suspect many ornithologists will react more to the arrangement of species, as these are not necessarily portrayed alongside their closest relatives. I was disappointed to find that seven of the 129 species recognised by Ripley are not illustrated. Nor are these seven necessarily the most rare, obscure or extinct species as the list includes *Laterallus spilonotus*, the common Galapagos rail and *Rellicula forbesi*, surely among the most common of the New Guinea forest rails. In a book of this price, these omissions seem unnecessary.

The text is thorough. There are three chapters of introductory material, followed by about 300 pages given to species accounts, for an average of well over two pages per species.

Each species is given a paragraph or two of general comment, followed by a more detailed treatment of each included sub-species, normally under the headings: Other Names, Description, Measurements, Distribution, and Status, together with life history details and a brief synonymy. Measurements usually quote only the extremes, and often do not indicate the size of the sample. Generic, specific and subspecific keys are given, although these are sometimes difficult to interpret. For example in the generic key *Laterallus* is separated from *Porzana* by whether the tarsus is or is not shorter than the middle toe plus claw, yet the same choice is also given to determine species within the genus *Porzana*. Range maps are given for 25 species, although I would prefer to have seen more. I found a couple of errors in those for Australian species—*Rallus pectoralis*, for example, occurs in south-western Australia, but this population is not shown on the map. The book closes with an excellent chapter on fossil rails by Storrs Olson, a bibliography and indices.

The text constitutes in part a taxonomic review, in which Ripley recognises 129 recent species grouped in 18 genera. His taxonomic views on the family are well and fully discussed in Chapter 3.

The book is well printed, designed and bound. While I have commented on several points which struck me as minor weaknesses, some such criticisms are perhaps inevitable in a work of this scope; it is nevertheless a beautiful, impressive and important book. The book is well worth owning, and almost essential for anyone with a special interest in rails.

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