

REVIEW

Zoological Catalogue of Australia. 37.2. Aves (Columbidae to Coraciidae). By Schodde, R. & Mason, I.J. (1997). CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne. Hardcover, 440 pp. Price not supplied.

The Australian Biological Resources Study (of the Federal Department of Environment, Sport and Territories) has a breathtaking plan to catalogue the entire Australian fauna on a computerised database. Volumes of the *Zoological Catalogue* are printed sections of this database. Of the 86 volumes proposed, this is the 17th to be published, and the first of four covering the birds.

This, then, is the new Australian checklist of birds that we have awaited for so long, or more correctly a quarter of it—from pigeons to rollers—dealing with pigeons, parrots, cuckoos, owls, swifts, kingfishers and other “near-passerines”. Volume 37.1 will cover ratites to gulls and terns; volumes 37.3 and 37.4 will cover the passerines. The treatment is highly detailed, with an introduction to each family, synonymies at the generic and specific levels, statements summarising the distribution and ecology of each species or subspecies, and references to key papers for each bird.

The geographic scope includes the Australian sector of Antarctica, and the islands under Australian control such as Norfolk, Lord Howe and Macquarie. This exactly complements the scope of the New Zealand checklist except that Macquarie Island is covered by both. New Zealand native species and/or genera (other than stragglers to New Zealand) covered in this volume are: New Zealand Pigeon (extinct on Norfolk Island), *Nestor* (extinct species on Norfolk Island), Red-crowned Parakeet (subspecies on Norfolk, Lord Howe and Macquarie), Shining Cuckoo, Long-tailed Cuckoo (passage-migrant on Norfolk and Lord Howe), Morepork (subspecies on Norfolk and Lord Howe) and Sacred Kingfisher.

A major issue in contemporary bird checklists is the sequence of families—whether or not they follow the radical rearrangement of bird groups suggested by recent studies of DNA-DNA hybridisation. In this volume the authors have followed a largely traditional sequence, because for Australian non-passerines the “Sibley sequence” based on DNA has not been corroborated by other evidence. However, the new sequence has been confirmed for Australian passerines and will be followed in later volumes. Unfortunately, there are some differences between the treatment in this volume and that of the recent list by Christidis & Boles (1994). *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories*. RAOU Monograph 2; reviewed in *Notornis* 42(3):216-217). Of relevance to New Zealand, the Shining Cuckoo is put back in *Chalcites* (*Chrysococcyx* in the RAOU list) and the Sacred Kingfisher is placed in the Alcedinidae (Halcyonidae in the RAOU list).

The book is partly computer-generated, with the result that references are mostly given in full. This is repetitive but makes for accuracy and ease of use. Checklists are dull-looking books with their text-filled pages. In my view, this one

is made even duller, and harder to scan, by unimaginative typesetting. The species and subspecies headings are not prominent enough. The main species-level texts (Distribution, Ecology) are too similar in typeface and layout to the long synonymic entries. A redeeming feature is the exquisite drawings by F. Knight which grace the introduction to each family.

This scholarly work is a landmark in the Australasian bird literature. All natural history research libraries will need it, and it will be of lasting interest and usefulness to New Zealand ornithologists.

B.J. GILL

LETTER

The Editor,

Errors and omissions in a list

It has been more than seven years since I submitted a note on possible changes to the systematic arrangement of New Zealand birds for publication in *Notornis*. The purpose of the note (Sibley *et al.*'s (1988) classification of living birds applied to the New Zealand list: *Notornis* 38: 152-164) was to assess some possible consequences for the New Zealand fauna of then recent biochemical studies. No one seems to have noticed that the Grey Warbler had been struck off as a New Zealand bird, or, if they did, they did not think that it was important. Perhaps that was not surprising as the reviewer, editor, and author had not noticed its absence either! Nomenclature may not be at the top of most members' interest lists, but it is somewhat surprising that the omission of one of the commonest birds has not been mentioned to the author at any time since the note was published. *Gerygone* should have appeared in the list in the subfamily Pardalotidae, subfamily Acanthizinae, after the Family Meliphagidae, in the Superfamily Meliphagoidea.

Some other corrections and alterations to the list may also be noted: Infraclass Neoaves should appear before Parvclass Galloanserae, rather than before the Coraciae; the correct name for the forest kingfishers has since been determined to be the Halcyonidae rather than the Dacelonidae; amongst the Psittacidae, *Platycercus* should be in italics; in the Accipitridae, the genus *Haliaeetus* is not now thought to have been present in New Zealand; the genus *Poliocephalus* should be added to the Family Podicipedidae; and the correct name for the Eopsaltriidae has been found to be the Petroicidae.

Yours faithfully,

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