

REVIEWS

Ecology of Birds, an Australian Perspective, by H. A. Ford, Surrey Beatty and Sons, NSW, 1989.

For reasons that are still largely hidden, Australian birds have coped remarkably well with the recent invasion of humans. Over the last 200 years only one mainland species is thought to have gone extinct, and only five others are currently listed as endangered.

A relatively unmodified avifauna, combined with evidence that birds underwent a major adaptive radiation in Australia (Sibley and Ahlquist 1985, *Emu* 85: 1-14), offers the exciting potential for independent tests of ecological theories developed in the Northern Hemisphere. With this book, Hugh Ford makes a first attempt at reviewing the tests that have been conducted.

Ford has three objectives: to provide an overview of the ecology of Australian birds, to relate the available literature to ecological theory, and to point the way towards studies that have not yet been attempted. In the first and third he succeeds admirably. On the second the book is disappointing, although not due to any fault of Ford's. Unfortunately, there are many ecological ideas about which the Australian literature has rather little to say.

Ford begins each section by pointing to major principles in ecology, then continues by asking how studies of Australian birds have contributed to an understanding of those principles. The 12 chapters cover origins, community and population ecology, breeding and foraging, several aspects of behaviour, and human impact. Comparison with other Pacific islands, including New Zealand, is offered when relevant literature is available, although the emphasis is Australian rather than Australasian.

The book is clearly a valuable review of the Australian ornithological literature and would be a useful reference in ornithology courses. To be succinct, Ford has limited most descriptions of ecological principles to a summary. His attempts to map the Australian literature onto that summary sometimes result in his asking more of the literature than it could provide. However, we learn much about what needs to be done, as well as about the questions that have been answered.

This book is handbook-sized, hard bound, and attractively presented with liberal offerings of carefully chosen figures and colour photos. It is written for knowledgeable amateurs as well as professionals, and each chapter is easily read at a sitting. It would be a useful addition to any enthusiast's library.

I. G. McLean