

REVIEWS

The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories. By L. Christidis and W.E. Boles. Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union Monograph 2, 1994. 112 pp. Obtainable from: RAOU, 415 Riversdale Rd., Hawthorn East, Victoria, Australia 3123. Price A\$21 incl. postage.

At the risk of seeming smug it can be fairly said that the Australians have not done quite so well as we have in the checklist department. Between 1953 and 1990, when the OSNZ produced three checklists (Fleming 1953, Kinsky 1970, Turbott 1990), our Australian cousins could muster only half a checklist (Condon 1975) and a skeletal outline of the other half (Schodde 1975). The present volume, long-awaited, is still not a full checklist) – there are no synonymies, treatments of subspecies or statements on distributional status. It is, however, a useful list, and the extensive discussion is important in showing, for Australasian birds, the way ahead through the new confusion over bird relationships.

Christidis and Boles are ornithologists at the Museum of Victoria (Melbourne) and Australian Museum (Sydney), respectively. Their book has two main parts. First comes a simple listing of all species of Australian birds (extant and recently extinct) systematically arranged by families and orders. The text has three columns showing Latin names, authorities and common names. The latter now form the RAOU's list of recommended English names. The second part is a succinct but detailed discussion for each order and family giving reasons for taxonomic changes and pointing out problems in need of further investigation.

The authors of any bird list published after 1990 must decide to what extent they will follow the radically new higher taxonomy of birds, and the changes to the familiar sequence of bird families, promoted by Sibley & Monroe (1990) based on data from studies of DNA-DNA hybridisation. Christidis and Boles take a cautious approach, accepting these changes only where data from other sources support the DNA findings. The result is a largely traditional sequence with a few innovations to keep us on our toes. As understanding of the relatedness of bird groups develops, this seems a good approach. There is a plan, we are told, "to revise the list at least every three to four years".

The following are some of the implications for New Zealand birds, assuming we should wish to harmonise with the Australians in the next edition of our checklist. Galliforms and anseriforms now follow immediately after ratites, and before penguins and tubenoses. The White-faced Heron is moved to *Egretta*. *Thinornis* is no longer endemic to New Zealand, for the Hooded Plover *T. rubicollis* is put in this genus. The Black-fronted Dotterel is now in *Elseyornis*. The Sacred Kingfisher becomes *Todiramphus sanctus* in the new family Halcyonidae. In the song-birds there are some family shake-ups. *Gerygone* is in the Pardalotidae, *Petroica* in the Petroicidae, *Rhipidura* in the Dicruridae and the Australian Magpie in the Artamidae.

The book is clearly organised, nicely produced and inexpensive. Any ornithologist seriously interested in the taxonomic status of Australasian birds will want to have a copy of this RAOU monograph.

LITERATURE CITED

- CONDON, H.T. 1975. Checklist of the Birds of Australia. Part 1. Non-passerines. RAOU, Melbourne.
- FLEMING, C.A. (convener) 1953. Checklist of New Zealand Birds. Reed, Wellington.
- KINSKY, F.C. (convener) 1970. Annotated Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand including the Birds of the Ross Dependency. Reed, Wellington.
- SCHODDE, R. 1975. Interim List of Australian Songbirds. Passerines. RAOU, Melbourne.
- SIBLEY, C.G.; MONROE, B.L. 1990. Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- TURBOTT, E.G. (convener) 1990. Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand and the Ross Dependency, Antarctica. Random Century, Auckland.

B.J. Gill



Handbook of the Birds of the World, vol. 2. New World Vultures to Guineafowl.
By J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott and J. Sargatal (Eds.) 1994. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. ISBN 84-87334-15-6 (hardback), 638 p.

Having seen the scope and effort involved in the production of *Birds of the Western Palearctic*, and *Handbook of Australia, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (both covering tiny avifaunas compared with the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (HBW)), when HBW1 was first announced I dismissed it as a work unlikely to succeed. After all, who would be mad enough to attempt a handbook to *all* the world's birds. After a detailed examination of HBW2, however, I am kicking myself and will certainly be collecting all twelve volumes of this monumental undertaking!

HBW2 is an extremely attractive and comprehensive book produced to an impressively high standard. It includes all hawks, eagles, caracaras, falcons, megapodes, cracids, grouse, quails, partridges and pheasants. In addition to an exhaustive text, HBW2 features 60 colour plates, 302 photographs, 590 distribution maps and over 7,000 references!

Firstly, a broad overview of each family is presented in informative prose covering systematics, morphology, habitat, habits, food, feeding, breeding, movements, relationships with man, status and conservation (e.g. Falcons and Caracaras runs to 32 pages; Pheasants and Partridges 46). It is reassuring to see conservation given such a high profile in a work of this kind. Then, each species is covered individually in concise detail, with a distribution map, and an illustration on a nearby plate. For species I am familiar with the maps were accurate, though of course small. The illustrations are attractive, helpful and shame many a modern field guide, though of course the range of positions and plumages is not comprehensive. To provide a bibliographic section for