

REVIEWS OF NEW PUBLICATIONS

Chalmers, M.L. 1986. *Annotated checklist of the birds of Hongkong, fourth edition.* Hongkong Bird Hatching Society.

The fourth edition of this checklist supercedes and updates the third edition by M.A. Webster published in 1975. It is a concise and very clearly presented summary of the status of every species in Hongkong, which carefully differentiates those species whose identification is unconfirmed or whose status in the wild may be suspect. At first, the separate listing under six status categories appears inconvenient, though probably regular use would overcome this. Most species under the category of assumed escapes are very obvious. The analysis of status and histograms showing distribution is likely to be a very useful feature, as is the comprehensive bibliography. One omission from the bibliography was noted, that of La Touche (1925-1934), whose species numbering system is used throughout.

The book will clearly be an essential reference work for all ornithologists in Hongkong and surrounding regions. The price outside Hongkong is US\$ 8.50 or pounds sterling 5.50, which is very cheap. It is available from the Society at GPO Box 12460, Hongkong.

White, C.M.N. & M.D. Bruce. 1986. *The Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, The Moluccas & Lesser Sunda Islands, Indonesia). An annotated checklist.* Brit. Orn. Union Checklist 7.

It is with great pleasure that we receive this long-awaited, first comprehensive checklist of Wallacea. Wallacea as defined here is the zone of Indonesia that lies transitionally between the Sundanese faunas of Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan on the continental shelf of Asia, and the Sahulian faunas of the shelf of Australia - New Guinea. For lack of readily available reference material, this uniquely interesting zone with its high rate of endemism has long remained a "grey area" for field ornithologists, and the authors and their publishers must be congratulated on laying the groundwork for the field guides that are in preparation.

The death of Charles White occurred in 1978 at a time when his second draft of this check-list was well on the way to completion, since then Murray Bruce has devoted an enormous effort in taking over the task of preparation, yet in such a way that the contributions of the late senior author have never been diminished. Throughout the book, Murray Bruce has ensured that the contributions of the two authors are distinct, yet melded together without loss of continuity.

The introductory sections define the concept and boundaries of Wallacea, disposing of any confusion that surrounds the original definitions of "Wallace's Line" and the later "Weber's Line" and "Lydekker's Line". The subdivision of Wallacea into the three component regions of Sulawesi, Moluccas and Lesser Sundas greatly assists the presentation, while the maps of each region (Maps 3, 4 and 5) allow the reader to identify the majority of the islands. Nevertheless the glossary in Appendix II is an essential feature in view of the multiplicity of islands and sometimes duplicity of names and spellings.

The sections on habitats give a brief but useful summary, though a few more

details under the climate section might have given a better overall perspective. The inclusion of some average annual rainfall totals would have emphasized the considerable climatic contrasts, comparing for example Ambon's 3460 mm with only 843 mm at Dili in East Timor.

Warnings are rightly given on the environmental changes that are taking place, or indeed have already taken place over the past decades especially on the more vulnerable smaller islands. Even a century ago A.R. Wallace recorded in his diaries the problems he encountered in reaching the remnant forests of some islands. As stated on p.29, "collections made 50-100 years ago may be the only evidence remaining to attest to the once diversified island bird populations"; in other words, some island lists may now be obsolete.

The descriptive zoogeography is inevitably the *most* interesting of the introductory sections, highlighting the complexities and anomalies of the region, many of which still wait to be unravelled. In this respect, an outline of current theories of ocean-spreading as they relate to Wallacea would have been beneficial. For example some theories show that Sulawesi has been formed from the collision of three crustal plates, of which the western plate may have been attached to Borneo during the Miocene (Katili, 1978) thus providing a major land bridge for the Soudanese elements in the Sulawesi fauna and vice versa. Geological research continues in the region and zoogeographers will always have a role to play in elucidating the geological history of the Wallacean archipelago.

The sections on migration and breeding serve to emphasize how little is known in these fields. Table 16 shows that even the monsoonal island of Flores illustrates the prolonged breeding seasons of equatorial birds, seasons which may well vary considerably through the region in response to local climatic variations and monsoonal exposure. Migration is also very poorly known, which is understandable with the emphasis given by earlier workers to the treasures to be found in the forests, yet Ash (1984) has recently added some 39 migrant species to the nearby Ball list, and clearly there is scope to investigate the migratory status of species throughout the region.

A most welcome feature is the compilation of a first comprehensive list of English names for Wallacean birds, used throughout the systematic section and also in the summary list in Appendix IV. Where possible, names of species in adjacent regions have been taken from the standard works, it is to be hoped that in the near future, English names can be standardized throughout Indonesia, and perhaps subsequently Indonesian names also.

Inevitably, one of the main values of this work is the provision of ideas and opportunities for further study. Bruce (1986) has already given a preliminary list of opportunities, both distributional and taxonomic, however the list is unending. With so much destruction of indigenous habitats, great priority should now be given to faunistic studies of individual islands, particularly from the conservation viewpoint. The Checklist provides the base line for such studies.

For example, it is stated on p.56 that Buton is largely de-forested, yet this reviewer has seen from recent aerial photographs some significant areas of forest remaining, and these should receive priority study. On the same page, it is stated that the avifauna of the eastern arm of Sulawesi is very poorly known. This area has seen extensive recent deforestation through transmigration settlement, so here again surveys of the remaining forests can be considered a priority.

If Ash (1984) can add 84 species to the comparatively well-known but ornithologically unimpressive island of Ball, how many additions await to be added to the Wallacean islands? KUKILA has the honour of publishing the first supplementary Wallacean list (see Bruce, this issue), and looks forward to publishing additional new records. Priorities are such that it should not be necessary to await the field guides that are under preparation before tackling fresh island surveys.

References:

Ash, J.S. 1984. Bird observations on Ball. *Bull.Brit.Orn.Cl.* 104 (1); 24-35.

Bruce, M.D. 1986. The birds of Wallacea : some opportunities for field

study. *Oriental Bird Club Bulletin* No. 3: 23-26. Katili, J.A. 1978. Past and present geotectonic position of Sulawesi, Indonesia. *Tectonophysics* 45:289.

D.A.H.

Beehler, B.M., Pratt, T.K. S D.A. Zierman. 1986. *Birds of Hew Guinea. Handbook no. 9. Wau Ecology Institute, Papua New Guinea. Princeton University Press.*

New Guinea, the second largest island in the world, is a spectacular tropical haven still dominated by vast expanses of pristine lowland and montane forest, teeming swamps and warrior tribes at the hunting-gathering stage of evolution. Ever since scientific man first set foot on its shores and sent back specimens of birds of paradise, purportedly wanderers from a celestial paradise, he has been entranced by the remarkable array of New Guinea's endemic birds. However, until the publication of this book there has been little in the way of a comprehensive guide to the ca 725 species (578 breeding land and freshwater birds) known or expected to occur on the island and/or its nearby satellites. Brian coates' (1985) *The Birds of Papua New Guinea* is a notable exception. Rand s Gilliard's (1967) *Handbook of New Guinea Birds* provided museum-type descriptions of all then recorded species but was of limited use in the field and has long since been out of print. Consequently the arrival of this book has been eagerly awaited not least by this reviewer, and we have not been disappointed.

This field guide follows the format now well established by Princeton University press (cf. Ridgely, R.S. 1981. *Birds of Panama*). The text includes a brief and comparative description of every species including information on habits, distribution and voice. The 55 plates, 47 of which are in colour, are grouped together centrally and are clearly referenced. The introductory section includes a 24 page description of New Guinea natural history, and at the end there is a gazetteer using a grid system. As the grid is based on latitude and longitude it seems a pity that grid coordinates at five degree intervals are not appended on the accompanying map. Also one of my few real criticisms of the book is that it lacks any species' range maps which as Coates (1985) illustrates so effectively are very helpful especially to the first-time visitor.

The authors make it clear that this is very much a 'first effort' and that subsequent studies will add considerably to the quality of the content. Nevertheless they are to be applauded upon the way in which they have drawn together and collated the enormous wealth of knowledge of New Guinea's birds. There is a noticeable weighting of information towards species in Papua New Guinea, the political eastern half of the island. However, this is not surprising as most of the recent ornithological work on the birds of this island, with the exception of Diamond (1985) and this author (In Prep.), has been conducted in the east (Frith 1979). It is to be hoped that this guide will encourage more observers to venture into the relatively little known western half of the island, Indonesia's Irian Jaya province.

The species accounts are clear and concise and, perhaps most useful of all they are comparative. This is especially critical for such difficult groups as the scrub-wrens *Saricornis* spp (the species limits of the Perplexing Scrub-wren *Saricornis virgatus* are still unclear), and the *Meliphaga* honeyeaters. The latter group have constantly been a thorn in the side of field workers and eluded critical identification. However, with care species identification is now possible using this carefully researched text in conjunction with Dale Zimmerman's fine plate (no.46).

In my opinion the book's piece-de-resistance are the voice descriptions. Jared Diamond's remarkable ability not only in diagnosing the various species and where appropriate, racial differences (cf Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus iozonus*), from frequently muted and/or indistinct calls and then presenting them, often with a schematic sonogram, in a readily comprehensible manner is an example to all future field guides.

The two artists. Dale Zimmerman and James Coe, are to be congratulated on the generally high standard of their work. I particularly like Coe's sepia-toned waterfowl (plate no. 4) and his *Accipiters* (plate no. 5). However, it is disappointing that the latter were not illustrated in flight as this is the usual position in which one is obliged to observe this difficult group. Dale Zimmerman's plate (no. 17) of the fruit-doves *Ptilinopus* spp is one of the highlights of the book. Most people who visit New Guinea want to see birds of paradise; what they don't perceive is that some of these other jewel-like denizens of the forest are equally beautiful and spectacular. This plate will go a long way to redressing that situation. Other plates I found of outstanding quality included the Cuckoo-Doves and Ground-Doves (plate no. 16) and the Sicklebill and Astrapia Birds of paradise (plate no. 52). However, just to be picky the quail and the button-quail are far too cramped, although admittedly to scale with cassowaries and scrubfowl. Squeezed into the bottom left hand corner of the first plate they are of little value to field identification. An illustration of the upper wings and back would have been a better aid to positive species determination.

Such is my enthusiasm for this book and New Guinea birds that I could discuss the subject *ad nauseum*. suffice it to say that there are very few criticisms to be made and that the beauty of the birds depicted in the plates and the clarity and excellence of the text will leave the reader in no doubt as to where his or her next birding trip might be.

References

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Diamond, J.M. 1985. New distributional records and taxa from the outlying mountain ranges of New Guinea. *Bin* 85: 65-91.

Frith, C.B. 1979. Ornithological literature of the Papuan subregion, 1915 to 1976: An Annotated Bibliography. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.* 164: 377-465.

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