

Reviews —

Zoological Catalogue of Australia 37.2, Aves (Columbidae to Coraciidae) by R. Schodde and I.J. Mason. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne 1997. Hardcover, pp. 440, 26 × 18 cm, map, 15 line-drawings. RRP \$A90.

The *Zoological Catalogue* is a project of the Australian Biological Resources Study (Environment Australia), an initiative of the Federal Government, whose aim is an inventory of all animal taxa within the political entity of Australia (including territories and continental waters). The subject of this review is the first part published, on pigeons to Dollarbird, of a four-part volume on birds, the forthcoming ones being ratites to terns (Part 1) and passerines (Parts 3 and 4). The body of the bird volume is a list of genera, species and subspecies, preceded by family introductions which summarise the biogeography, anatomy and biology of the members and give justification for taxonomic decisions made (i.e. lumping or splitting of genera and species). Each family account gives an exhaustive list of references on the biology and systematics of the family. Each genus, species and subspecies entry gives the author, date, bibliographic citation, details of type specimens, distribution, and synonymy (with references). Each species entry also gives justification for the subspecific arrangement followed, and each subspecies entry summarises the ecology of that taxon, with key references. The usefulness of a such a catalogue is obvious: for any species or subspecies of interest, one can immediately review its taxonomic history and current status, its distribution and 'potted' ecology, and find some of the important references on its biology.

The format of the text is fully explained in the editorial preface. The work includes a map of Australian drainage divisions, as used in the distribution accounts, and the text is enhanced by Frank Knight's attractive line-drawings of a representative species from each family chapter. The work concludes with two appendices giving abbreviations, symbols and acronyms, an appendix listing taxonomic and nomenclatural decisions made in the *Catalogue* (for quick reference), an appendix of rare vagrants (<8 confirmed records), a taxonomic index, and an index of common names.

A stated aim of the *Catalogue* series is to lead users into the most recent information available on each species. Although this holds true for taxonomic information, which for the present work was current to 1994 and was thus generally consistent with Christidis & Boles (1994), the same cannot be said for the biological references. The cut-off date for incorporation of biological information and citations was 1990, i.e. a seven-year lag, which in the electronic age seems extraordinary even for a government body. A consequence is that, for instance (whether by design or not), Schodde & Mason (1980) is presented as the authority on Australian owls and frogmouths, with no citation of the important research of the '90s on these birds.

Of most relevance to bird-watchers, and particularly those intending to publish, are several differences from the current Birds Australia checklist (Christidis & Boles 1994) in terms of generic status and specific rank. In the present *Aves Catalogue*, the differences are: Peaceful Dove now *Geopelia placida*; Galah now in its own genus *Eolophus*; Red-collared Lorikeet now separated as *Trichoglossus rubritorquis*; Pale-headed Rosella now a subspecies of Eastern *Platycercus eximius*; bronze-cuckoos now in *Chalcites*, with Gould's now a subspecies of Little *C. minutillus*; Koel now separated from Asian birds as Pacific Koel *Eudynamys orientalis*; Southern Boobook now separated as *Ninox boobook* (from Morepork *N. novaeseelandiae* of New Zealand and Norfolk Is.); 'dull' swiftlets (White-rumped and Uniform) now in genus *Aerodramus*; House Swift now *Apus nipalensis*.

I noticed very few errors in this work: only the occasional typographical slip, including a scientific (subfamily) name. I also wonder about the matching of some subheadings with taxonomic listings in Appendix III, in which some subheadings appear to have been transposed. Contrary to the claim that Courtney (1993) misreported the down colour of the Galah, he correctly reported pink natal down for this species.

The *Catalogue* is a scholarly, scientific work that most ordinary bird-watchers will probably not want to purchase. Nevertheless, we are obliged to be aware of the taxonomic rulings, particularly where they depart from Christidis & Boles pending a new edition of that checklist. Furthermore, the *Aves Catalogue* will be of considerable interest and use to serious amateurs and armchair taxonomists. At the very least, amateurs should familiarise themselves with it in a library, in order to keep abreast of Australian bird nomenclature and to learn a little of the taxonomic process and history. Anyone wanting to learn about the characters and biology of Australian birds will find the *Catalogue* an invaluable starting point.

This work is available from CSIRO Publishing, P.O. Box 1139, Collingwood, Vic. 3066 (phone 03 9962 7666 or free call 1800 645 051 within Aust.; fax 03 9662 7555; email: sales@publish.csiro.au), or order directly from home page <http://www.publish.csiro.au>.

References

- Christidis, L. & Boles, W.E. (1994), *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories*, RAOU Monograph 2, Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, Melbourne.
Courtney, J. (1993), 'Comments on the taxonomic position of the Galah', *Aust. Bird Watcher* 15, 60-67.
Schodde, R. & Mason, I.J. (1980), *Nocturnal Birds of Australia*, Lansdowne, Melbourne.