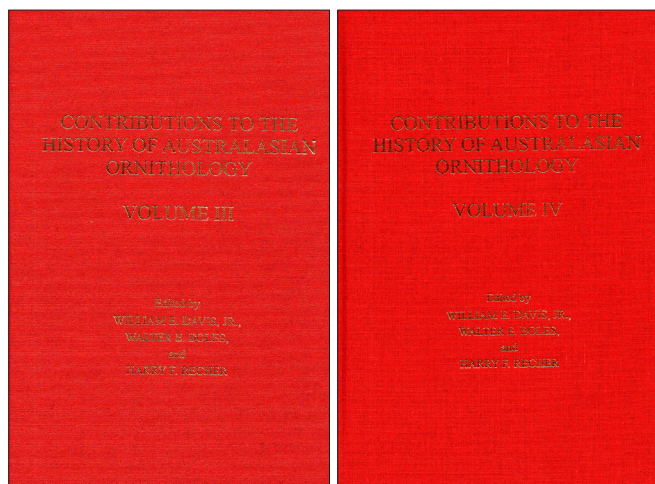


Book Review

Contributions to the History of Australasian Ornithology, Volumes 3 and 4

edited by William E. Davis, Jr., Walter E. Boles, and Harry F. Recher

Nuttall Ornithological Club, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. Hardbacks,
Volumes 3 (2017; 603 pp., 96 figures) and 4 (2018; 598 pp., 70 figures), both 23 × 15 × 4 cm.
RRP for each volume AU\$110.



These two books follow Volumes 1 (2008) and 2 (2012) in the series (for reviews see Woinarski 2009, Fulton 2013 and Davis 2014). They are well bound and well printed on good paper, the 166 black-and-white figures being mostly of people. Chapters appear in the order that they were completed, but when possible the editors group those on similar topics. As headings within chapters provide a useful guide to content, I detail them.

Volume 3

The 56-page first chapter, *A History of Ornithology in Tasmania* by G. Lord & W.E. Davis Jr, provides an account of institutions, individuals, and events involved in the progress of Tasmanian ornithology, to 2016. It does so under the headings 'Early History'; 'Conservation and Ornithology'; 'Wildlife Division of the State Government'; and 'The Bird Observers' Association of Tasmania (BOAT)'. Under the latter, accounts of a dozen individuals prominent in recent Tasmanian ornithology appear. The Tasmanian State museums barely rate a mention. Ornithology today in Tasmania is stated to be primarily orientated towards conservation. The bibliography occupies 14 pages.

The 106-page chapter entitled *History of Ornithological Exploration of New Guinea* by B.M. Beehler & J.L. Mandeville appears comprehensive, including details of field researchers and their findings. It comprises 'Introduction'; 'Brief Historical Overview'; 'The Voyages of Discovery'; 'Colonialism'; 'The Expeditions'; 'The Plume Trade'; 'Art, Birds of Paradise, and Bird Books on New Guinea'; 'The Explorer–Naturalists'; 'The Cabinets and the Curators'; 'The Institutions'; and 'The Age of Field Study'; followed by a 12-page bibliography, and three appendices—an 11-page 'Geographical Gazetteer'

with a 2-page map of New Guinea; a tabulated 57-page chronological 'Time-line of Ornithological Exploration and Research in the New Guinea Region'; and a tabulated 67-page 'Geographic Table of Ornithological Exploration and Research in the New Guinea Region', detailing who was where and when and with a full-page map delineating regions of New Guinea. The only criticism of this valuable chapter is that the photographs are mostly remote from the pertinent text where their figure numbers are, frustratingly, not cited.

The 97-page chapter entitled *A Brief History of Avian Palaeontology in Australia* by W.E. Boles makes fascinating reading. It comprehensively covers the topic to include contemporary studies by students and the literature to 2016 under the headings: 'The Fossil Record—Ages, Sites, Taxa'; 'Possible Indigenous Interactions'; 'The Initial Discoveries of Dromornithids'; 'Charles W. de Vis and the Proliferation of Fossil Birds'; 'A Period of Quiescence [*sic*] with Scattered Penguins'; 'The Stirton-Tedford-Miller Years'; 'More Discoveries in the 1970s'; 'Patricia Vickers-Rich, Colleagues, and Students'; 'The Pleistocene Extinction Debate'; "'Mr. Moa" Comes to Australia'; 'Recent Work on Dromornithids'; 'Students and Post-docs: Flinders University'; 'Recent Student Research'; and 'Concluding Remarks'. I was surprised that the extinct dromornithids (large Emu-like birds) are now thought to be early in the lineage that includes the waterfowl rather than in that including the ratites, and was interested to read of geographical distributions of extant birds beyond their present ranges. The bibliography is 27 pages.

Next comes the 63-page chapter *James Allen Keast—Bird Watcher and Ecologist: An Autobiography* by J.A. Keast, with a Preamble, annotations, and corrections by H.F. Recher. Headings are: 'Babe in the Woods (1922–1937)'; 'The Teenage Naturalist (1938–1941)'; 'The Wonderful Five Islands'; 'Seasonal Distribution Ecologies'; 'A First Job and the Army (1938–1945)'; 'Attending University (1946–1952)'; 'The 1952 Round Australia Expedition'; 'An Appreciation of the Desert Monoliths and Ayers Rock'; 'The Kimberleys and Missions'; 'Going to Harvard (1953–1955)'; 'A Curator at the Australian Museum (1955–1962)'; 'The Sydney Hobby Farm'; 'Queen's University—Joining the Faculty (1962)'; 'Research at the Lake Opinicon Field Station, Temperate Environments'; 'Temperate Cold Canada and Dry Australian Adaptations, Some Comparisons'; and 'Faunas, Careers, Knowledge'. It has a 2-page bibliography and 7-page appendix listing Keast's publications. It is an interesting read about this doyen of recent museum and field ornithology in Australia, but I would have liked more about the development of his ideas resulting in his works on speciation.

The 122 pages of *A History of Ornithology in the Top End of the Northern Territory* by R. Noske are punctuated by the headings 'Introduction to the Top End'; 'Early Settlements and Collectors'; 'Collecting Around the Turn of the Century (1894–1903)'; 'Collecting Begins in the Eastern Half of the Top End'; 'Ornithological Contributions by Servicemen During WWII'; 'Post-war Collecting Expeditions and Surveys (1948–1968)'; 'Ornithologists in Darwin'; 'The Research Era Begins—Waterbird Ecology in the Top End'; 'The Conservation Commission Era (1986–)'; 'Contributions by the Author and Colleagues'; 'Concluding Remarks'; and an 18-page bibliography. This impressive chapter, by a field ornithologist, emphasises the valuable distributional and breeding records documented by some bird- and egg-collectors. It focuses on the five species endemic to the Top End as well as the Magpie Goose *Anseranus semipalmata* (a perceived risk to agriculture) and Gouldian Finch *Chloebia (Erythrura) gouldiae* (declining since the 1970s). It does not detail any ornithological material in the Northern Territory Museum. Noske notes that the 1986 Fifth Harold Hall Expedition of the British Museum of Natural History marked the end of the bird-collecting age (in Australia at least). He wrongly implies that there were four expedition members, by failing to mention Harry Butler and Ralfe Whistler. He states that A. Hiller was the sole Australian member of the expedition but Hiller was then English (now Australian), and Butler was the only Australian; and the expedition travelled in three Land Rovers, not two. Noske observes that this expedition saw the start of the era of avian ecological research by field ornithologists, and he comprehensively and admirably covers their activities.

Volume 4

The first chapter, *Who was Gregory Mathews?* by T. Howard, objectively assesses the man and his prolific and controversial taxonomic bird work and cites the opinions of several contemporary ornithologists. The headings in this chapter are: 'Family Background'; 'Early Life'; 'Marriage and Move to England'; 'The Ornithological Scene in Britain'; 'Early Work'; 'Finding Contributors'; 'The Coming of Iredale'; 'The Question of Authorship'; 'The Question of Taxonomic Ideas'; 'Checklists'; 'RAOU Checklists'; 'The Birds of Australia'; 'The Austral Avian Record'; 'New Species'; 'Financial Problems and Sale of the Bird Collection'; 'The Donation of the Book Collection, and Final Years'; 'Type Lists from Tring and from New York'; 'Assessment by International Ornithologists'; 'Assessment by Australian Ornithologists'; 'Conclusion', and the bibliography is 6 pages. It is noted that Mathews' *The Birds of Australia* (1925–1927) contains field notes by many ornithologists.

The next chapter, *Ornithology at the Queensland Museum* by W.E. Boles, includes the headings 'Philosophical Society of Queensland'; 'The Museum is Created'; 'The de Vis Years'; 'The Quiet Years'; 'The Mack Years'; 'Associates'; and 'Collections'. Although two papers by C.B. Frith about Rawnsley's Bowerbird are listed in the bibliography, they are not cited in the text. And, ironically, although many of Frith's publications are in the bibliography, none of the 10 that he published in the *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* with Dawn Frith, as associates of that institution, are. The text includes mention of the field ornithology in Australia and New Guinea of

recent museum staff members and associates and notes that the egg collection (5200 clutches) provides useful data on "the breeding behaviour of many Queensland birds" (p. 132). This museum houses >30 000 bird specimens. It is stated that Wayne Longmore first described the nest and eggs of the White-lined Honeyeater *Microptilotis (Meliphaga) albilineata* in 1983, but the nest was first described by Dan Freeman (1971). The 1990 discovery of a recently killed Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis* is detailed. The 13-page bibliography is valuable.

Philippa Horton's meticulously researched 92-page chapter about the collectors *John and James Cockerell: Father and Son Naturalists* has the headers: 'Introduction'; 'Early Years'; 'To Queensland'; 'Cape York and Exchanges'; 'Aru Islands, and Cape York and Torres Strait Again'; 'The Jardine Affair and Further Exchanges'; 'To London'; 'James Cockerell's Collecting Trips'; 'In the Employ of Samuel White'; 'John Cockerell in Brisbane'; 'Lismore'; 'Mildura and South Australia'; 'Final Years'; 'Cockerell Specimens in World Museums'; 'John Thomas Cockerell: Perpetrator of Fraud, or Careless Enthusiast?'; 'Defence of Cockerell [sic] and his Collection'; 'Conclusion'; and 'Postscript'. It is stated (p. 154) that the Lovely Fairy-wren *Malurus amabilis* and Australasian Figbird *Sphecotheres vieillotii* subspecies *flaviventris* "are restricted to the Cape York Peninsula", which is untrue under any interpretation of that area of Queensland (Frith & Frith 1995). This esoteric chapter, certainly of interest to those concerned with the Cockerells' work, is concluded by 201 endnotes and a 5-page bibliography.

Although the 216-page chapter *Ornithology at the South Australian Museum, Adelaide: 1856 to 1939* by P. Horton, A. Black, and B. Blaylock exhaustively details the museum, ornithological collections and persons associated with them, its authors state (p. 242), "It is by no means a complete account". Its headers are 'Early Years, 1856 to 1875'; 'The Collectors, 1860s to 1890s'; 'Intrigue Among the Exchanges, 1860s and 1870s'; 'Administrative and Scientific Changes 1875 to 1885'; 'Accommodation and Management 1884 to 1912'; 'Expeditions in the 1890s'; 'Taxidermists and Museum Assistants 1881 to 1939'; 'An Association of Ornithologists, 1899'; 'Development of a Research Collection 1898 to 1914'; 'Expansion and New Leadership 1908 to 1922'; 'Honorary Ornithologists and Other Staff 1922 to 1939'; 'Acquisition of Collections to 1939 and Beyond'; and 'Since 1939'. I found text about Night Parrots, grasswrens, John Gould, Alfred R. Wallace and Shane Parker of particular interest, but there is much more. The 'Since 1939' header defies the chapter title, but permits important additions, notably the account of S.A. Parker. There are 457 footnotes and a 15-page bibliography.

The last chapter, *A History of Ornithology in Western Australia* by A.H. Burbridge and E. Russell, contains the headers: 'Aboriginal Knowledge of Birds'; 'Early European Explorers—Finding New Lands and Weird Creatures'; 'New Legal and Social Attitudes'; 'Ornithology in Government Agencies'; 'Ornithology in Universities'; 'Independent Ornithologists and NGOs'; 'Birds on Islands'; 'Studies on Individual Species'; and 'Conclusions'. It includes little about the Western Australian Museum, as a chapter deals with this in Volume 1, but far more about field ornithology. It covers studies of fieldwork on wetlands, seabirds, black-cockatoos, galahs, ground parrots, finches, scrub-birds,

magpies and more. Its bibliography occupies 27 pages, and two appendices list 'Chairpersons, Western Australian Branch of the RAOU/Birds Australia/BirdLife Australia', 1943–2015 and 'Editors, *Western Australian Bird Notes*', 1943–2002.

These volumes contain a wealth of careful historical research, not only invaluable to those interested in the science but also for those writing up work, be it from museum or field. Their exhaustive, taxonomically comprehensive, general indices (51 and 54 pages, respectively) enable users to learn of the history of discovery and biology and ecology of species mentioned. They contain much of interest, instruction, and pleasure. It is fascinating to read about, and see photographs of, ornithologists previously known only from names on publications.

Although the readership for some chapters may be limited, the availability of these chapters is highly significant, emphasising the generous commitment to ornithology of the Nuttall Ornithological Club. The contributing authors deserve the heartfelt appreciation of all interested in Australasian ornithology. The volumes are available in Australia from Nokomis Publications (www.nokomis.com.au). Although expensive for some, these volumes should certainly adorn the shelves of all pertinent institutions and reference libraries.

References

- Davis, F.R. (2014). *Contributions to the History of Australasian Ornithology, Volume II*. Book review. *Emu* **114**, 385–386.
- Freeman, D.J. (1971). The nest of the White-lined Honeyeater. *Emu* **71**, 86–87.
- Frith, D.W. & Frith, C.B. (1995). *Cape York Peninsula: A Natural History*. Reed Books, Sydney.
- Fulton, G.R. (2013). Book review: *Contributions to the History of Australasian Ornithology* edited by W.E. Davis, H.F. Recher, W.E. Boles and J.A. Jackson. *Australian Field Ornithology* **30**, 212–214.
- Mathews, G.M. (1925–1927). *The Birds of Australia*. Author, London.
- Woinarski, J. (2009). *Contributions to the History of Australasian Ornithology*. Book review. *Emu* **109**, 360–362.

Clifford B. Frith
Malanda QLD, Australia