

The authors have set out not just to provide a guide to all the birds of the Samoa archipelago but also to incorporate the bird lore; the stories, legends and proverbs of the Samoan people. I found that these stories, interspersed throughout the text, enhanced the book's value and made delightful reading. No doubt the life-lister dashing from one Pacific island to the next, ticking off the various endemics, would ignore these fascinating tales, but the visitor who wants an appreciation of how Samoan people view their birds will get useful background information from these legends.

The bulk of the text deals with the birds under the headings of Seabirds, Migratory Birds, Waterfowl, Marsh and Landbirds, and Accidental Occurrences, together with legends and proverbs. Appendices cover suggestions for successful birding in Samoa, the language, a checklist of the birds, footnote citations, and a bibliography. The section on birding deals well with the need for the inquisitive birder to respect local customs when away from the main tourist areas. Anyone who has lived in the Pacific would endorse the comments made.

Each bird is described, its breeding is commented on, and sometimes we're told where best to go to see it. The treatment seemed inconsistent at times. For example, the "Common Tropicbird" (*Phaethon aethurus*), a dubious record, is given a heading in the text and listed in the checklist but the sightings of Peter Child (*Notornis* 26) of the Little Tern and Siberian Tattler are omitted or mentioned only in passing. With few birds to deal with, the authors could have included every species given in the literature and simply commented on its status. Thus, the unconfirmed sighting of Cattle Egret in American Samoa, as well as Child's observations, would rate a mention, and the early records that now appear to be errors.

An intriguing entry for New Zealanders is the paragraph about an *Apteryx*: ". . . smaller than the New Zealand *Apteryx* but resembles it in other respects . . ." a quote from an 1897 book by Stair.

The authors' love of Samoa, its birds and its people is obvious throughout the book. It is not just a stark field guide. It is a very good field guide and so is warmly recommended. It will also appeal to those with an interest in the peoples of the Pacific and the special role of birds in their cultures.

Don Hadden

SAOS Checklist of Southern African Birds, edited by P. A. Clancey, Sigma Press, Pretoria, 1980.

In these somewhat out-of-joint times, bigots are apt to ask "Can any good thing come out of South Africa?" For ornithologists the answer is an emphatic "Yes". This hefty and forthright Checklist reflects both the breathtaking variety of birds over a vast subregion and the hard work and scholarship of the members of the SAOS Committee.

Name almost any family or tribe of African or Eurasian birds from eagles to sunbirds, from bustards to barbets and bulbuls, from ciconia to cisticola, and the chances are that, in the great land-mass covered by this checklist, it is represented by many species or subspecies, resident, migratory or both. Then there are the notable oddities, such as Ostrich, Bateleur, Secretary Bird, Promerops. A veritable gallery of bee-eaters, kingfishers, hoopoes, rollers, louries, starlings add brilliant colour, all logically catalogued, reduced to

trinomials and with a concise note on their known distribution, supported most helpfully as the need arises by a map. Nor, of course, are the "little brown jobs" neglected. *Anthus novaeseelandiae* is represented by eight subspecies and earns a map (p. 233). It is also worth noting that it has to compete with nine other species of pipit.

By contrast, New Zealand's remote insular avifauna makes a very modest showing. Only at sea with all our penguins, tubenoses and cormorants do we remain hard to beat. The long Hypothetical List suggests that South African ornithologists still have much to learn about their oceanic migrants and visitors. How satisfying, incidentally, to see *Catharacta* not *Stercorarius* used for the generic name of the big austral skuas.

All worthwhile checklists contain some curious scraps of information. That wayward nearctic sandpiper, *Calidris fuscicollis*, is on both the SA and the NZ lists. But the only one so far recorded in South Africa (p. 365) became a victim of botulism at a sewage works near Cape Town. Does this sound a warning for coprophilous birdwatchers on the Auckland Isthmus?

Just as on the football field Springboks have proved that they can run straight and kick goals, so the team which compiled this checklist has mastered a vast subject and revealed a meticulous attention to detail. Is it churlish to point out that on p. 298, *epomorpha* should be *epomophora*? The Royal Albatross is the 'epaulette wearer'. Even if we remember the ancient adage *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi*, the SAOS Checklist of 1980 will be an indispensable tool for very many years and not without significance for serious NZ ornithologists.

R.B. Sibson

Contribution à l'Etude des Oiseaux de Polynésie Orientale, by D.T. Holyoak and J.-C. Thibault. Mémoires du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Series A, Zoology, Vol. 127. 1984. 209 pp., maps. Available from La Bibliothèque centrale, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 38, rue Geoffroy-Sainte-Hilaire, 75005 Paris.

Anyone contemplating a birdwatching trip to the eastern Pacific, from Samoa eastwards, should get a copy of this book.

This modest publication, printed on non-glossy paper, is the most valuable guide to the birds of these areas at present available.

Not only does it give distribution maps and specific island information as to what bird is on what island, but it also gives early records, many of which go back to Captain Cook.

The book does not contain illustrations of the birds but gives adequate descriptions as to size, colour, song and habitat. As such it could be described as an elaborate checklist.

Already, as with most publications, it needs updating as it does not record the Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) on Tahiti or Moorea or the Zebra Dove (*Geopelia striata*) on Borabora. However, these introduced species on these islands do not constitute a serious omission.

The only problem with this book for many New Zealand birders is that it is in French. Nevertheless, it is well to take the time and translate it for its value is immense.

Stuart Chambers