Birds of Australia. A summary of information. Pp. 1-552, text illus., col. pls 1-24, 300 maps. By J. D. Macdonald. With a contribution by D. L. Serventy. Illustrated by Peter Slater. Sydney, *&c.*: A. H. & A. W. Reed Pty Ltd. NZ $18.50.

The publication in 1948 of Serventy and Whittell's " Birds of Western Australia " came at the right moment to provide a sharp stimulus to critical ornithology in Australia. In the ensuing quarter of a century a growing awareness of the unique character of the natural heritage of that great isolated continent has led to a spate of books and booklets, good, bad and indifferent.

This solid volume is in the very top class, for although it modestly claims to be a ' summary of information,' it lists 745 species of which only 20 are introduced (N.Z. readers please note), it is generously illustrated and the text is fortified by maps. For 25 years the author was in charge of the Bird Room at South Kensington and *inter alia* he became an authority on the birds of Africa. When the famous Mathews collection of Australian birds, many being type specimens, which had been deposited at Tring, unexpectedly crossed the Atlantic in the 1930s after the Rothschild collection was sold to the American Museum of Natural History, there were big gaps in the collections of Australian birds available to ornithologists in Britain. It was part of the author's work to remedy these deficiencies. Through the generosity of a great Anglo-Australian, Major Harold Hall, five special expeditions were planned after World War Two. On the first of these a new Babbler was found in South Queensland and named in honour of Harold Hall. Subsequently an unknown species of Grass-wren was discovered and named in 1968. Another mark of the up-to-dateness of this workmanlike book is a map (No. 39) of the known distribution in Australia of the Sarrus Crane.

In the ' Introduction ' and ' Notes on the Text,' the author covers a lot of ground with a masterly economy of words as he delineates his purpose and sets before the reader many of the facts and problems of Australian ornithology. A few typical quotations are: (a) Voice " The language of birds is a complex and vastly interesting subject, but for most species it is not well known or understood in human terms." (b) Food. " There is much to be learned." (c) Status " Most species, even the rarest, are common somewhere," an assertion, which, alas, is belied by only too many endemic New Zealand species. Throughout the book, the commentaries which precede the various groups or families are particularly informative, if e.g. one wants to know why a Heron is not an Egret or why a Wood-Swallow is not a Swallow. Similarly, in the proper place it is suggested that the Gerygone Warblers or Fairy Flycatchers may be an offshoot of the Phylloscopi or Leaf Warblers which they resemble and largely replace.

The maps are of two kinds. Scattered through the text, where relevant, are world maps of families or super-species, e.g. Pelicans, White Ibis, Jacanas, Painted Snipe, Parrots etc. But by some mischance on p. 211 New Zealand is not dotted as it should be on the map of the Psittacidae. Then near the end of the book are 300 clearly drawn maps showing distributions in Australia. These are very useful because they save both time and words. Generally it is advisable, even imperative, to read the text in conjunction with the map. Thus, those

who know the Rock Warbler (p. 348), a distinctive species which has a very restricted range, will be surprised to learn that it is 'fairly common' unless and until they realise that that description applies only to the small patch of dark shading on Map 174.

Australasian taxonomists may receive a few shocks. The author is a lumper rather than a splitter; but as he says, scientific names are "rather loose pegs to the exasperation of naturalists who want to hang their information on something stable." Some familiar generic names disappear. Here are some examples: (1) *Synoicus* gives way to *Coturnix*, thus making our enigmatic Brown Quail congeneric with the extinct Native Quail and the migratory quails, which all those millenia ago combined with manna to save the wandering Israelites from starvation in the Sinai desert. (2) Pukeko, Moorhen and Black-tailed Native Hen are all merged in the genus *Gallinula*. (3) The Spur-winged Plover is no longer *Lobibyx* but *Vanellus;* but *Crocethia* is retained to keep the Sanderling in a monotypic genus. The Black-tailed Godwit which visits Australasia is called *Limosa limosa* with no mention of *melanuroides*. (5) *Gelochelidon* for the Gull-billed Tern and (6) *Chlidonias* for the marsh terns disappear and are replaced by *Sterna*. The Caspian Tern becomes simply *Sterna caspia,* thus losing some barbaric handles which have been foisted upon it from time to time. (7) For the White Noddy *Gygis* is out of favour and *Anous* is in.

Dr D. L. Serventy, most scholarly of Australian ornithologists, has contributed a thoughtful essay on the "Origin and Structure of Australian Bird Fauna." Writing in his usual lucid manner he discusses such problems as climatic and topographic change, isolation, continental drift; and a section on relations with neighbouring islands is particularly relevant. For serious New Zealand ornithologists, as they try to piece together the riddles of present distribution, the fossils of Gondwanaland will soon be compulsory reading!

Of the 745 species listed, 467 are illustrated in one form or another and the artist deserves the warmest praise. 24 coloured plates in which the sheer brilliance of many Australian birds is reproduced most successfully, occupy the middle of the book. On Plate 6 one has the agreeable surprise of finding such pronounced Australian endemics as Peltohyas and Stiltia bedded down beside such rare waifs as Upland Plover and two species of phalarope, all in glorious colour, which also emphasises the strangeness of the Painted Snipe. Very helpful too are the finely drawn black and white sketches which accompany the text. Naturalists in New Zealand should particularly study those of ducks (p. 87), waders (p. 159), cuckooshrikes (p. 289), wood swallows (p. 466). Some, e.g. petrels (p. 44), dotterels (p. 152), terns (p. 195), appear to owe something to illustrations which have appeared in recent New Zealand publications. Only once in a while does the artist fall from his high standard. Why is the Red-necked Stint made to look bigger than the Knot (p. 169)? The stances of the Grey-tailed Tattler (p. 167) and Broad-billed Sandpiper (p. 171) are stiffly unrealistic. But these are very minor grumbles.

For New Zealanders perhaps the least satisfactory section of the book is that dealing with the tubenoses. The ancient legend that the Wandering Albatross has the largest wingspan of all birds is repeated, though as far back as 1891 Buller claimed that "*diomedea regia* is appreciably larger"; and more recently, investigations by Bailey,

Sorensen and Westerskov substantiate his claim. Finally, although support for the author's view comes from L. H. Matthews in "A New Dictionary of birds" (1964), Serventy, Serventy & Warham (1971) concede that the Royal is slightly bigger. It is understandable that in an Australian list their one breeding albatross, *Diomedea cauta,* should be placed first, but the subsequent arrangement with the 'Greaters' in the middle of the 'Lessers' seems rather disorderly. Surely the Sooty Albatross is a regular visitor to the Great Australian Bight rather than a 'rare straggler.' Whereas the Manx Shearwater is admitted on the strength of a single banded but battered beach-wreck, Hutton's Shearwater, a regular even if rather anomalous migrant, is reduced to a comment under *Puffinus gavia.* Cook Petrel — note that apostrophe s is now dropped from many names in this book — is listed as a 'visitor probably from New Zealand.' Where else could they come from, for the so-called Cook Petrels *(defillipiana)* of the south-eastern Pacific are so different as probably to warrant full specific status ?

It is pleasing to see the use of vernacular names such as Pediunker instead of the insipid Grey Petrel; and Shoemaker instead of White-chinned Petrel which so often is a misnomer. But Giant Petrel is retained in preference to Nelly, the adoption of which would take some of the clumsiness out of the popular names of the two species which the author accepts. Southern Nelly has a brisk ring about it.

This is a book of real quality, thoughtful in its planning and polished in its fulfilment. As a major contribution to Australian ornithology it cannot lightly be disregarded. Any lover of the birds of Australasia will be proud to have it on his shelves and will be using it continually.

R. B. S.

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Marion and Prince Edward Islands. Report on the South African Biological & Geological Expedition 1965-1966. Sponsored by the Department of Transport of the Republic of South Africa and supervised by the South African Committee for Antarctic Research. Edited by E. M. van Zinderen Bakker Sr., J. M. Winterbottom and R. A. Dyer. Pp. xii + 1-427, frontis., text illus., col. pls 1-24, black & white pls 1-89. Cape Town: A. A. Balkema. R. 22.50, NZ $25.33.

In a time of greater and greater specialisation it is a pleasure to find a book that not only maintains a high scientific standard but also is general in its coverage. This book follows the tradition of the reports of the great European scientific expeditions of almost a century ago and is a welcome addition to such works as Chilton's "Subantarctic Islands of New Zealand" and the recent publications on Antarctica.

The various sections of the book cover the climate and geology, botany, ornithology and zoology of Marion and Prince Edward Islands. Altogether there are 37 papers of which five deal with ornithology, one in a general section by E. M. van Zinderen Bakker Jr. and four in the zoology section, three by the previous author and one by Dr J. M. Winterbottom, Director of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute for African Ornithology. This paper "The Position of Marion Island in the Sub-