

REVIEW

"A Classification of the Rallidae" by Storrs L. Olson. *The Wilson Bulletin* 85 (4): 381-416, col. frontispiece & 7 figs (1973).

Using skins and what skeletons were available to him, Olson has attempted to identify the more primitive members of the Rallidae and to illuminate evolutionary trends in this relatively homogenous and generalised family of birds. Flightlessness has developed many times in island populations, and is a neotenuous condition that has evolved rapidly, involving little genetic modification and lacking major phylogenetic significance. Thus, like Mayr, Olson denies generic status to flightless derivatives of recognisable ancestry.

The traditional subdivision into subfamilies (Rails, Gallinules, Coots) does not stand up to critical examination but Verheyen's subfamily Himantornithinae is justified for a long-legged West African forest rail with unusual patterned natal down (shown with others in the frontispiece) and with skeletal peculiarities that are discussed in detail. *Himantornis* thus points to forest-dwelling, long slender tarsi, broad procoracoid processes and patterned natal down as primitive characters. Barred remiges (as in our Banded Rail and Wekas) and the condition of the nasal bar are also found useful in grouping and separating genera.

Olson's classification reduces the 52 genera recognised in Peters' "List" to 35, of which 11 are monotypic, arranged in the following linear sequence:

Himantornis, *Canirallus*, *Sarothrura*, *Coturnicops*, *Micropygia*, *Rallina*, *Anurolimnas*, *Laterallus*, *Nesoclopeus*, *Gallirallus*, *Tricholimnas*, *Crecopsis*, *Crex*, *Rougetius*, *Aramidopsis*, *Dryolimnas*, *Atlantisia*, *Rallus*, *Aramides*, *Amaurolimnas*, *Porzana*, *Poliolimnas*, *Aenigmatolimnas*, *Cyanolimnas*, *Neocrex*, *Pardirallus*, *Eulabeornis*, *Habroptila*, *Gallicrex*, *Porphyrio*, *Pareudiastes*, *Gallinula*, *Fulica*.

New Zealand rails are classed as follows: *Gallirallus* Lafresnaye 1841 for *philippensis*, *dieffenbachii*, and *modestus* as well as for the wekas, living and extinct, a grouping confirmed by skeletal features (*Hypotaenidia* Reichenbach 1852 is a junior synonym); *Dryolimnas pectoralis* (with *muelleri*), a member of the pro-Rallus group; *Crex crex*; *Porzana tabuensis* and *pusilla*; *Porphyrio melanotus* and *mantelli*, *Gallinula* (*Tribonyx*) *ventralis*, *Fulica atra*. Some extinct New Zealand rails (e.g. *Pyramidula*, *Diaphorapteryx* *Nesophalaris*) are not mentioned; for *Aptornis*, Olson has a novel interpretation (*pers. comm.*) that will doubtless be published before long in the Records of the National Museum of N.Z.

When discussing *Gallirallus dieffenbachii* and *G. modestus*, Olson claims there is no evidence that these two derivatives of *philippensis* were ever sympatric, suggesting that *dieffenbachii* was confined to the main Chatham Island, before its early extinction there, and that *modestus* was confined to Mangare Island. This hypothesis

could obviously be tested by study of the abundant sub-fossil bone collections from the Chatham Islands.

Any Rail classification is bound to be controversial and the main purpose of this review is to bring the study to the notice of New Zealand ornithologists.

C. A. F.



WILD LIFE TOUR

Colin Searle is taking another wildlife tour to Australia's out-back, 13 July to 10 August. Three weeks will be in the Cape York region and visits will be made to Townsville and the Great Barrier Reef. This is a camping tour and the costs will be approximately \$650 which covers most of the transport and the catering. Write to P.O. Box 2577, Auckland, for details.



ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY CAR STICKERS

These attractive car stickers are 3 inches in diameter, made of durable adhesive vinyl. They feature a picture of the Takahe (painted by Elaine Power) in three colours on a white background. The name of the Society is in black around the perimeter. These are available for 25 cents from your Regional Representative or Mrs S. M. Reed, 4 Mamaku Street, Auckland 5.



THE CONSTITUTION

Copies of the amended new constitution are available from either your Regional Representative or the Secretary.

In view of general dissatisfaction with the time occupied at A.G.M.s by debates on changes to the constitution, Council requests the co-operation of members by obtaining the written support of ten members to any proposal to amend the constitution. It is hoped that this procedure will reduce the number and increase the quality of future amendments to the constitution.



CORRIGENDA

Notornis 21 (2): June 1974

BARTLE, J.A. Seabirds of eastern Cook Strait, New Zealand, in autumn

p. 140, para. 6, line 2 for Abernathy read Abernethy

para. 7, line 6 for Kts read km/h

line 7 for "strong breeze" read "moderate breeze"

p. 146, para. 2, line 4 for ane read any

p. 151, para. 1, line 7 for reparture read departure

p. 153, para. 6, line 4 for Jenkins (1947) read Jenkins (1974)

p. 159, para. 3, line 3 for water read waters

p. 165, line 4 for HEATHER, B. D. 1972. Southern Skua (*Stercorarius skua lonnbergi*) read HEATHER, B. D. 1972. Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*).