

REVIEW

Birds of Tahiti, by J. C. Thibault and Cl. Rives; English version by D. T. Holyoak. 112 pp. and 70 coloured illustrations. Papeete; Les Editions du Pacifique.

Eastern Polynesia has been until recently practically without publications describing its ornithofauna. The results of the recent exploration of French Polynesia by Jean Claude Thibault, David Holyoak and others are now put together in this very handsomely published and readable account.

The introduction gives a general outline of this publication's contents and is accompanied by a map of the Society Islands together with brief lists of birds peculiar to the single islands. This is followed by a chapter briefly describing the origin and the main features of Tahiti's bird fauna, including the breeding land- and sea birds migrants and introduced birds; the latter appear particularly important as some of them are held responsible for the disappearance of some native species. Next, the main causes of extinction of some bird species and of the ways the bird habitat can be improved are described together with hints on bird observation.

The fifth and main chapter is devoted to the description of the birds, their voices, habitat and field observations of the 33 species of birds found on Tahiti. Both scientific, vernacular and Polynesian names of the birds are given. All the bird species are illustrated by magnificent colour photographs, most of which taken in their habitat. A comprehensive index concludes the book. The book is almost luxuriously illustrated as it contains 70 illustrations in 111 pages of the text.

The main quandary of the reviewer is to decide whether the "Birds of Tahiti" are mainly for the tourist or the ornithologist. My personal impression is that the authors tried to produce a book that would satisfy both visiting tourists and students of birds. Illustrations, if they are too numerous, reduce the space available for the descriptive text, particularly in the most important fifth chapter of the book. Here the text has been reduced to a narrow, half-a-page long band. It is almost irritating to see in some species the lower part of this band blank, while the description of a species is terse in its brevity. The illustration on pp. 24-25 is supposed to represent the Tahiti Kingfisher; in fact it appears to represent a passerine. Twenty-seven illustrations out of a total of 70 include irrelevant parts of background or just plain air or water that could be cut without any damage to the illustrations, and thus supply more space for the text. The list of birds referred to the island of Moorea presumably pertains to Tahiti.

Finally, an ornithologist interested in birds of French Polynesia will sadly miss the absence of further references, particularly as he will find 4½ blank pages at the end of the book.

Despite the above shortcomings, the "Birds of Tahiti" presents an important and beautifully set contribution to our knowledge of the birds found in Eastern Polynesia. This little volume deserves a place on the bookshelves of all who are interested in the birds of Polynesia.

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