

Perhaps the most exciting of the sounds so far recorded are those of the Takahe. What effective off-stage noises they would be for a film of Conan Doyle's 'Lost World'! The ebullient outpourings of the Weka, too, should be included. These have been most admirably recorded. But why have the weird nocturnal noises of the Pukeko been omitted? The recordings of Pied Stilt and Banded Dotterel are disappointing and do not do justice to the variety of calls made by these two plovers.

Some of the comments may cause the critical listener to raise a doubting eyebrow. When Guthrie-Smith wrote about the Riro-riro's 'faint sweet trill that heralds fuller spring,' it may have sounded highly poetic; but it is nonsense to those who live in the north where the Riro-riro may be heard singing strongly both in the sticky noonday heat of February and in the cooler days when the autumn rains come. Faint? When conditions are favourable, it is audible at more than a quarter of a mile. How many Robins in the South Island now live where they can 'eat crabs from the seashore'?

It was a wise decision to include the songs of a dozen of the introduced birds; for among them are some of the best songsters in the world; and over large tracts of New Zealand now, it is their singing which dominates the dawn and dusk choruses. The recordings will be most helpful to those who claim that they cannot distinguish between the songs of Blackbird and Thrush; even if the recording has perhaps lost something of the Blackbird's fluty mellowness. Especially pleasing is the warbling of a Hedge-Sparrow against a background of chiming Bellbirds. The timbre of the finches comes through splendidly. Henceforward there can be no excuse for not recognising the distinctive trill of the Redpoll; a surprisingly common sound in some parts of New Zealand. After hearing these records, some will realise for the first time that the gay colouring of the Goldfinch is matched by the vibrant charm of its singing.

The Bigwoods have made a spectacular start in a new field of ornithology in New Zealand; but it is only a start; and much more remains to be done. Kokako, Brown Creeper, Rock Wren, Saddlebacks on Hen Island, Stitchbirds on Little Barrier all offer a challenge. Also waiting to be 'taped' are the sounds of the nesting colonies of our many sea-birds; the excited babel of islands where shearwaters and petrels come in at dusk; the feeding chatter of godwits and knots and the music of the tidal flats. The field, in fact, is almost inexhaustible.

The instructional value of these recordings is inestimable. They should be a stimulus to naturalists and others to travel with their ears open. The publishers are to be congratulated on their enterprise in making possible an original contribution to the 'literature' of New Zealand ornithology.

— R.B.S.



Checklist of Birds of the World, Volume IX, Edited by E. Mayr and J. C. Greenway, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass.

With the publication of Volume IX, the monumental Checklist of Birds of the World, which was initiated in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Cambridge, Massachusetts, to replace Sharpe's obsolescent Handlist (1900-1910), moves one stage nearer completion. When the editor, J. L. Peters, died in 1952, only seven volumes of the planned fifteen had appeared. The task of completing the remaining volumes

is now being shared and the advice of ornithologists of international reputation is being sought.

Volume IX is concerned with passerine families. For these there is no universally recognised sequence, so the editors have followed a sequence recommended by a special committee of the Eleventh International Ornithological Congress. Accounts of sixteen families and sub-families are included, among which are larks, swallows and martins, wagtails and pipits, cuckoo-shrikes, bulbuls, shrikes, waxwings, dippers, wrens (but not the wrens of New Zealand), mocking birds and their allies.

Where the contents of this volume touch New Zealand there are some mild surprises for the critical reader. The Australian Welcome Swallow is made a subspecies of *tahitica*. The Tree-martin is placed in the genus *Petrochelidon*, and Gould's name *Hylochelidon* is suppressed. Now that New Zealand and Richard's Pipits are united, lustre has accrued to the specific name *novae-seelandiae*, of which 27 races are given, ranging from the mountains of Africa to Western Siberia, the Himalayas and Australasia. Both Australia and New Zealand are allowed five subspecies each. According to this list the typical *novae-seelandiae* is confined to the South Island; and the North Island race is *reischeki*, for which the type locality is given as Manturu (sic) and Waikato. The cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina novae-hollandiae*) which sometimes straggles to New Zealand, belongs to a highly successful species with nineteen races extending over India, southeastern China and Australasia.

The authors are alive to the difficulties of being consistent in the inclusion of vernacular names. Perhaps it is a little unfortunate that such well-known English names as Welcome Swallow, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Horsfield Bush-lark are omitted.

This fine volume is the polished product of Danish book-making. Binding, print and layout are unexceptionable. — R.B.S.



NOTICES

A STUDY OF THE RED-BILLED GULL

Red-billed Gulls have been banded in New Zealand since 1943 and over 4,600 have now been banded. Returns have been coming in steadily and much useful information about their dispersal and movements is accumulating. Over the past two years a large number of birds were banded at Kaikoura Peninsula and an exceptionally interesting dispersal pattern is emerging.

All this has prompted the launching of the present project. It is proposed to conduct a census of the breeding colonies with the co-operation of O.S.N.Z. members and a general study of the dispersal of these gulls from their breeding colonies based on a large scale colour banding scheme. It is planned to start the coming season with breeding colonies in the middle districts, namely Kaikoura Peninsula, Lake Grassmere, Nelson, Stephens Island, Kapiti Island, Cape Palliser and a large scale night roost on Somes Island.

If sufficient help can be organised, the banding programme will be extended to other colonies further afield. It is thought that the project will last some five years.