

REVIEWS.

A Working List of Australian Birds, including the Australian Quadrant and New Zealand. By Gregory M. Mathews, C.B.E. The Shepherd Press, Sydney, 1946. £1/1/-.

This Society does not aspire to active interest in the complexities of bird systematics: nevertheless, in view of the recent appearance of Professor Marples's List, a few comments on this latest contribution by a senior taxonomist may be relevant. G. M. Mathews has been a student of Australasian birds for some 40 years, basing his studies largely upon the extensive collections in the Northern Hemisphere, of which his own (now in New York) was one of the most important. He is justifiably classed as a "splitter," having probably contributed more sub-specific and generic names to bird literature than any other ornithologist. He may certainly be classed (without malice) as a student of skins in museums, and not of live birds in the field, and he generously insists (in the introduction to the work under review) that "the elucidation of life histories and distribution" are "the more interesting and important side" of ornithology. Whether Australasian ornithologists will accept Mr. Mathews' somewhat mandatory invitation to concentrate on such topics and leave systematics to him is another matter.

In 1931 Mathews published a "List of the Birds of Australasia" (including New Zealand), in which every synonym was included; this remains a valuable work of reference to the literature. It might have been anticipated that the "working list" would supplement and replace the 1931 list, but this is far from the case. "The present list only records subspecies which can be accepted by workers using the small imperfect collections available at present in Australian museums." . . . "The many subspecies, not listed, are not to be rejected," but . . . "require comparison of better material," i.e., are on the suspense list. The reviewer would comment, at the risk of infringing Mr. Mathews' veto on "destructive criticism," that such a compromise does not inspire great confidence in the critical faculty with which the "pruning" has been effected.

One convenient departure from the format of the 1931 List is the presentation of a separate list of New Zealand birds, prefaced by a somewhat cryptic, if not apologetic, note that "owing to the distance from Australia and other troubles, we are publishing the list as it is." The New Zealand list is a definite contribution to local bird systematics, although not nearly so easily used as the 1931 list, owing, in great part, to the curtailment of generic headings and the lack of full references. There are some errors (e.g., the Whistling Duck is listed under the Pigeons), and some seeming inconsistencies, in typography, for instance. Also, 11 lines are given to the single New Zealand record of the Black-footed Albatross, but only one to the Silver-eye! Among omissions noted in a casual perusal are the Pallid and Channel-billed Cuckoos, the Norfolk Island Allied Shearwater, and Gould Petrel; on the other hand, the list is swelled by Antarctic species not known from New Zealand. Incidentally, the total of recognised forms (species plus sub-species) is about 316.

No ornithologist, in New Zealand or elsewhere, will accept the list uncritically, and Mr. Mathews would be the last to wish it. Looked at in this light, the volume may be regarded as a stimulus to further ornithological research in Australasia.—C.A.F., 13/8/46.

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An investigation of the northern island of the Poor Knights group from an ornithological viewpoint is reported by G. A. Buddle, of Auckland. Some striking differences in bird population in relation to the southern island (dealt with in "Emu," vol. 41) are recorded, and the effects of wild pigs on the southern island are discussed, particularly in the distribution of the spotless crane (*Porzana plumbea*) and Buller's shearwater (*Puffinus bulleri*).—R.H.D.S.