

REVIEWS.

Avian Evolution in New Zealand and Australia, by W. R. B. Oliver. The Emu, 45, pp. 55-77 and 119-152.

The present journal is not the place in which to review in detail a long technical paper dealing with the osteology, phylogeny and relationships of the various groups of birds, though its publication should not be allowed to pass without notice in these pages as a notable addition to the ornithological literature of Australasia. The argument appears to be based upon the idea of evolution by orthogenesis. In comparing birds of simple structure with those of complex structure it is found that the changes involved are increase in size, increase in ossification and the development of more prominent projecting portions of the skeleton. In this way an evolutionary scale for each character of the skeleton, such for example as the shape of the vomer, is arrived at and used as a basis for classification. This procedure may be objected to by taxonomists with different views on the nature of the evolutionary process. It is interesting to notice that Lowe's theory of the descent of the Ratite birds from a flightless cursorial ancestor is supported, though it has received adverse criticism from other authors, but his similar theory with respect to the penguins is rejected.—B.J.M.

Podgy, the Penguin, by L. E. Richdale, 23 Skibo Street, Kew, Dunedin. 16 pages, 7 illustrations. Price, 2/6.

For several years Mr. Richdale has been bringing out at intervals booklets on native birds illustrated by his excellent photographs. These are intended to provide accurate information for adult readers in an easily accessible form. He has now extended this project by bringing out his first bird book for children, and with his long experience in the schools he is well qualified to do so. It tells quite simply the story of a pair of yellow-eyed penguins from the winter season, through egg-laying, until the chicks enter the water. It is told in a way which will be interesting to children but in which the facts are correct even to the changes in weight of the birds and the periods each spends on shore at the nest. This information is woven into the story in a way which adds to its interest. Six of the pen and ink illustrations are drawn from photographs and show the birds in authentic attitudes. Penguins have been the subject of more distorted representation both in pictures and writing than probably any other familiar bird, and Mr. Richdale is to be congratulated for having given New Zealand children a true story of one of the most attractive of our native birds.—B.J.M.

Letters from Skokholm, by R. M. Lockley (J. M. Dent & Sons, London, 1947.)

This is a book that should get a good reception from New Zealand ornithologists. The intensive study of the living bird and of island communities by this writer are well known, and the happy results of his field work and the collaboration of many other British ornithologists have been some important advances in our accurate knowledge and understanding of bird behaviour. This book is based on letters written between September, 1939, and September, 1940, to a friend serving in the Army in Norway and subsequently a prisoner of war. It covers in essay form all Lockley's earlier researches on the gannets, shearwaters, and storm petrels along with admirable accounts of practically all the other birds of the island, the rest of the animals, and the weather. I must confess to having found "The Way to an Island" and some of his earlier books disappointing in patches, as if the author had been groping for a style. Not everybody would agree with that opinion, but all would agree that "Letters from Skokholm" is different. Its consistency of style combined with accuracy seem to me to make it his best popular book. Admirers of the art of C. F. Tunnicliffe will be delighted with a wealth of illustration, vignettes happy in design and subject which are something more than just another picture of a bird.—R.A.Falla.

Date of Publication—October 1, 1947.

The Masterton Printing Co., Ltd., Lincoln Road, Masterton.