

Book reviews

regional distributions of the species that have been described. Given what I have just stressed, this could be seen as the most important part of the whole book, as it identifies habitats. The eye will run down the list of species and see that probably more, proportionally, live in region 20, the 'Townsville-Cooktown rainforest area', than any other. The table will not tell you, unfortunately, that there are two divisions in this region: a southern one (Atherton Tablelands and Bellenden Ker range), and a northern one (Daintree/Bloomfield forests). Some of region 20's species are found in both; others, such as the two species of tree-kangaroo, are restricted to one or the other. The Daintree/Bloomfield forests, despite being in part included in the Cape Tribulation National Park, are at present under threat. Australia, as the book's introduction indicates—though this may not be made sufficiently explicit for foreigners—suffers from a stultifying federal system, with divisions of responsibility between the Federal Government and the State Governments. At the last federal election, the balance was probably swung Labour's way by that party's promise to take on the Tasmanian (State) Government and save the wild Franklin River from being dammed. Now another federal election is due, and another conservation issue has arisen; but this time, Labour is in power, and if it wants to save the Daintree forests it must take on the powerful Queensland State Government, and could lose more seats in Queensland than it would gain elsewhere . . .

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Extinct and Endangered Plants of Australia

J. Leigh, R. Boden and J. Briggs
The MacMillan Company of Australia PTY Ltd and World Wildlife Fund, 1984, Australian \$49.95*

It is rather disturbing that books on extinct and endangered plants should now assume the proportions of a major systematic monograph. By any standards this new work is a masterly treatment. Not only Captain Cook will be remembered at Australia's bicentenary in 1988 but the 52

appearance of this study will commemorate the 78 species presumed extinct and remind us of the 201 species that have become endangered as a direct result of the 200 years' worth of colonisation of Australia by Europeans.

The bulk of the text (240 pages) describes, in a series of formal case histories, each rare and endangered plant species, with additional notes about the group to which it belongs, its conservation status and geographical distribution. Most importantly it also gives an account of Australian attitudes to plants—both historical and modern—the role of plants, a description of extinction, a superb account of vegetation types, a very positive tabular account of the threats and an account of the conservation strategies that might be applied to save plants. The style of the layout follows the very popular 'Reed books' on Australian plants. Especially good are the many excellent photographs highlighting different habitats and those species most at risk.

As one might expect, the areas that have come off worst are those that are best known botanically with the richest, most diverse floras near urban conurbations. At the worst end of the scale the greatest number of extinct and endangered species occurred, or still occur, in the south-west of Western Australia and south-east Queensland. The most obvious threats are vividly demonstrated to be urbanisation, agriculture and pastoralism. Those areas least disturbed, with apparently no extinctions or real threats, occur within the arid zones of Central Australia. This probably reflects the relatively small disturbances, but also underlines the poor state of botanical knowledge of these areas. All but one of the presumed extinct species and all but four of the endangered taxa (some 197) were or are endemic to Australia.

Although it seems to me that some of the accounts are over-pessimistic, when we know that some rare species are truly rare, the message is quite clear. If the present practices of wide-scale clearing, overgrazing, mining, urban development, man-made forest fires and the introduction of exotic competitors continues at the present rate the relatively small figures (between one and two per cent of the total flora) can only get a lot bigger.

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By seeking to identify the Australian problems by both novel and established methods this book will go a long way to stimulate new research and conservation efforts. It is appropriate that WWF and IUCN were involved in promoting the book at a time when both organisations have embarked on a world-wide campaign to stimulate interest in the world's flora. Let us hope that this fine evaluation of universal concepts providing us with a very useful status report will be emulated by other nations.

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*Available from Globe Book Services, 107 Moray Street, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

The Doves, Parrots, Louries and Cuckoos of Southern Africa

M.K. Rowan

Croom Helm, London, 1983, £25.00

This volume, the third monograph on southern African birds to be published under the sponsorship of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, includes accounts of the indigenous species of four disparate families. Included here are the 13 species of doves and pigeons (Columbidae), six species of parrots and lovebirds (Psittacidae), three species of louries/turacos (Musophagidae) and 17 species of cuckoos and coucals (Cuculidae) which occur south of the Zambesi and Kunene Rivers.

The text by Mrs Rowan is based on an extensive and methodical extraction of data from a wide range of published (e.g. standard manuals, avifaunal lists, journals, newsletters) and unpublished sources (e.g. nest record cards, field notes, reports). Mrs Rowan also had the sagacity to enlist the help of an Advisory Panel of 30–35 eminent ornithologists with field experience who acted as referees and provided much new information. The species' accounts have been prepared in a standard pattern and include systematics, distribution and status, mensural data, plumage descriptions, social organisation, maintenance activities, reproduction, hybrids, moult, population dynamics, parasites, and relations with man. There are also clear maps showing the approximate distribution of those species that have a

restricted occurrence in the area, and eight, rather disappointing and dully coloured, plates by G. Arnott.

The author is to be congratulated for her impressive scholarship, concise, uncluttered writing, and the comprehensive coverage which includes references up to mid-1980. The book is not, and cannot have been intended to be, for any but the more serious birdwatcher and bird biologist, and as such it will be the standard reference work for many years. The wealth of knowledge within these covers should surely also be used for a series of well-illustrated books written for a wider public.

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The Bee-eaters

C.H. Fry

T. and A.D. Poyser, Calton, 1983, £19.60

Surprisingly, not since Dresser's sumptuous monograph, published over 100 years ago, has a book been devoted to this spectacular family of birds. Needless to say, the original publication is very much out of date, not readily available, and far too expensive for most private libraries. The new publication, therefore, is most welcome and will fill an unwanted gap on many book shelves.

The main body of the 260-page text is divided into seven chapters: Introduction, Species Accounts, Origin of Species, Food and Foraging, Bee-eaters and Apiculture, Social and Reproductive Life, and Evolving Specific Differences. A further 47 pages are devoted to nine appendices, which contain a glossary of scientific terms, names of other birds and mammals mentioned, breeding localities of the European bee-eater in southern Africa, nesting sites of the carmine bee-eater, detailed lists of prey of the little, red-throated, white-throated and European bee-eaters, notes on aberrant plumages, a bibliography and an index. Also included are eight coloured plates by the author, illustrating the recognised species and the majority of subspecies, while John Busby provided more than 100 line drawings and the dust jacket.

This monograph is based upon 20 years of