

that is of general interest. Enrique Bucher reopens the case of the North American Passenger Pigeon and the factors that led to its extinction.

Edward O. Minot



*The Birds of the Philippines*, by Edward C. Dickenson, Robert S. Kennedy and Kenneth C. Parkes. 1991. B.O.U. Check-list No. 12. British Ornithologists' Union, Tring. 507pp. £37.00 (hardback), ISBN:0-907446-12-4.

In the fine tradition of BOU Check-lists, this effort is large and comprehensive, a feat for a country of over 7000 islands and an avifauna of over 500 species. Some 420 pages are devoted to the Check-list itself while the rest comprises introductory chapters on the Philippines and its birds.

Despite the authors' attention to detail and reference to some 650 publications, there is a problem; not with the book, but with the relative lack of documented information on the archipelago. As they stress, there are still many discoveries to make about the biology and occurrence of birds there. The description, as late as 1990, of a species new to science is testimony to this.

It may be too late for some species! The indigenous habitats of the Philippines, particularly the rainforests in which live most of the native birds, are in a parlous state, as shown in the colour plate of forest cover. While conservation is not the direct purpose of the publication, it is good to see a practical plea for the birds and their habitats included.

The criticism may be unfair in this case, but I do find it irksome that history is so often deemed to start with the arrival of Europeans. The book's "History of Ornithological Exploration" ignores the fact that local people probably knew and still know rather a lot about birds.

The chapters on biogeography, although overlapping and poorly coordinated in parts, has some interesting speculations on the origins of Philippine birds.

The writing is generally easy to follow, though it is turgid in some parts and trite in others. There are a few errors of omission or editing. For example, to a reader unfamiliar with the Philippines, the lack of a single, well-labelled map of the country seriously undermines one's ability to understand the points being made. Figure 1 confounds by suggesting that the parrot genus *Prioniturus* starts with the letter *D*!

Despite these few shortcomings, the book is a monumental effort and will be an essential reference for those interested in the birds of this important part of the world.

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