

REVIEWS

A Field Guide to Australian Bird Song: Cassette 3. 1987.

This cassette, the third in a series, should be of particular interest to New Zealand ornithologists as it contains recordings of many wader species that are regular visitors to our shores.

The cassette covers 68 species, starting with crakes and ending among the terns. The localities in which the recordings were made range through Lord Howe Island, Chatham Islands, Tasmania, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Australia, the oldest recording dates being 1961 and the most recent July 1986.

Waders are among the most difficult species to capture on tape, many existing recordings having been obtained in under less than ideal conditions. The compilers of the guide go to considerable lengths to point this out in the written introduction. Given the variety of recording equipment in use and the extreme difficulty in recording waders in general, the result is quite acceptable, although not equal in quality to the first two tapes in the series. As on the earlier tapes the spoken identifications are by Len Grice. The folio that comes with the tape continues the high standard set by the earlier volumes and is a model of its kind. At least 47 of the species on this third tape are on the New Zealand list, some such as the Painted Snipe being very recent additions.

Most of the 68 species are first releases and should create considerable interest on both sides of the Tasman. All of the waders on this tape were captured in the Australasian region, which is unique in a publication of this type.

Available from The Bird Observers Club, Box 185, P.O. Nunawading, Victoria 3131, Australia for \$A10.50 post paid. For reviews of cassettes 1 and 2 see *Notornis* 31: 355 (1984) and 34: 87 (1987).

L. B. McPherson

The Unknown Music of Birds: Hungatron LPX19347.

This unusual bird disc, which won the record of the year award for 1987, is by well-known Hungarian researcher Dr Peter Szoke, a senior research fellow of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest.

This disc explores the hidden structures and melodies in the songs of birds from a wide range of families from many parts of the world by slowing down (stretching) such song to as much as 1/64th of its true speed. Many birds sing as fast as 150 notes per second and three different notes simultaneously, which is far too fast for the human ear to follow. When these recordings are slowed down to as much as 1/64th, one can hear the structure, often of great beauty and melody, of complex songs of species such as the Grey Warbler, Kea, Blue Duck, Yellow-breasted Tit, all of which are on this disc. The 16 tracks deal with different types of sounds, the first with birds as we normally hear them, the second with gradual slow-down to emphasise the hidden melodic structure of the sounds, the third with species

presenting a steady unchanging pitch. Track 4 deals with simple pitch intervals, track 5 more complex calls, and track 6 even more complex songs. Track 7 deals with the ability of birds to learn songs other than those of their species.

Side 2 presents musical rhythms (who knew that the White Heron calls in 2/4 time?). Track 2 gives examples of different types of buzzing rhythms (*Locustella* warblers). Track 3 demonstrates the ability of some species to transpose musical motifs up or down the scale. Track 4 demonstrates a more restricted song type such as the Yellow-breasted Tit has, and track 5 a more complicated version of this type of song; examples given include Grey Warbler. Track 6 is of non-musical song, and track 7 gives a folk music structure of great beauty. Tracks 8 and 9 slow down Hermit Thrush song and compare it with a human voice singing the same notes, which are then speeded up to that of the bird song. The opera singer Janos Toth reaches a new high and is hard to distinguish from the thrush by this method.

If you are interested in the structure of bird song, this is a useful disc to have. The New Zealand agent is Ode Record Co. Ltd, P.O. Box 1535, Auckland, or 199 Karangahape Road. The technical quality of this disc is very good, even excellent, and is superior to the authors' earlier recordings. Price not known, probably about \$NZ15.00.

L. B. McPherson