

REVIEW

A review of Norfolk Island Birds: past and present by R. Schodde, P. Fullagar and N. Hermes. Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service Special Publication [8] 1983. 119 pp.

This excellently researched and produced little volume provides the Norfolk Island group with a reference document which in the breadth of subjects covered is unlikely to be matched for any other SW Pacific island group.

An outline of the history of the islands is given with special reference to changes in their vegetation and to their ornithological exploration. This is followed by a review of their geological history.

Recent research into fossil remains dating from c. 700 to 850 BP has yielded evidence of several species not previously recorded at Norfolk Island, including four which may be forms new to science. Fossil evidence also shows the kiore (*Rattus exulans*) to have been present at this early date, although the authors' assumption that the kiore is now extinct is probably incorrect.

The fossil record of birds on islands is reviewed, and the value of such fossil avifaunas in predicting evolutionary patterns is discussed. The origins of the Norfolk Island avifauna is examined, although without reference to Oliver's 1911 work on this subject.

A checklist of modern Norfolk Island birds is provided and analysed according to status. Endemism is high with 5 species and 9 races in this category, of which 2 species and 3 races are classed as recently extinct.

Each of the 43 breeding species has a page devoted to it providing information on distribution and taxonomy, historical records, present status and breeding, together with a summary of the results of the RAOU census of December 1978 and a distribution map based on observations made at that time. No plumage descriptions are given, and although for most species this aspect is adequately covered elsewhere, good descriptions of the endemic forms are not readily available and their inclusion would have enhanced this section of the book.

Summaries are provided for each of the 50 non-breeding migrants or vagrants, but because of their brevity, the reasons for decisions made by the authors, particularly in regard to some of the earlier records, are not given. It is for example regrettable that no reasons are provided to support either the acceptance of the 1951/52 'Egretta species' as *E. alba* or the listing of Pelzelns' early record of Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) as unconfirmed. The inclusion of *H. unicolor* as one of the species to which c. 30 Pied Oystercatchers seen in 1960 could be attributed also merits some explanation, as does the listing of Little Egret solely on the basis of its inclusion in de Ravin's 1975 paper. The 1977 records of Australasian Grebe and

Australian Pelican, although attributed to M. F. Soper, were not seen by him personally and should therefore be listed as unconfirmed.

The distribution patterns of both the pre-European indigenes and the post-European arrivals have been mapped from the results of the RAOU census and these data have also been used to demonstrate the dependence of several of the endemic forms on the Mt Pitt reserve.

A few small proofreading errors appear to have slipped through giving rise to minor inconsistencies in the maps comprising fig. 18; also the references to Stuart on pages 63 & 64 should be dated '1838-40' and not '1938-40.'

Finally a comment on nomenclature and classification. The book follows the RAOU Checklist, and with over 80% of the birds listed being common to both Norfolk Island and New Zealand, no better case could be made for the need for closer cooperation between the RAOU and OSNZ Checklist committees than the almost continuous, often quite minor, differences which beset the reader accustomed to New Zealand nomenclature. Such minor disagreements as 'Red-fronted' versus 'Red-crowned' Parakeet, 'Australian' versus 'Eurasian' Coot, 'Nankeen' versus 'Australian' Kestrel and many others are surely capable of resolution.

For those with a particular interest in Norfolk Island birds this publication is available from the Government Conservator, P.O. Box 310, Norfolk Island, South Pacific 2899.

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