

REVIEWS

Birds of Africa, by John Karmali. 1980. Collins. pp. 191. NZ retail price \$45.00.

Despite the all-embracing title, this book covers some of the bird-life of East Africa. The subtitle of the book is "A bird photographer in East Africa."

The introduction briefly describes the physical characteristics of both the Palaearctic and Ethiopian zoogeographical regions, across parts of which the continent of Africa lies. These descriptions are supported by relief and vegetation maps.

The birds are presented in 37 chapters, which follow classification order. About 75 species are selected for discussion and the summaries are informative and interesting. The amount of text for each species varies. For example, ostriches get two pages, whereas other species get only a few lines.

However, the real purpose of this book are its illustrations. There are 72 colour photographs and over 140 monochrome illustrations. The colour photographs, mainly portrait studies, are excellent. The monochromes illustrate bird activity, sometimes being presented as a series of time-lapse shots.

The layout of the book is good, except that many of the colour plates have been spread across two pages. In some cases the centre fold cuts the illustrated species in half, and in other plates only sky, water or leaves are printed on one half of the spread. At least 19 plates are of the latter sort and I would rather see single-page portraits and a few more species included on extra colour plates. At the end of the book the colour plates are repeated as monochromes in reduced form and notes are given about each. Some of these notes are of help to bird photographers.

It is pleasing that Collins have decided to publish these fine photographs by Karmali. However, as few of the species covered are known to New Zealand ornithologists or are likely to occur here, I doubt if many will decide to add this book to their libraries, also bearing in mind the price. I note that the UK price is quoted at £12.50 (approx. NZ\$37.00) and so the publication may find wider appeal there.

JOHN FENNELL

A field guide to the birds of Australia, by Graham Pizzey, illustrated by Roy Doyle. 1980. Pp. 460, 56 col. plates, 32 b/w plates. Collins. Aus\$25.00.

Graham Pizzey's one-volume field guide has been worth waiting for. All Australia's 700 or so species are covered in a 900-gram book, which is sure to replace in users' affections the current edition of Slater's two-volume 1200-gram guide.

Roy Doyle's illustrations are attractive and excellently reproduced, are generally accurate in detail, and capture the "jizz" of the birds. On each plate the scale is clearly shown and field marks indicated by

lines on the R. T. Peterson style. These plates are inserted in the centre of the book but a particular illustration is readily located from the text.

Not all Australia's birds are illustrated: even regular visitors like the Streaked Shearwater and Royal and Buller's Albatrosses are unrepresented, although covered in the species' accounts. For the grebes, penguins, petrels, cuckoo-shrikes, wood-swallows and magpies reliance has been placed on monochrome reproductions, but in some other groups like the ducks and waders colour plates of the birds at rest are supplemented by black and white ones of them in flight. Immature and non-breeding plumages are often shown as well as those of the breeding condition.

There are small and useful maps towards the end of the book stated to show breeding distributions, although these actually seem to depict the total Australian ranges. For example, the Australasian Gannet is shown as reaching Shark's Bay, Western Australia, whereas it is not known as a breeder in that state.

The text gives scientific and a whole range of vernacular names (some quite archaic) and, typically, 5-10 lines on field marks, 2-3 on voice, 1 on habitat, 3-6 on breeding and 2-3 on range and status. Key features are emphasised by italics, always a helpful system. The text coverage is adequate for most species but too brief and imprecise to permit identification of difficult birds like prions and diving petrels found among beach wrecks.

Peter Slater's work scores in some ways — his silhouettes of petrel and gull bills and his head-on flight outlines of raptors, for example, are valuable — but Pizzey's book, though not faultless, must now take over at least for the time being as the bird guide for Australians and for visitors to that country. Many New Zealanders will envy the Australians in having access to such an excellent work, which will also be very useful for identifying Australian strays that reach our shores. Finally, this book is excellently bound and despite its bulk should stand up well to the wear and tear of field use. In a new edition random errors should be corrected, some additional material could be worthwhile such as colour illustrations of the two giant petrels, and revisions to the non-passerine nomenclature arising since the 1975 RAOU Checklist could be incorporated.

JOHN WARHAM

The Birds of The Gambia — An annotated check-list and guide to localities in The Gambia, by J. V. Jensen and J. Kirkeby. 1980. Aros Nature Guides.

About a quarter of this book is devoted to two introductory chapters and the rest mainly to the systemic list. The first chapter is largely a potted geography illustrated with sketch maps and diagrams; the second a description of the better known bird-watching localities with bird lists and habitat photographs; and the last the list of species with concise notes on status, habitat, breeding and range, a distribution map for each species and numerous black-and-white photographs, the majority by the authors themselves.