

REVIEWS

The Sulidae: Gannets and Boobies by J. Bryan Nelson (with a foreword by V. C. Wynne-Edwards). 1978. Oxford University Press. 1012 pp.; 404 figures, maps, photographs and field sketches; 14 col. and 18 b. & w. plates; 19 appendices; bibliography; 275 x 195 mm. £40.

To review critically a monograph as vast as this in a single *Notornis* page is patently impossible: I shall merely try and give some idea of the book's scope and of its relevance for the New Zealand ornithologist. The work is one result of Bryan Nelson's 19 years' devotion to the task of unravelling the biology of the world's gannets and boobies during which he worked in Britain, The Galapagos, Peru and Christmas Island (Indian Ocean). One might have concluded that Dr. Nelson would have exhausted his subject: not so — at the time of writing (December '78) he and his wife were taking a long hard look at our Cape Kidnappers' birds. . . .

Each of the nine sulids is dealt with under four main headings — (1) Nomenclature (external features, morphology, moult and voice), (2) breeding distribution (numbers and other aspects of population), (3) breeding ecology and (4) breeding behaviour. Apart from historical aspects (mostly deliberately ignored), the coverage is very extensive if not exhaustive and reflects the author's personal experience and the published work of others. For instance, the account of the North Atlantic Gannet covers 154 pages, that of the Cape Gannet 25 pages, that of our Australasian Gannet 33 pages. This last section is based mainly on the work of Wodzicki, Stein, F. H. Robertson, Probine and McMeeking in New Zealand and of your reviewer at Cat Island, Tasmania, with some recent data from C. J. R. Robertson. There are notes on all the Australasian gannetries (the colonisation of Norfolk Island was perhaps too recent to be included), maps of Australian recoveries of N.Z. birds, diagrams of the changes at the Cape Kidnappers colony and of the age structure of the population there, etc., etc. The result is that this chapter provides an excellent account of our gannet which is especially interesting for the comparisons of the ecology and behaviour of the three forms of *Sula bassana* — summarised in a table extending over four pages. Nelson points out that the Australasian Gannet is the second rarest sulid (after Abbott's Booby) and has a very restricted breeding distribution.

In the final chapter — virtually a book in itself — many strands are drawn together in comparing the nomenclature, evolutionary relationships, morphology, distribution and numbers of the nine species.

Throughout the book, attractive and relevant sketches support the text and photographs have been used lavishly. Although most are printed by offset, the majority have reproduced well.

This is a long, well written work of scholarship. It is reminiscent of James Fisher's *The Fulmar* in that virtually every gannet and booby colony is described but *The Sulidae* is a more balanced book, with behaviour and breeding ecology occupying a major part of the text. Despite the high price it is good value for money, and Dr Nelson gets no royalties on sales. Everyone undertaking serious work on sulids will need to own or to have access to a copy.

— J. WARHAM