



West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
Africain



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papers carry clear diagrams or tables or appendices of basic data from which the conclusions have been drawn. The few photographic illustrations are of moderate quality. We are promised that the Proceedings of the 1985 Botswana PAOC will be published in 1986; let us hope that that deadline is kept.

J. H. Elgood

This volume can be obtained from: Mrs. J. Wolhuter, Southern African Ornithological Society, P.O. Box 87234, Houghton, Johannesburg, South Africa 2041.

ROBERTS' BIRDS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA by Gordon L. Maclean, 5th Edition March 1985, John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, pp. li + 848 + 76 colour plates. No jacket price (about £25). ISBN 0 620 07681 X.

It must be said at the outset that this is a really splendid book that all interested in African ornithology will want to possess. From the first appearance of "Roberts" in 1940 it has been the standard work for the area south of the Cunene, Okavango and Zambezi Rivers, a marvel of compression into a single volume, yet small enough to be used in the field (many contemporary works for other areas of Africa being multi-volume series of large-format books). It is the second major metamorphosis that *Roberts Birds of South Africa* has undergone, each with new authorship, and this time the revisions have been major in almost every aspect (including the title change from *South* to *Southern Africa*).

The two most important changes are the text completely rewritten by Gordon Maclean, and the replacement of the 56 original plates of Norman Lighton by 76 modern style and much improved plates by Kenneth Newman and Geoff Lockwood (a replacement started in the 4th Edition). All but vagrant species have a coloured distribution map that shows sedentary or migratory status at a glance; but one could wish the maps indicated northward range extension towards or beyond the Equator (and surely the European Bee-eater map should distinguish Palaearctic migrants from South African breeding birds). Almost all species accounts include a sonogram, with a welcome verbal interpretation such as 'wip...wip...weeu' for the Red-chested Cuckoo; some species have two or more sonograms but it is a pity that, in the interest of spatial economy, many of the verbal interpretations can only be read with a lens.

Several additional species of birds are included, which has made it timely to revise the Roberts numbers (a decision that was "not undertaken lightly"). A major improvement is the introduction of some dichotomous keys, with an occasional comparative table for such difficult groups as Cisticolas and small waders. It is not clear what criteria have been used to decide whether to use a dichotomous key; extreme examples being a 6-page key for raptors and another (though not called a key) to separate Malachite and Pygmy Kingfishers, there being no key for Alcedinidae. The introduction includes coloured vegetation and rainfall maps which are on a larger scale than the species distributional maps, making it difficult to relate species and environments. A welcome feature is that, in addition to the useful general reference list, there are literature references for most groups and even for some species. Vernacular names have been revised; and bird names in 12 languages are listed in indexes. A minor change is that weights and measures are now in metric units.

"Roberts" has always been an invaluable mine of information, but Maclean's Edition is undoubtedly greatly improved all round; it will not only be a must for all ornithologists in Southern Africa but also has much to commend it to observers in West Africa. The illustrations alone make it very much worth while, since so many non-passerine species, and not a few passerines, occur in both areas; the coloured flight figures of predators and waders are especially useful, although the variable scale is confusing with, for example, Ringed Plover looking as large as Greenshank. Worth special mention are flight illustrations of Columbidae, most of which occur in West Africa, and a nightjar plate showing spread wings and tails of both sexes of the seven species (all of which also occur in West Africa). A few of the plates are rather overcrowded, and users outside Southern Africa would have preferred plates labelled with scientific rather than English names, since so many of the latter differ regionally. Placing most of the 'additional' species in the last two plates has made them into very mixed grills, with petrels and passerines figured together. Incidentally, the most recent 'additions' have a 'number' which is quite out of sequence with those of their near relatives; pipits run from 716 to 726 with two newcomers, Mountain and Red-throated Pipits numbered 901 and 903 respectively.

It would be quite inappropriate in a brief review to attempt to trace the changes in such a successful standard of work over its history of 45 years with 5 major Editions, and many amendments at most reprintings, but the reviewer has before him an original Austin Roberts (5th impression 1946) with 463 pages; a McLachlan & Liversidge, 3rd Edition (1st impression 1970) with 642 pages and the new Maclean 5th Edition of 1984 with 848 pages. They form a most interesting comparison, increasing size being but a measurable aspect of steady improvement in content and usefulness.

The Maclean 'Roberts' is a veritable compendium of information, apparently free from those blemishes that seem to occur in most modern works.

J. H. Elgood

CONSERVATION OF TROPICAL FOREST BIRDS, edited by A.W. Diamond and T.E. Lovejoy, 1985, Int. Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge, UK. Pp xiv + 316. £18.50 incl. p. & p. ISBN 0 946888 05 1. Letterpress-printed, but otherwise having much the same format and feel as the larger Proceedings of the Fifth PAOC (see above) being illustrated with maps, graphs and tables, this valuable volume is a collection of papers presented at a workshop and symposium held at the 18th World Conference of the ICBP at Cambridge in August 1982. Although the illustrations are not always of very high standard, nearly all of the papers most certainly are. The 21 contributions are arranged in four parts: Global Perspectives, the Neotropics, the Paleotropics, and Workshop Proceedings. All of the papers are by internationally well-known ornithologists and, more importantly, there are few if any obvious omissions among the experts who have contributed. The five papers on African birds are by J.M. Thiollay (on West Africa), S.N. Stuart (East Africa), R.J. Dowsett (Central and Southern Africa), A.W. Diamond (threats and sites) and A. Prigogine (Albertine Rift forests - why this paper is in the Workshop part and not the Paleotropics part is not apparent). In addition A. Keast's and A.W. Diamond's papers in the Global Perspectives part refer extensively to the African picture.

Thiollay's reference list contains not a single *Malimbus* citation, which does not reflect too creditably on this journal. I should have liked him to give an even more detailed discussion of Threats (habitat destruction, logging,