

BOOK VIEWS

by Brian E. Cassie, Millis

A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF COLOMBIA. Steven L. Hilty and William L. Brown. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986. 976 pages; 69 plates, 56 in color; 100 line drawings; 1475 range maps. \$95.00 clothbound; \$42.50 paperbound.

and

BIRDS OF NEW GUINEA. Bruce M. Beehler, Thane K. Pratt, and Dale A. Zimmerman. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986. 404 pages; 55 plates, 47 in color; 19 line drawings. \$65.00 clothbound, \$37.50 paperbound.

Here are the latest (long-awaited and long-overdue) bird field guides in the excellent series undertaken by Princeton University Press. Princeton has the process of producing first-class field guides down to a science (previous guides have been done for Australia, Venezuela, Panama, and the U.S.S.R.), and, if anything, the content of the books is getting better. Birdwatchers and biologists have been scrambling for years to pick up any ornithological literature they could find for New Guinea and Colombia; until now, this has been a time-consuming and frustrating experience. With the publication of these guides, the void has been filled most admirably.

Both books are a reasonable nine-by-six inches, convenient for field use. The plates, mostly in color and in all cases very well painted, are lumped together in the middle of the books. Those of you who own *Birds of Venezuela* or *Birds of the Republic of Panama* will immediately notice that a great number of the illustrations in the Colombia book were used originally in one of these guides. I have already heard grumbling from my customers, most of whom expected all new plates. I must say I find no fault with the publisher reproducing plates used in previous publications: the plates are good, and that is the important thing. For the record, there are sixteen entirely new plates in the Colombia guide.

The text of both books follows a set formula. Families are introduced by a short to fairly lengthy paragraph, and each individual species within the family has an account comprising identification, similar species, voice, behavior, status, habitat, and range. The Colombia book has an additional segment on breeding biology, and, in general, the species accounts are fuller in this guide (due, no doubt, in large part to the tremendous amount of field work undertaken in the American tropics in the last few decades). The introductory chapters and appendices add significantly to these publications. *BIRDS OF NEW GUINEA* has a twenty-five-page chapter on Papuan natural history, another on field techniques, and a useful gazetteer. Included in *BIRDS OF COLOMBIA* are notes on topography, climate, vegetation, and habitats, all illustrated with photographs (an excellent, though

under-utilized, idea in guidebooks). In addition, there is an introduction to Colombian migrants, sections on conservation and national parks, a history of Colombian ornithology, and an eleven-page birdfinding guide. The range maps are well done (too bad there are none in the New Guinea book), and the bibliography runs to several hundred titles.

Although I commend Princeton on two more excellent guides, I am upset, but not surprised, with the prices asked for them. Although the paperbound editions are *relatively* inexpensive, they are not sewn, and if the *BIRDS OF VENEZUELA* paperback is indicative of the production throughout the series, these will not stand up very well to field use. The clothbound editions are perfectly sound, but also perfectly expensive. How can the publisher justify charging an extra \$27.50 (New Guinea) and \$52.50 (Colombia) for cloth bindings? I suggest that their marketing survey has told Princeton that they have us right where they want us - that the traveling birdwatcher will pay almost any price for a decent field guide. If they ever publish a guide to *all* of South America, I shall have to get a second mortgage to afford it.

CORRIGENDUM to the review of *ORNITHOLOGY IN LABORATORY AND FIELD*, which appeared in this column in the June 1986 issue. I commended the author, Olin Pettingill, Jr., on the great number of additional references cited, but was undermined by a typo. Pettingill lists not a mere 155, but *over 1550* references in all.

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