

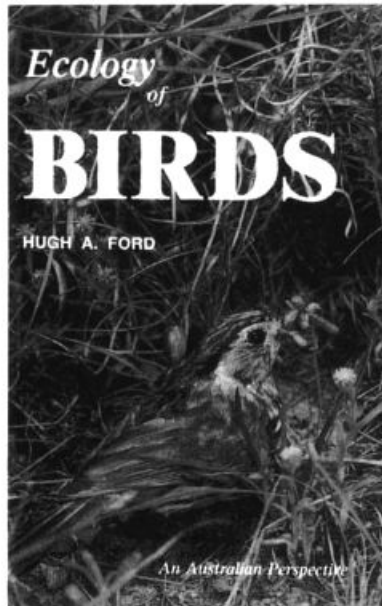
## BIRDERS' BOOKSHELF

### **Ecology of Birds, An Australian Perspective**

*Hugh A. Ford. 1989. Surrey Beatty & Sons Pty Limited, Chipping Norton, NSW, Australia. 288 pp., 48 color photographs, table of contents, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth.*

**T**HIS BOOK IS ONE OF SIX IN A SERIES dealing with various aspects of the ecology of Australia. A stated purpose of the series is to provide both useful information about the ecology of Australia for professional biologists and basic factual knowledge about general ecology for interested amateurs. Fulfilling such a promise is usually difficult, and this book does not accomplish both tasks well. Happily for those of us that are interested in learning about Australian birds, the emphasis is much greater on useful information about birds than it is on general ecology.

Ford presents an interesting view of Australian avian ecology in chapters



that deal with distribution, foraging behavior, community and population ecology, breeding, mating strategies, and migration. For example, birds are the best known taxon on the Australia continent, yet new species are still

being described. Unlike other continents, high mountain ranges and large bodies of water have almost no influence on avian distributions. Many insectivorous birds in Australia have relatively smaller clutches compared to birds in northern temperate regions, and breeding strategies include such extremes as those of lyrebirds, bowerbirds, birds of paradise, and megapods. Many species in Australia are cooperative breeders, but most remain unstudied. Only two terrestrial species migrate in any great numbers from Asia to Australia, but numerous migratory seabirds and "waders" frequent the continent.

The presentation of general avian ecology is less successful. For example, it is stated that birds can increase foraging efficiency by forming search images, with no mention that that refers only to searching for cryptic prey. Similarly, Ford simplifies the discussion of importance (or unimportance) of competition to such an extent that it would be very difficult for an

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amateur to understand the controversy surrounding that issue in avian ecology. Ford's thinking on avian ecology has clearly been greatly influenced by the late British avian ecologist David Lack, and Lack's ideas are showcased on several occasions. It also is interesting to read that "there is a certain amount of truth in what Wynne-Edwards said", since his ideas concerning self-regulation of grouse populations in Scotland have generally been discounted by North American ecologists. In the last three chapters,

Ford discusses the ecology of endangered species, effects of habitat changes, and a synthesis of Australia avian ecology, which I thought was the best part of the book.

Another stated purpose of this series is to stimulate ideas concerning ecology in Australia and Ford interjects comments concerning gaps in knowledge in numerous places. These range from the previously mentioned smaller clutch sizes in insectivorous birds and higher incidence of cooperative breeding, to questions such as why are there



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no woodpeckers, a very successful group on other continents that occur within a few hundred miles of Australia, nor species that behave like woodpeckers, in Australia? and "why [do] Eastern Rosellas have white cheeks, and Western Rosellas yellow cheeks?" (Apparently nobody knows)

The text is remarkably error-free, although some of the 48 color pictures of habitats and birds in the middle of the book were poorly produced in the copy I received. The glossary is quite short and terms are only defined in a few words.

The book is very readable and full of interesting facts about Australia and Australian birds. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in an introduction to the birds of Australia and their ecology

—Kimberly G. Smith

