

## ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

AN ATLAS OF SPECIATION IN AFRICAN NON-PASSERINE BIRDS. By D. W. SNOW (ed.). British Museum (Nat. Hist.), London, 1978: 390 pp., 391 maps. £42.50.—This important book is the joint effort of 14 compilers including the editor, who attempted to achieve uniformity of treatment by the contributing authors. It completes the great work started by Hall and Moreau on the passerine birds of Africa (1970). Together the 2 volumes provide a useful and reliable synthesis of data on the distribution, ecological occurrence, and evolutionary relationships of the breeding birds of Africa south of the Sahara. As in the earlier volume, no accounts or maps are given for species that are merely transient or wintering visitors in that vast region. Also excluded are such purely or predominantly marine groups as the penguins, gannets, tropicbirds, gulls, terns, skimmers, and marine species of cormorants. Included are the islands in the Gulf of Guinea, but not the Cape Verde Islands. On the east coast, Madagascar and the Comoros are dealt with only for species considered conspecific with, or in the same species-groups as African forms. Socotra, Zanzibar, Pemba, and Nafia are included as they are hardly more than sea-girt pieces of the African zoological region.

The maps attempt to show all recorded localities for all species included. When one realizes that in many species there are dozens or even hundreds of such records, the enormous amount of information brought together, and the ease with which the results may be assimilated, must make all users of the book aware of how much they owe to the authors. The hours of tedious library research involved in producing these maps will save many times as much time for the readers, often less well equipped with books and experience than the self-sacrificing compilers. The literature is covered up to the close of 1976, although a few 1977 references that add significant records were included as the work went to press.

Following the maps for each family is a short summary statement pointing out extralimital ranges of the included or related species, and calling attention to obvious gaps or weaknesses in the current information on the African taxa. In cases where there are more non-African than African species, these statements help to place the African data in a better perspective. Thus, for the Columbidae (p. 220) we are informed that the family has a cosmopolitan distribution in tropical, subtropical, and temperate regions; that of the 40 genera and 290 species currently recognized, 6 genera and 34 species occur in Africa, and that of these all but 2 are endemic to Africa or extend, at most, to adjacent parts of southwestern Arabia.

One great advantage of the maps is that they include many unpublished records, the specimen bases of which are in the collections of the many museums whose curators supplied these otherwise unreported data. For some areas for which specimens and literature are meager, the compilers included unpublished observations by resident ornithologists. This has involved sight records for conspicuous or easily identified species, particularly for large birds seldom collected today. We are assured that for families or genera in which field identification of very similar species is difficult and hence open to doubt and criticism, the inclusions on the maps are limited to actual museum specimens with data. In the appendix at the end of the volume there is a complete list of the books and papers used in preparing the maps. To a long-time student of African ornithology it comes as a surprise that Anton Reichenow's great 3-volume *Die Vogel Afrikas*, the first comprehensive account of birds of the continent, is omitted. Also missing are Hubert Lynes' work on the birds of northern and central Darfur, Reginald E. Moreau's *The Bird Faunas of Africa and its Islands*, and V. G. L. van Someren's extensive 1922 and 1932

papers on the birds of Kenya and Uganda. These omissions can only mean that the records therein reported have since been repeated in other or more recent works, or that, in the case of Reichenow's work, the sources from which he obtained his data are themselves included. Another surprising omission is Stark and Sclater's 4-volume work on the birds of South Africa. One can only hope that all the specimen or observational records in these books have been incorporated in the present atlas. It is highly probable that these sources have not been overlooked by the experienced and competent experts who compiled the present series of maps, but it would have been good to see them duly listed.

In his introduction the editor writes that the primary objective of this enormous compilation was to complete the mapping of a major continental avifauna, and thereby to enable zoogeographers, evolutionary biologists, and other students of special areas or species to examine and analyze the speciation patterns of African birds insofar as they can be expressed geographically. He then states that a ". . . less clearly defined hope is that the presentation of the distributional and evolutionary complexities of a rich and ancient avifauna may suggest to future workers new lines of approach to evolutionary problems which at present we cannot clearly see." It is to be expected that such may well transpire; at least it will not be the fault of the authors if this does not happen. They have presented, in readily usable and easily grasped and compared form, a truly vast amount of data and ideas, a source for innumerable studies to come. Their combined efforts have resulted in a work that summarizes and presents in a critical, reliable, and meaningful manner the work of hundreds of devoted ornithologists over many decades, actually over 2 centuries, in an area of which parts are now unfortunately less accessible to visiting scientists than they once were. Because of the difficulties, uncertainties, and even conflicts attendant upon the organization and functioning of some "emerging" nations still too busy with basic necessities to afford leisure or opportunities for the study of their rich and fascinating birdlife, we may rejoice that in this atlas we have a masterly compilation of what has been learned to date. This we cannot lose, and when additions can be made, their accretion will be easy to fit into the picture and to assimilate into our concepts.—HERBERT FRIEDMANN.

LIFE HISTORY OF THE EASTERN FIELD SPARROW IN CALHOUN COUNTY, MICHIGAN. By Lawrence H. Walkinshaw. 1978: 153 pp., 40 figs., xerox copy of typescript. \$21.50 (hard cover), \$16.50 (soft cover) for persons affiliated with an educational institution; \$27.00 and \$22.00, respectively, for others. Order from: University Microfilms International, Dissertation Copies, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. Order No. LD 00185.—R.J.R.

THE BIRDS OF EAST AFRICA. A collection of lithographs prepared from the originals drawn from nature by V. G. L. van Someren between the years 1909 and 1937. A Limited Edition. Published by A. C. Allyn, for the Allyn Museum of Entomology, Sarasota, Florida, Volume I, Ploceidae-1, Plates 1-93, (color) 1973. \$60 per volume, \$6 per fascicle of 16 plates.—Over 1800 different kinds of birds painted from life in their natural habitat by V. G. L. van Someren (1886-1976) are included in this collection, of which the weaver-birds comprise the first and, so far, only volume. The frontispiece is a fine color photograph of the author in old age. The series is intended for museums, libraries and collectors of fine illustrations in natural history. Arthur C. Allyn, the publisher, is himself a collector and a benefactor of much naturalist research.

There is a foreword by Dr. Austin L. Rand, formerly Chief Curator, Department of Zoology, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago. Dr. Rand had previously written a brief summary of van Someren's life and contributions to ornithology in the Bulletin of the Field Museum (April, 1950), and also edited *Days with Birds*, a 520-page book (1956) by van Someren, which was 1 of the first general surveys of the behavior of East African birds. It was based on personal observations by the author, and still has some of the most extensive life histories yet available on these birds.

Dr. V. G. L. van Someren was a man of many talents and accomplishments. He graduated in medicine and dental surgery from the University of Edinburgh and was appointed medical officer in British East Africa (Kenya). In addition to his duties as a medical doctor, he studied the natural history of East Africa for over 40 years. In 1906 he and his brother started a systematic survey of the birds of Kenya and Uganda, and ultimately over 25,000 specimens from their collection were deposited in various museums. Part of his collection of nests and eggs of East African birds is now in the collection of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology in Los Angeles. Dr. van Someren also made over 5000 photographs, some of which help illustrate the volumes by Macworth-Praed and Grant on *Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa*. He was interested in all phases of natural history, was Honorary Curator of the Natural History Museum at Nairobi (1914-38), a Fellow of the Linnaean Society of London and a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society. He was also Director of the Coryndon Memorial Museum, Nairobi (1938-40).

Another talent is now made generally evident with the publication of this collection of lithographs; V. G. L. van Someren could also do superb illustrations of birds in their natural habitat. The pictures of the birds are lifelike and scientifically accurate (including color of bill and eye) and show each bird, often both male and female, in its natural habitat, perched in characteristic vegetation. The depiction of the nests of the weaverbirds are only used in the general background, and show little detail; the bird itself takes pre-eminence in each illustration. With a few exceptions, the drawings of the nests are generally accurate. However, the nest of Large Solitary Golden Weaver (*Ploceus xanthops*) should not have an entrance tube, and that of Black-billed Sparrow Weaver (*Plocepasser mahali*) is not pensive from the roof as shown. Each plate is labelled on an interleaf with the scientific name in capital letters followed by an English name in small letters. A paragraph or 2 of descriptive material accompanies each plate and gives some brief notes on general habits as well as on the usual clutch size and the color of the eggs of each species.

The first volume on weaverbirds illustrates most of the species of East African Ploceidae, not including the sparrows. It includes the long-tailed viduine finches, but not the estrildid finches. This work must be viewed historically, and one must keep in mind that the illustrations were done many years ago. Some of the scientific names are outdated, for example, *Ploceus nigriceps* is used for *Ploceus cucullatus nigriceps* (Layard's Black-headed Weaver) and *Urobrachya axillaris* for *Coliuspasser axillaris* (Fan-tailed Widow-bird). The historical flavor is reflected in the English names that van Someren created for his birds, there being rather few such names in general use at that time. Not infrequently his names seem more appropriate than those now in general use. For example, "Grey-capped Social Weaver" more precisely describes *Pseudonigrita arnaudi* than does "Grey-headed Social Weaver," the name found in some recent books, since this species does have a gray crown while the rest of the head is definitely not gray. Similarly, van Someren's "Yellow-cheeked Black Weaver" is far more descriptive of the distinctive features of *Ploceus melanogaster* than is "Black-billed Weaver" of more recent works. Van Someren described a number of new subspecies of weaverbirds, and there is rather

considerable and useful illustration of subspecies in the book; back in those days what was or was not a different species was not nearly so clear as it seems today.

It is a pity that the work of this great ornithological pioneer is marred by inadequate editing. Misspellings of the scientific names are not uncommon, and some are not corrected by the all too brief "Errata" sheet that accompanies the volume. Two plates are erroneously labelled. In Plate 8 the lower figure is obviously *Sporopipes frontalis*, the Speckle-fronted Weaver, and not *Pseudonigrita darnaudi* [sic] *dorsalis*. Plate 66, labelled *Euplectes hordacea*, really shows *Euplectes orix*. There is no table of contents and no index, and to find a given species one must simply page through the book.

Despite its venerable nature this collection reminds us we still have much to learn about East African birds. For example, as yet there is very little known about *Ploceus (Anaplectes) jubaensis*, a rather spectacular bird (apparently a subspecies of *rubriceps*) which van Someren described in 1920 and which he calls the Juba River Scarlet Weaver. He also notes an observation of nest building for Weyn's Weaver (*Ploceus weynsi*), a Ugandan species of which the nest and eggs seem to be still undescribed.—NICHOLAS E. COLLIAS AND ELSIE C. COLLIAS.

## NEW LIFE MEMBER



Dr. Jerrold H. Zar, a recent Life Member of The Wilson Ornithological Society, is Professor and Chairman of Biological Sciences at Northern Illinois College in DeKalb. Dr. Zar's principal interests are physiological adaptations to environmental stress and statistical analysis of orientation and other data. He has had two books published—one entitled *Biostatistical Analysis* and the other *Field and Laboratory Methods for General Ecology*. Dr. Zar is active in many professional societies and is married with two children.