

**Birds of Singapore** by C. Hails and F. Jarvis. Times Editions, Singapore. 168 pp., (1987).

Think of Singapore, and you think of the very epitome of urbanisation: overcrowding, over-development, concrete, apartment blocks, biological sterility. Yet, as author Dr Chris Hails shows, there is still a lot of greenery in Singapore: over one half of the main island is still rural or agricultural and there is even a small remnant of little-disturbed rainforest. Happily for Singapore's human inhabitants, therefore, they still share the island with much wildlife, and here is the book to help them enjoy it. *Birds of Singapore* appears to be the first publication devoted exclusively to the island's avifauna in fifty years. Chris Hails' text and Frank Jarvis' illustrations combine to form a lively, authoritative and pleasing book in which they have chosen to treat 131 of the island's total of 295 bird species recorded within the last decade. The full checklist, together with a status code for each species, is presented as an appendix.

By choosing to limit themselves to the more frequently recorded species, the authors have certainly done the reader no disservice, as they have been able to devote more space to illustrations and text. The former are very attractive, with the birds often being depicted in appropriate foliage and looking as if they have been sketched or painted from life. Even on the few occasions where the artist may not have quite succeeded in capturing the characters of a species correctly, the reader must at least give him credit for his lively and original depictions.

The species text is both informative and a pleasure to read, with much emphasis being given to the birds' habits. This book will certainly help the beginner to identify the birds he finds in Singapore. The experienced birdwatcher, who would find the species covered elsewhere, in his South-East Asian field guides, should buy this book in any case as it is much more than a field guide. There are four introductory chapters dealing with bird habitats, with migration and seasonality and with some of the more general aspects of tropical ecology. Maps of the more important sites show you where to watch birds in Singapore while there are also a few colour photographs of habitats.

This book seems certain to succeed in its aim of encouraging more Singaporeans to take an interest in their environment. One can only hope that it will also encourage the island state's rulers to pay more attention to conserving such natural and semi-natural habitats as remain, rather than further modifying them in the name of progress and to the detriment of the many resident and migrant birds which they continue to support.

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