

BOOK REVIEWS

The Birds of Wallacea, by C.M.N. White and M. D. Bruce. B.O.U. Check-list No. 7. British Ornithologists' Union, London (1986), Pp 524. Price (at addresses outside the United Kingdom) £35.00.

B.O.U. Check-lists treating areas of the Old World tropics are likely henceforth to be offered for review in a spread of regional journals, N.H.B.S.S. being one. Five numbers, out or imminent, cover parts of Asia. '*Wallacea*' is the first of these and on bulk stands alone in the series. Double that of its fattest predecessor, '*Nigeria*' (and twice the price), indeed, this number challenges the average page total of an entire annual volume of the Union's journal, *Ibis*, a whimsical thought when it is recalled that a mere decade ago B.O.U. launched the series specifically to relieve *Ibis* of the space pressure of 'papers' of this nature.

Luckily, they obtained a generous loan but mere cost, rightly, has not been permitted to stand in the way of establishing B.O.U. rights to a major first synthesis beyond original literature. Notwithstanding its place in biology, the famous oceanic archipelago of eastern Indonesia has never had a bird-book of its own. White and Bruce now fill this gap authoritatively and if A.R. Wallace's '*Malay Archipelago*' is still the best consolidated guide to the natural history and people of the area, '*Wallacea*' must be the starting point of all future avifaunal studies. Almost everything about it belies the popular concept of 'check-list' but to have turned away a first full-scale review of evolutionary relationships within the 130 or so explored islands, to say nothing of White's re-descriptions of their many endemics, would have been resoundingly false economy.

'*Wallacea*' has been anxiously awaited. Begun by Charles White (of African check-list fame) well before the present series started, its publication has also been among the longest awaited. The senior author died in 1978, part way through a second-draft manuscript. This, at the behest of the B.O.U., Murray Bruce took over, spending a further 5 years in museum, bibliographic and field research to bring it to a finished statement. The task has been to arrange, expand, annotate and reference existing material, reappraise all systematic decisions and up-date taxonomy while retaining White's text and opinions as faithfully as possible. A main outcome has been an (often lengthy) addendum per species but where more drastic action proved desirable, individually attributable statements have been integrated into a combined text. Occasional technical condensations are stylistically hard-going but this tricky exercise has otherwise been wholly successful. The 2-tiered approach lends insight of its own.

78 pages are devoted to general material. They begin with Bruce's preface in which his role and the format are described, maps of the 3 'districts' showing all islands named in the text (in a few years all but strictly phonetic spellings will again be outmoded) and a glossary of Indonesian terms common in place names. White's habitat analysis alludes to the extent of deforestation (hence probable defaunation)

prior to the coming of the earliest systematic collectors. His suggestion that some forms displaced from lowland forest have found refuge in surviving upland forest could have truth at least in the sense that some islands may retain only eurytopic generalists, narrow-niche specialists vanishing before they were even detected. Bruce continues with notes on conservation measures. A proposed 14.3 million hectares of park is impressive by SE Asian standards but the Lesser Sunda Islands are still of outstanding concern. There then follows White's long and important essay 'Descriptive zoogeography of Wallacea' in which he starts from first principles and proceeds to discuss dispersal histories, endemism and patterns of faunal transition in detail. Recent insight into the Australasian-Asian avifaunal interchange from DNA-hybridization studies (SIBLEY & AHLQUIST, 1985) does little to upset conclusions reached. Students of the eastern Palaearctic, on the other hand, may be surprised by some of White's views on sources of migrants (he seems also to have been startled to discover that Borneo receives fewer species than Africa). A proposal that expanding niches in small island communities may have blocked the entry of migrants into Wallacea does not indicate what migrants might have been up to during the expansion phase, and notes by Bruce suggest the problem may be less ecological than informational. Few collectors, evidently, ever bothered with migrants.

Preliminaries end with the obligatory (and always fascinating) historical synopsis of exploration, spanning 3.5 centuries in this instance. 347 pages of systematic section then treat 676 species, in a generous ratio of page-space to taxon ('*Nigeria*' covers half as many again in half the space). Individual treatments include basic ecological information (habitats, extreme breeding or migration dates) and details of distribution but are otherwise devoted to systematics—as befits 'a taxonomic forum' in which 'conclusions reached... are in many cases just a starting point for renewed studies' (Bruce, p. 77). I am inadequate to the task of a general review of this big section but offer a selection of comments pertinent mostly to the Asian side of the transition zone:

- (a) Chinese egret—difficulty of separating the non-breeding colours from white-phase Eastern reef egret should not be underestimated, especially now that these birds are known to share habitats.
- (b) Malaysian night heron—juvenile plumage is no necessary indication of local breeding. Most autumn migrants passing through Malaya are juveniles.
- (c) Schrenck's bittern—the Sarawak record cited is not a basis for guessing this species might breed in the tropics. Only assumed to have been a fledgling, the bird in question was sufficiently independent to have escaped after a few days' captivity (SMYTHIES, 1957).
- (d) Sulawesi serpent eagle—as likely to be an allospecies of the Kinabalu as the Crested serpent eagle.
- (e) Sulawesi hawk eagle—most like Blyth's hawk eagle in colour, and living at similar altitudes. Why are these two, rather than Wallace's hawk eagle, the allospecies of other Asian forms?

- (f) Blue-breasted quail – migration noted in the Philippines (MCCLURE 1974) may bear on the occurrence of subspecies *lineata* in northern Wallacea.
- (g) Waders – of expected species, Asian Dowitcher has now been confirmed in Timor (ANDREW 1986);
- (h) Redshank – taxonomic and distributional reviews by W.G.HALE (1971, 1973) have been overlooked. *T.t. eurhinus* is one of 4 Asian-breeding subspecies all of which winter at least as far south as the Malacca Straits. Identification of nominate (European) *totanus* in Borneo is an undoubted error.
- (i) Wallacean green pigeons – I can find no good reason for the assumption that *teysmanni*, *floris* and *psittacea* are all necessarily allospecies of the Thick-billed pigeon. That they replace each other on adjacent islands is of no special taxonomic significance, as the authors have pointed out in other contexts.
- (k) Sulawesi hawk cuckoo – the call claimed by Stresemann somewhat resembles Oriental cuckoo. A resident race of the latter in upland Sulawesi would not be unexpected. As the authors point out, it bears no resemblance to that of any true '*Hierococcyx*'.
- (l) Sulawesi owl – dorsal feather patterning is of Barn rather than Masked owl type, supporting allocation to an *alba* superspecies.
- (m) White-throated needletail – presence of the subspecies *nudipes* in Java in late December (MEES, 1971) may be of relevance to winter-dated Wallacean records.
- (n) Black-faced cuckooshrike – taxonomic splitting reopens the question of species limits in Asia. Are all continental forms *macei*? Does *javensis* stand alone? The latter is the older name.
- (o) Sulawesi babbler – linked by the authors with Asian *abbotti* and *separiarium*, RIPLEY & BEEHLER (1985) remove these to a separate genus *Malacocincla*.
- (p) Bush warblers – subsequent to publication of the Check-list, ROZENDAAL (1987) has described a striking new species of *Cettia* from Yamdena, linking Asian and Pacific forms. He has also shown that Finsch's name *bivittata* is likely to apply to a Sumatran rather than to a Wallacean taxon. Tape recordings of song confirm the presence of the Indonesian bush warbler, *C. vulcania*, in Wallacea.
- (q) Tailorbirds – reintroduction of *sepium* as the specific name of the Ashy tailorbird corrects a widespread error in recent Asian literature. Malayan observations indicate that the Mountain tailorbird does not sew its nest. Its systematic position is in doubt.
- (r) Rufous shrikethrush – F.G. Rozendaal believes that an extreme vicariant population of this New Guinea bird, doubted by White and Bruce, really does exist on Sangihe Island. A second endemic of this little refugium, Caerulean paradise flycatcher, is now believed to be extinct (WHITTEN 1987) and Murray Bruce may have been the last ornithologist to see it alive. How many more Wallacean birds will have been found to have disappeared by the time funds become available for their study (what price the Sumba hornbill?), and again, who knows what vanished before the days of Wallace, Beccari, Kuehn, Everett

and others?

'*Wallacea*' ends with an encyclopaedic bibliography; nearly 2000 items, current to 31 December 1983. Vital spadework by Bruce, who is concerned overall 'that the finished product does justice to overdue expectations'. He need hardly have worried. C.M.N. White would have been satisfied with the scholarship, as surely must a growing number of serious students carrying '*Wallacea*' both to the museum and to the field, price not withstanding. The latter is high only if one thinks in 'checklist' terms : no-one with SE Asia-Australasian avifaunal commitments can actually afford to do without. Note that Bruce has published a first supplement to '*Wallacea*' in *Kukila* 3 (1987) and promises more on some of the stranger endemics. This Indonesian journal will continue to be the main repository at least of distributional information and its editor should be kept abreast of all new findings.

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