

REVIEWS

BOOKS :

Rowan, M.K. 1983. THE DOVES, PARROTS, LOURIES AND CUCKOOS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA. Pp. 468; 8 colour plates, 33 maps, 3 black-and-white diagrams. Cape Town: David Philip. R24,00 excl. G.S.T.

The past year has been noteworthy for the number of new books concerned with South African birdlife which have appeared on the local market. Since books are relatively expensive items, those with limited purses may have difficulty in deciding which single volume to buy from the many now on offer. For any person active in the field of ornithology, this book ought to be a first choice. It is excellent value for money at a price that most will be able to afford.

Although it deals with only 39 species in four families, it sets out virtually everything that is known about the birds concerned. Graeme Arnott has portrayed 34 of the species in a series of eight colour plates. These depict both male and female plumages for sexually dimorphic species and the juvenile plumages and differing adult colour phases of some of the cuckoos are well featured. A map of approximate distribution is featured for most of the species covered. Each of the families is given a comprehensive introductory write-up and a shorter comment is given for every genus. Ten pages of references set in two columns give an indication of the thoroughness with which the diverse ornithological literature has been scoured; they include every mention made of any of the species in club newsletters, and club members may well find their names in this list, which could serve very well as the basis of "Who's Who" in southern African ornithology. The book is completed with an index of scientific names thoughtfully divided into three parts for birds, other animals and plants respectively.

Work on this volume started some fifteen years ago and an advisory panel (scattered the length and breadth of southern Africa) spent many hours checking the draft texts prepared by Mrs. Rowan. When the Trustees of the Bird Book Fund had to shelve the project for reasons of unfavourable economic climate, it seemed that all the work had been for nothing. It is a tribute to the author that she never lost faith in its eventual publication and did an excellent job of updating the text when the

go-ahead for publication eventually came. The only aspects of information given which appear to lag behind current knowledge concern the distribution of some of the species. Distribution is a dynamic aspect of a species's life history, however, and is ever subject to change of a greater or lesser degree.

Aside from this relatively minor detail the book is a mine of information. I doubt that there is any ornithologist in South Africa (aside from the author) who could read the text on any one of even the common species featured therein without learning quite a lot he or she didn't already know about the bird concerned.

Birdringers involved in woodland or forest community studies will find the section on that enigmatic group, the cuckoos, of particular value. Even the experienced ringer faces the risk of catching a 'whatzit'. He may know it is, for example, a cuckoo, but what sort of cuckoo? There is more than enough data in this book to permit an accurate identification to be made. Apart from such considerations, however, Bunty Rowan's book will be an authoritative reference work for a long time to come. It should be on the bookshelf of every person who devotes time to bird study.

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Mead, Chris. 1983. BIRD MIGRATION Pp. 224; 35 black-and-white photographs, 18 colour photographs. Feltham: Country Life Newnes. U.K. price £9.95

This is an eye-catching book and, despite its stated aim to introduce "both the amateur bird watcher and the interested layman to the absorbing world of bird migration", it is no coffee-table edition. It presents a comprehensive review of migration patterns of European and North American birds and informs the reader on related matters such as flight strategies, energy costs, navigation and opinions on the evolution of migration. Additionally, there are chapters devoted to the history of Man's discovery of bird migration, the means by which migration is investigated and ways by which migrating birds can be