

REVIEW

BOOKS:

Rogers, K., Rogers, A. and Rogers, D. 1990.
"BANDER'S AID" Supplement No. 1. Royal
Australasian Ornithologists Union. Report
No. 67. pp 75. RAOU, 21 Gladstone Street,
Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039, Australia.

This publication updates and adds to the descriptions and ageing and sexing criteria of some Australian birds given in "Bander's Aid" (reviewed in Safring News 16: 93-96). It serves, we are told in the introduction, to help ringers in the field and to provide information for the compilers of the RAOU Handbook. The volume is softback, A3 size; I am pleased to note that the binding is an improvement on "Bander's Aid".

Over 80 new or revised species' accounts are given, the majority concerning 'bushbirds', but a few waders, gamebirds and other nonpasserines are included. Only a couple of waders (Curlew Sandpiper and [Red] Knot) and introduced species (House Sparrow and European Starling) are of direct interest to ringers in South Africa. The majority of accounts detail plumages according to age and sex, measurements (including 'Total Head Length' more often than culmen) and moult. Notes on breeding, geographical variation and population size and advice on catching and handling (notably of parrots) are provided in some instances. Over 30 ringers have contributed to the species' accounts, based largely on their own observations, but with resort to the literature where appropriate.

The information is concisely and logically presented. Potential pitfalls regarding ambiguous terminology (particularly ageing) are clearly spelled out. The often painstakingly detailed descriptions reflect creditably on the commitment and patience of field workers and compilers. Such minute observation does appear at times superfluous (and indigestible), and one may be tempted to question the necessity of including it all. I would, however, be inclined to support this detailed approach. Only the initial presentation of such comprehensive data will allow future distillation of salient features and figures and, consequently, deviations from the norm, to be recognised and recorded. And, for example, who is to say that the shaft colour of the fourth primary of species X will not ultimately prove a reliable ageing feature, unlikely as it may at first appear?

A suggestion that Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis* in Tasmania may be sexed according to the extent of rufous on the flanks gives food for thought as far as our Cape White-eye is concerned. Certainly the latter displays wide variation in underpart colour, not least on the flanks. I gather that, to date, this has been ascribed to racial variation. Perhaps we could investigate this by scoring birds according to the extent and intensity of grey and/or buff and in conjunction with cloacal protuberance and Frank Douwes's pelvic gap (if that's OK with him?). Has anyone, incidentally, looked at sole colour in white-eyes? On the Cape Peninsula this is either dirty white or bright yellow. Could this be age-, sex-, season- or race-related (not to mention what they last perched on...)?

Supplement 1, like its progenitor, still falls short in the standardization of colour. Until a system (such as an artist's colour chart) for field use is adopted, descriptive inconsistencies will persist, as each ringer perpetuates his or her idiosyncratic terminology. Would it be feasible to have colours qualified only by intensity and not another colour? So it is that we are presently bombarded with, for example: greenish, green, bright green, iridescent green, dark green, very dark green, grass green, bright grass green, green-blue (not to be confused with green/blue?), olive green, dull olive green, turquoisey green, bluish green, yellow green, greyish green (not to be confused with greenish grey), and so on. And that's just the greens. 'Cream washed olive' (palate colour of the juvenile or immature Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, for such it is) sounds like something left over at a cocktail party.

The sentiments I expressed in the review of the original "Bander's Aid" apply equally to Supplement No. 1. Together, these publications provide an excellent model on which to base a South African equivalent. Of the latter, there remains no sign. Why are the Australians apparently such fastidious observers and recorders, and why is there such a wealth of ringing-derived information (at least in print) relative to this country? Perhaps the editor of Safring News would grant some page space to the Rogers' clan so that we can be told how they go about it?

Finally, for those of you who thought it was merely another produce of the fevered imagination of Dame Edna Everidge, I am pleased to confirm that there is such a place as Moonee Ponds. As the headquarters of the RAOU it is certainly of greater importance than the home of Norm's prostrate support system.

Mike Fraser