

## REVIEWS

**A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon.**—G. M. Henry. London: Oxford University Press. xl + 432 pp., 30 pls. 124 drawings, end-paper map. Price \$6.55.—G. M. Henry is well-known as a bird artist through his illustrations for various bird books, including one on hill birds of India by Salim Ali. Between 1927 and 1935, the Ceylon Government published a beautiful series, "Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon" by Mr. Henry, and now his son, David Reid-Henry is following in his father's footsteps, a notable succession in a talented family.

G. M. Henry is well qualified to write on the birds of Ceylon as he lived on the Island for many years prior to World War II, finally retiring in the late 1940's to a village in Oxford where he now lives. The book imparts a certain feeling of nostalgia for the days when the author lived in a tropical paradise for a lover of nature. The main attraction of the book is the series of superb illustrations done with great competence by the author. He and his son are excellent bird illustrators, certainly as good as any now living. The black and white drawings are perfect, and my only criticism of the colored illustrations, which are obviously excellent as originals, is that the color reproduction is not perfect, and the plates suffer somewhat thereby, through no fault in the least of the author. The blue and green tones are occasionally much too weak or again much too strong, while the yellows and the reds are in general good.

The book opens with general comments about the development of ornithology in Ceylon and hints for bird watching on the Island. It is perhaps too bad that more is not said about the present status, as my impression is that there is now a very active interest in birds on the Island, partly through the activity of societies and journals such as "Loris," none of which are mentioned. There is a section on topography and climate which is rather superficial, including a statement that in its geological history Ceylon has been "severed" from the mainland and "drifted eastwards" to form a separate island, and that the southern mountainous half of the Island has been severed from the parent continent for a vastly longer period of time than the northern portion. This seems gibberish to me; and even if it be true, it can hardly have had much effect on the evolution of the birds, as the author assumes, because any such major crustal movement must have occurred long before birds as we know them were in existence.

Following this, there is a discussion of nomenclature and a technical list of the families, genera, and species of birds found in Ceylon. Mr. Henry refers to a recent major revisionary publication by W. W. A. Phillips who published in 1952 a revised checklist of the birds of Ceylon, but most unfortunately he does not adopt Phillips' arrangement or classification. He states that his book is not intended as a work on classification or nomenclature, but rather as a help towards "enjoying the birds," and therefore, the precise arrangement is not of very great importance; he does not think the student will find much difficulty in correlating the "Guide" with the "Checklist." Following this statement, Mr. Henry goes on blithely listing all the technical names for the species as if he thought it were important, and adopting a higgledy-piggledy arrangement, sometimes following earlier authors such as Wait, sometimes later ones such as Whistler or Phillips, all in a way which is likely to confuse any student. This is the sort of a book which, in its technical treatment is likely to convince the amateur that nomenclature is a farce and something on which no one can agree, and its practitioners are all blatherskites.

The rest of the book is devoted to a list, species by species, of the birds of Ceylon. Aside from the questionable technical arrangement, the information contained

in this section is well-presented and interesting reading. There is a good deal of new information as well. Mr. Henry includes sight records of forms not previously recorded, and he has a good deal to say about distribution, and in many cases, about habits, calls, field observations, all matters of great interest and use. In some cases he lists species only as species, in others he gives separate sections for subspecies, again a matter on which he seems not to be clear. In one or two cases he questions existing subspecies on the grounds that the populations concerned are not resident, an assumption which seems unsupported by the evidence. Comments such as these of the author certainly result from a lack of interest in technical matters such as speciation and would much better have been left out either by the author, or by whomever the editors of the Oxford University Press consulted in connection with its publication.

In general, it seems to me this book serves as a reminiscent and happy memory of Mr. Henry's many years in Ceylon, with a host of interesting notes on various bird species and a splendid series of illustrations. As such and as such alone this volume can be a useful guide to getting to know birds in this fascinating part of the world.—S. DILLON RIPLEY.

**Records of Birds of Prey Bred in Captivity.**—Arthur A. Prestwich, London, N. 14, 61 Chase Road (published by the author) 31 pp., 1955. This is the second edition, the first one having been published in 1950. The present list has been brought up to date and several old records, previously overlooked, have been brought to light. Many important observations on the life habits of birds of prey are reported in the present volume, which includes the falconiforms as well as the owls. It is interesting to note that the Andean Condor has been one of the most prolific birds of prey in zoos despite the fact that it lays but a single egg which takes almost two months to hatch. Some other vultures and owls also nest fairly readily. Hawks, eagles, and falcons are not so easily induced to breed in confinement.—J. DELACOUR.