

This is especially true for the widespread oceanic species *Gallirallus philippensis*, *Porzana tabuensis*, and *P. porphyrio*. Most of the maps are fairly accurate, although for *P. porphyrio*, southern Tonga (Tongatapu, 'Eua) and nearly all of the Solomon Islands are erroneously excluded from the range. The map for *Porzana tabuensis* also has inaccuracies. I would add, however, that Taylor's accounts of these three difficult species are outstanding and by far the most useful ever written.

The color plates by Ber van Perlo are generally accurate and artistically gratifying. Multiple depictions for most species cover much of the variation due to age, sex, or geography. Some of the birds are too pale; the colors should be more saturated in, for example, various species of *Gallirallus* and *Porzana* (plates 14 and 28). A few other plates are too red. The soft-part colors are inaccurate for some poorly known species, such as for both species of *Nesoclopeus* (plate 11).

Extinction is no small topic when discussing rails; if not for anthropogenic extinction, more species of rails would be alive today than of any other family of birds. Taylor discusses extinction of island rails thoroughly, reviewing even some of the massive amount of extinction that took place prehistorically on oceanic islands. This sets his book apart from most modern treatments of avian biogeography, which ignore human-caused extinctions that occurred before 1600.

Because of their secretive habits, many species of rails are difficult to detect and therefore difficult to survey. Large-scale population estimates are simply unavailable and unrealistic to attempt for most species. Thus, the conservation status is highly speculative for many, perhaps most, species of rails. On average, Taylor does a much better job than many conservationists in not crying wolf about species whose status is, in fact, either poorly known or simply not qualified for the subjective classification "endangered." An exception would be *Nesoclopeus woodfordi*, which he calls "globally ENDANGERED and possibly close to extinction" (p. 230) in spite of being "locally common" (p. 231) on the large island of Isabel. During my field work on Isabel in 1997, *N. woodfordi* was common in riverine forest and was well known to local people. It is not close to extinction.

To continue with *Nesoclopeus*, I was disappointed to see that Taylor repeated the oft-made but illogical claim that *N. woodfordi* of the Solomon Islands and *N. poecilopterus* of Fiji form a "superspecies" and may even be conspecific. These two flightless species are distinct from each other morphologically, and they live on islands that are separated by 2,200 km of deep ocean. Just as untenable is suggesting superspecies status for *P. monasa* and *P. atra* (p. 422), two flightless species that are isolated by 6,000 km of deep ocean and hundreds of intervening islands.

Among my minor quibbles, unavoidable in a work

as extensive as Taylor's, are using "eruptive" rather than "irruptive" (p. 37), "classed" rather than "classified" (p. 349), and various misspelled island names (p. 361). Pettiness aside, *Rails* is a book that will never be far from my reach. Barry Taylor has set a very high standard for future family-level bird books.—DAVID W. STEADMAN, *Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611, USA.*

The Auk 117(3):841–842, 2000

The Directory of Australian Birds. Passeriformes: A Taxonomic and Zoogeographic Atlas of the Biodiversity of Birds in Australia and its Territories.—R. Schodde and I. J. Mason. 1999. CSIRO Publishing, Canberra, Australia. x + 851 pp., numerous text figures. ISBN 0-643-06457-7. Cloth, AUS \$180.00 (available from <sales@publish.csiro.an>).—Assessment of the species-level taxa of Australian birds has been a major problem ever since the publication in the early part of this century of the many volumes of *The Birds of Australia* by G. M. Mathews. A predominant difficulty has been the location of the largest collections of Australian birds, including most of the type specimens, in European and North American museums. For several decades, Richard Schodde and Ian Mason have built up the largest current Australian collection of Australian birds with excellent label data at CSIRO-Wildlife in Canberra. They have used this material as the foundation for a review of the species taxa of this avifauna. In addition, Schodde has examined the important collections of Australian birds in overseas museums, paying particular attention to the type specimens in to clarify the nomenclature of these birds. The results of this enormous labor on the passerines of Australia are presented in this volume.

The species taxa recognized in this treatment are based on the biological species concept, and this volume includes a discussion of the advantages of this species concept and the species taxa based on it. However, because this treatment of Australian passerines is also intended for use by general biologists, conservation managers, bird watchers, and interested lay persons, the authors felt that a general term for the basic units of Australian avian biodiversity was needed. This need is not well served by the phylogenetic species concept that would result in species taxa with widely different properties. Hence, the concept of the ultrataxon—a neutral grouping—was proposed to delimit the geographic units, generally subspecies, within species-level taxa. Use of the term "ultrataxon" is equivalent to the legal definition of "species" in some laws such as the U.S. Endangered

Species Act, and it avoids all of the problems and shortcomings associated with species taxa under the phylogenetic species concept.

The area covered is Australia and its territories (e.g. Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands), and extends to Christmas, Cocos, Macquarie, and Heard islands, as well as the Australian Antarctic Territories. Accepted vagrants are treated briefly in a supplementary list covering only the Australian region.

Each species taxon description begins on a new page and, for each, the ultrataxa (subspecies) are presented with a brief description of each with a standard map showing its breeding range and zones of intergradation, if any. Species taxa, whether monotypic or polytypic, are not described. Synonymies for species-group names are not given. Other discussion is brief and often includes taxonomic (including comments on the genus, the species, and ultrataxa) and nomenclature circumscriptions. Because of an ingenious scheme for subdividing Australia into geographic regions and subregions, and using acronyms for habitats (see p. 9), the included information for each species and the ultrataxa is immense. When combined with the detailed citations, this organization provides the reader with full information of the biodiversity and distribution of Australia's passerines. A number of new subspecies is described; these are clearly noted in the text and are listed in Chapter 4 with all other taxonomic changes proposed in this work. Families are introduced on a blue background that makes the start of each family easy to spot simply by looking at the edge of the volume. Each family is delimited and the genera rather briefly discussed. Authors and dates for generic names are not given, nor are generic-group synonymies included.

The same map of Australia, with state boundaries, cities, river systems, mountain ranges, and deserts, is presented on the front and back end pages. Additional maps (fig. 1, p. 9) showing geographic regions and subregions, and historic geographic barriers (fig. 2, p. 787), together with acronyms of habitat types, are provided. Extensive glossaries (27 pp.) for geographic, taxonomic, biological, etc., terms are provided, as is a large bibliography (23 pp.) as well as complete indices of scientific and common names (16 pp.). Although information about the diversity and distribution of Australian birds in this volume is terse, every effort was made by the authors to insure that users can find it.

The scheme followed in this volume allows the presentation of each ultrataxon in a clear and unambiguous way regardless of different opinions on the taxonomic status of the taxon. Hence, the endangered Black-eared Miner, often considered a separate species, is included here as the ultrataxon *Manorina flavigula melanotis* (p. 270), with a full discussion of the evidence supporting or refuting the advocated taxonomic position. In a similar manner, the Varied

Sittella (*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*; p. 428) is treated as a complex of five ultrataxa in a single species rather than five separate species, again with a full discussion of the evidence, in this case, supporting the decision. In this way, the 720 ultrataxa of Australian perching birds are clearly and consistently arranged in 340 species taxa corresponding to the biological species concept such that the information is available and useful to a diversity of ornithologists from the pure systematist to the practical conservation manager.

This initial volume of *The Directory of Australian Birds* is one of the most important works to be published in a number of decades on the diversity and distribution of a continental avifauna. It is certainly the most important such work to appear for Australian birds. Although an outstanding significant reference work for anyone with the slightest interest in the Australian avifauna, I can recommend it to everyone from bird watchers and conservation specialists to scientific ornithologists in all fields as the baseline for the systematics and distribution of Australian passerines. Richard Schodde and Ian Mason are to be congratulated for their several decades of hard work collecting the data needed to write this volume and for producing such an outstanding work. All ornithologists can look forward with anticipation and pleasure to the appearance of the promised two additional books in this series.—WALTER J. BOCK, *Department of Biological Sciences, Columbia University, 1200 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York 10027, USA.*

The Auk 117(3):842–844, 2000

Restoring North America's Wild Birds: Lessons from Landscape Ecology.—Robert A. Askins. 1999. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut. ISBN 0-300-07967-2. Paper, \$30.00.—Anyone questioning why wild birds are "flagships for conservation" will find their answers in this wonderful book. Robert Askins' eyes-wide-open approach to the task set forth in the title is utterly engaging, and, although clearly for people with avian affinities, it is especially relevant for conservation biologists from all walks of life.

Reading Askins' book was like being a student in a field course! In the first nine chapters (of a total of 10), I romped through the major biomes and habitats of North America, looking at each through the eyes of an experienced and impassioned naturalist-ornithologist. In each chapter, Askins focuses on a region's bird species and communities that are declining, at risk of decline or extinction, or are already extinct. Then, he sys-