

# Ornithological Literature

John Faaborg, Book Review Editor

**BIRDS OF NEW GUINEA.** By Thane K. Pratt and Bruce M. Beehler. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 2015: 9–528 pages. ISBN: 978-0-691-09563-9. \$49.50 (paperback).—This second edition of *Birds of New Guinea* is a substantial and significant revision of the venerable first edition, which I used during a birding trip to Papua New Guinea in 2012. During this trip I learned firsthand from a contributor to this book, our guide David Bishop, that much of the information was out-of-date and that a new edition was on its way.

What I did not expect is that besides the new information, there would be significant improvements in its organization and illustrations as well as the addition of range maps. With regard to the organization, there are virtually two books in one. The first main part consists of plates with paintings; the facing pages provide short descriptions focusing on identification and range maps. All of the 111 are new and in full color. In the first edition, the plates are located in about the middle of the book, include a handful of gray-scale illustrations, highly abbreviated notes on identification, and there are no range maps. The second main part consists of species accounts that follow summaries of Families, and there are often similarly highlighted sections that feature some groups of species. For example, there is a brief set of notes on goshawks and sparrowhawks within the accounts of Eagles and Hawks. The species accounts offer additional information about identification (including descriptions of sexual and age differences in plumage), subspecies, similar species, distribution, voice, habits, and behavior. In general, these accounts are far more detailed than those in the first edition.

The plates and species accounts follow introductory material that defines the scope of the book, provides hints about how to use it, and offers a concise summary of New Guinea natural history. There is also some especially insightful advice about finding birds in the field in New Guinea. In my experience this is not a place to casually visit for birdwatching without prior planning and study (or joining a reputable bird-tour group), and as the authors point out, it can be dangerous if you

are unaware of local customs, especially with regard to trespassing.

In summary, this field guide is a must for anyone contemplating serious birding or research on birds in New Guinea. It is as aesthetically pleasing as it is informative and authoritative. — H. CARL GERHARDT, Division of Biological Sciences, University of Missouri-Columbia, 215 Tucker Hall, Columbia, MO 65211-7400, USA; e-mail: gerhardth@missouri.edu

**THE CROSSLEY ID GUIDE: BRITAIN & IRELAND.** By Richard Crossley and Dominic Couzens. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 2014: 301 pages. ISBN: 978-0-691-15194-6. \$27.95 (Flexibound).—The latest addition to the Crossley field guides will have a familiar look to those who have used other guides in this series. The guide covers more than 300 species found in Britain and Ireland, including all rare species that occur regularly in this region. As with other Crossley guides, the species are not listed taxonomically, but are organized into broad groups. For example, the “swimming waterbirds” group includes swans, geese, ducks, cormorants, divers (loons), grebes and alcids. This can be a bit confusing for birders familiar with most other field guides, as species are not always where you expect to find them.

Each species is given up to a full page in the book, with lesser allocations for uncommon species (half page) and rarities (quarter page). Each features a photo montage, representing individuals in all plumage variations set against a background of its typical habitat. Crossley includes photos of individuals in common poses (e.g., foraging, flying), both near and far away, to give readers a sense of what the species looks like. Sometimes similar species are included in a montage for direct comparison.

Personally, I find the photo montages too cluttered and busy to be useful in the field. I find it much more difficult to pick out the essential details required for identification from among the many examples in a montage, and prefer the simpler sketches found in standard guides, such as my trusty Collins Bird Guide (Mullarney et al. 1999,

1st edition, HarperCollins Publishers, London, UK). However, if you have time to examine them closely, the photo montages are very useful in learning what the bird looks like in a variety of postures. Kids will also enjoy finding individuals hiding in the background habitat.

Each photo montage is accompanied by a written text description, by Dominic Couzens. The text offers detailed information on different plumages, where and when the species can be found in Britain and Ireland, their foraging behavior, and how to differentiate it from similar species. Dominic Couzens' descriptions are excellent, both a pleasure to read and packed full of useful information. For example, he describes Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) having a smaller head and more of a "beer gut" than Song Thrush (*T. philmelos*), something that is easily seen once pointed out, but difficult for novices to identify on their own. The focus on describing how to differentiate each species from other similar species is particularly welcome, as this aspect of bird identification is underemphasized in most other field guides. Unfortunately, the call and song descriptions tend to be fairly basic and lacking some needed details.

The text descriptions are where this field guide shines for me. I still prefer guides based on stylized, simplified paintings for use in field identification, and find the Crossley photo montages too busy to process quickly. Therefore, I am unlikely to take this book into the field with me. However, I will spend some time studying it before my next trip to the region.

Both authors are expert birders, and have managed to infuse the book with a lot of their knowledge on species behavior and the "jizz" of each species. I do not think this book will replace the standard field guides for most people, but it is a useful adjunct to them.—JUDITH D. TOMS, Eco-Logic Consulting, 8100a McPhail Rd, Saanichton, BC V8M 1S3, Canada; e-mail: judith.toms@zoho.com

**WITMER STONE: THE FASCINATION OF NATURE.** By Scott McConnell. Privately printed by Scott McConnell, USA. 2014: 411 pages. Book website: witmerstone.com; author email: witmer.stone@gmail.com; LCCN: 2014913017. Witmer Stone (1866–1939) was an all-around naturalist with a specialty in ornithology, whose career spanned a period of major changes in research on birds. He spent his career at the

Academy of Natural Sciences Philadelphia (ANSP) and was a major player in the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU). This biography is divided into a prologue, 17 chapters, an addendum, 2 Appendices, a brief bibliography and an extensive endnotes section. The prologue: "In Witmer's Shadow" McConnell explains how he came to write this book, and some of his thoughts and observations as he wrote it. Chapter 1 highlights Witmer Stone's boyhood in Philadelphia, and the development of broad interests in natural history, including the founding, with his brother and a group of friends, of the *Wilson Natural Science Association* and housing in his home the club's 'museum' of natural history specimens. Chapter 2 deals with Stone's schooling at Germantown Academy and then the University of Pennsylvania, where he received an A.B. degree in 1887, an A.M. degree in 1891, and an honorary Sc.D. in 2013. Chapter 3 follows Stone's career at the ANSP, starting with a Jessup Fund fellowship in 1888, where he was expected to assist in the Museum work while taking advantage of the Academy's extensive libraries and collections. He served as an assistant curator from 1892–1908, as curator 1908–1925, executive curator 1918–1925, director 1925–1928, and conservator of the ornithological section from 1881–1925, where he focused on reviving the ornithological collection that had been moribund since John Cassin's death in 1869. He was curator of vertebrate zoology from 1918–1934, and held several emeritus positions at the time of his death in 1939. The chapter deals at length with Stone's various accomplishments and frustrations over financial matters and the administrative duties that often kept him from his research. Chapter 4 deals with the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club (DVOC), Stone's role in the club, and the various characters who were his friends. He was a founding member of the DVOC in 1890, edited the Club's journal *Cassinia* for a decade, and was active in the Club throughout his adult life. Chapter 5: "Conservation Battles" follows Stone's involvement in the conservation movement. Early in his career, Stone was involved in conservation work with the AOU's Committee on Protection of North American Birds, which he chaired from 1898–1901, and the Pennsylvania Audubon Society. For decades, as editor of the AOU's *The Auk*, he pushed a strong conservation agenda. Although initially quiet on the issue, Stone eventually became embroiled in the controversy surrounding the U.S Biological Survey's predator

and rodent poisoning campaign, coming down strongly against the Survey's program, bringing him into conflict with, among others, A. K. Fisher who ran the Survey's program and was a prominent member of the AOU. In his most influential publication (see below), Stone had much to say about the loss of coastal habitat to construction, the mosquito control ditching, and pesticide application. He opposed the systematic killing of crows (*Corvus* spp.), including opposing the DuPont Company sponsorship of a \$2,500 reward to the club or person that could kill the most crows and "other vermin" in a period of three months. He was also outspoken on the issue of excessive collecting of birds and especially their eggs, arguing that in some areas these efforts were negatively impacting local bird populations. His championing the use of sight recognition of birds in field studies, rather than collecting, brought him into conflict with many of the older generation of "shotgun" ornithologists. Because of the DVOC's involvement with the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Stone was drawn into the middle of the fight between Rosalie Edge and the National Association of Audubon Societies (later National Audubon Society) for control of the Sanctuary in the mid-1930s. Chapter 6, "The Beautiful Science," traces Stone as an ornithologist, his interactions with other notable ornithologists, and his love of watching birds in the field. Stone was elected a Fellow of the AOU in 1892 at age 26, and had a long career with the AOU as a member of Council, Vice President, and President from 1921–1923. He was a member of the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature for 30 yrs, including 16 yrs as its chairman and served as editor of *The Auk* for 25 yrs. He did research and published on bird migration, molt, and taxonomy that moved him into the higher echelons of North American ornithologists and his work as editor garnered him an international reputation. Stone was also interested in ornithological history and was a great admirer and booster of Alexander Wilson.

The next two chapters deal with Stone's family life—he married at age 37 and the marriage produced no children—and his botanical pursuits. He was a founding member of the Philadelphia Botanical Club and for a decade in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was as much a botanist as ornithologist. This botanical work culminated in the publication of the book *The Plants of Southern New Jersey* (1911, part of the annual report of the New Jersey State Museum, Trenton), which became a classic. In 1912, when he became the editor

of *The Auk*, his interests in botany faded. Chapter 9, "An All-round Naturalist" traces Stone's contributions to mammalogy, herpetology, and entomology. The next two chapters describe at length Stone's work on systematics, particularly as a member and chairman (1915–1931) of the AOU's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of North American Birds, and his 25-yr editorship of *The Auk* (1911–1936). The account details the wars over excessive proliferation of subspecies, and the headaches involved with the production of the fourth edition of the AOU's *Check-list of North American Birds* in 1931. As editor, Stone faced the economic trials of World War I and the Great Depression and the pressure from a new generation of academically trained ornithologists to tighten the standards for what got published in *The Auk*.

A brief chapter on Stone's popular writings is followed by an extensive chapter on Stone's most significant publication, *Bird Studies at Old Cape May: An Ornithology of Coastal New Jersey* (1937, by the DVOC, Philadelphia). It includes his many summers spent at Cape May and the friends with whom he shared field adventures. The book was a great success, was lauded for Stone's writing style as well as its ornithological and historical content, and was very favorably reviewed. For example, Joseph Hickey wrote "[It] is written in a style that is very graceful, never pedantic, better than Brewster and approaching Thoreau." (*Bird-Lore*, 1938. 40:130–131.). Chapter 14 is really a history of the hawk wars of the 1920s and 1930s and the establishment of the Witmer Stone Wild Life Sanctuary on Cape May Point. Thousands of hawks were slaughtered on the Point during the annual fall raptor migration until a coalition of conservationists, including Stone, was successful in putting a stop to it. The following chapter, "A Genius for Friendship" describes Stone's unusually magnanimous and warm personality and his tendency to help anyone who sought help. A brief chapter deals with Stone's travels, which were somewhat restricted, and is followed by a last, poignant, chapter that details his failing health and ultimately his death. In an addendum, McConnell adds an historical perspective on Cape May and the changes that have occurred since Stone's death, some good, some bad, and ends with a very personal note on how Stone's *Bird Studies at Old Cape May* had enriched his own experiences. He closes with reference to his biography of Stone: "If this book stirs a similar reaction in its readers, or inspires a closer kinship with those

who have gone before, the author's greatest ambitions for the book will have been realized."

Appendix 1 presents brief biographical material on 17 of the ornithologists and other scientists who played a prominent role in the life of Witmer Stone and are frequently mentioned in the text. Appendix 2, "Development of *Bird Studies at Old Cape May*" presents a chronological listing of reports in *Cassinia*, Stone's talks, letters, and articles relating to Cape May.

This is a thoroughly researched biography of one of the leading figures in North American

ornithology of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. More than 2,000 end notes document this research. The book is well written, essentially error-free, and a pleasure to read. It should be on the shelves of every academic institution, and is a must read for anyone with interests in biography or the history of ornithology. McConnell is to be congratulated on producing this long overdue biography of a most interesting ornithologist and man.—WILLIAM E. DAVIS, JR., Professor Emeritus, Boston University, 23 Knollwood Drive, East Falmouth, MA 02536, USA; email: wedavis11@gmail.com