

Book reviews

By seeking to identify the Australian problems by both novel and established methods this book will go a long way to stimulate new research and conservation efforts. It is appropriate that WWF and IUCN were involved in promoting the book at a time when both organisations have embarked on a world-wide campaign to stimulate interest in the world's flora. Let us hope that this fine evaluation of universal concepts providing us with a very useful status report will be emulated by other nations.

Chris Humphries, Botany Section, British Museum (Natural History)

*Available from Globe Book Services, 107 Moray Street, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

The Doves, Parrots, Louries and Cuckoos of Southern Africa

M.K. Rowan

Croom Helm, London, 1983, £25.00

This volume, the third monograph on southern African birds to be published under the sponsorship of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, includes accounts of the indigenous species of four disparate families. Included here are the 13 species of doves and pigeons (Columbidae), six species of parrots and lovebirds (Psittacidae), three species of louries/turacos (Musophagidae) and 17 species of cuckoos and coucals (Cuculidae) which occur south of the Zambesi and Kunene Rivers.

The text by Mrs Rowan is based on an extensive and methodical extraction of data from a wide range of published (e.g. standard manuals, avifaunal lists, journals, newsletters) and unpublished sources (e.g. nest record cards, field notes, reports). Mrs Rowan also had the sagacity to enlist the help of an Advisory Panel of 30–35 eminent ornithologists with field experience who acted as referees and provided much new information. The species' accounts have been prepared in a standard pattern and include systematics, distribution and status, mensural data, plumage descriptions, social organisation, maintenance activities, reproduction, hybrids, moult, population dynamics, parasites, and relations with man. There are also clear maps showing the approximate distribution of those species that have a

restricted occurrence in the area, and eight, rather disappointing and dully coloured, plates by G. Arnott.

The author is to be congratulated for her impressive scholarship, concise, uncluttered writing, and the comprehensive coverage which includes references up to mid-1980. The book is not, and cannot have been intended to be, for any but the more serious birdwatcher and bird biologist, and as such it will be the standard reference work for many years. The wealth of knowledge within these covers should surely also be used for a series of well-illustrated books written for a wider public.

P.J. Olney, Curator of Birds, Zoological Society of London

The Bee-eaters

C.H. Fry

T. and A.D. Poyser, Calton, 1983, £19.60

Surprisingly, not since Dresser's sumptuous monograph, published over 100 years ago, has a book been devoted to this spectacular family of birds. Needless to say, the original publication is very much out of date, not readily available, and far too expensive for most private libraries. The new publication, therefore, is most welcome and will fill an unwanted gap on many book shelves.

The main body of the 260-page text is divided into seven chapters: Introduction, Species Accounts, Origin of Species, Food and Foraging, Bee-eaters and Apiculture, Social and Reproductive Life, and Evolving Specific Differences. A further 47 pages are devoted to nine appendices, which contain a glossary of scientific terms, names of other birds and mammals mentioned, breeding localities of the European bee-eater in southern Africa, nesting sites of the carmine bee-eater, detailed lists of prey of the little, red-throated, white-throated and European bee-eaters, notes on aberrant plumages, a bibliography and an index. Also included are eight coloured plates by the author, illustrating the recognised species and the majority of subspecies, while John Busby provided more than 100 line drawings and the dust jacket.

This monograph is based upon 20 years of

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research by the author, and contains all that is currently known about this family. The text is well put together and although it is packed with information, it is not just a list of facts; the extended accounts are lively and readable. My only criticism of the text is very minor, and concerns the presentation of the scientific names on pages 22–23. The capitalisation of the generic name is acceptable, but it should have been printed in italics. The decision to print the name in this fashion was probably made for clarity's sake, but there is a convention which should be followed—there is no room for artistic licence. The vignettes by John Busby are delightful and capture the 'jiz' perfectly, but the colour plates are somewhat disappointing and do not attain the excellence of the remainder of the book.

Whatever my criticisms, I can only thoroughly recommend this publication to both the professional and amateur. Needless to say, it will be the main source of reference for the bee-eaters for many years to come, and is a must for any library. Further, I would like to congratulate the publishers on producing yet another fine addition to their current series of ornithological titles. C.A. Walker, *Palaeontology Section, British Museum (Natural History)*

Snakes: Biology, Behaviour and Relationship to Man

Wolf-Eberhard Engelmann and Fritz Jürgen Obst
Croom Helm, London, 1984, £13.95

This is a comprehensive introduction to one of the least understood and most feared animal groups. The authors give a strong emphasis to explaining the influence and importance snakes have had on human cultures, across the world and throughout history.

The text is divided into chapters on evolution, anatomy, physiology, behaviour, diversity and systematic classification, and is refreshingly interspersed with briefer topics such as the religious, commercial and culinary use of snakes. Folklore, legends and fairy-tales concerning snakes are included and reinforce the impact of the book, which leaves the reader not only with an excellent insight into how snakes have adapted to their

present-day environments, but with a balanced perspective of how and why they have been exploited by the human race. *Snakes* is well illustrated with 73 colour plates, 83 black-and-white photographs and many line drawings among the 244 pages. Translated and revised from the original German text, the concluding pages on keeping snakes in the terrarium do not explore the recent trends of European legislation to control and limit the numbers of snakes entering the pet trade, or the importance of encouraging the study of these animals in the field rather than in the home.

Tom Langton, *GLC London Pond and Newt Survey Officer*

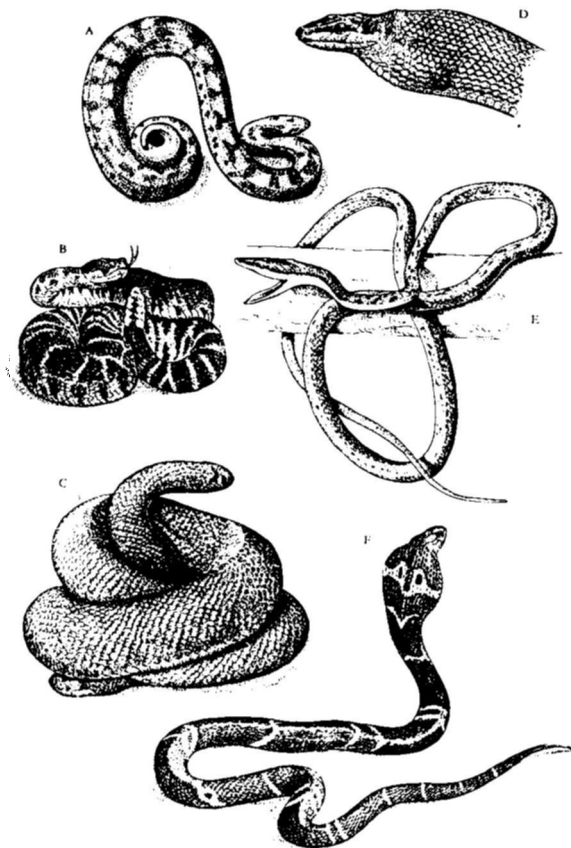


Illustration from *Snakes* showing defensive display in: A. tartar sand boa; B. Prairie rattlesnake; C. rubber boa; D. red-tailed racer; E. bicuda; F. spectacled cobra.

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