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Review of *Waterfowl in Australia* by H. J. Frith

Paul A. Johnsgard
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, pjohnsgard1@unl.edu

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WATERFOWL IN AUSTRALIA. By H. J. Frith. East-West Center Press, Honolulu. 1967: 6 × 9 in., 328 pp., 5 col. pls. many bl. and wh. illus., 19 distribution maps. $10.00.

Our dearth of knowledge concerning Australian waterfowl has, until recently at least, been so severe as to once stimulate Ernst Mayr to write a paper (Emu, 45:229–232, 1946) reminding Australians how little was then known about their native waterfowl. The situation was especially serious in view of the fact that no fewer than six of Australia's 19 species of indigenous waterfowl represent monotypic genera that are largely or entirely restricted to that continent. Furthermore, these include such phylogenetically significant and taxonomically controversial genera as *Anseranas*, *Cereopsis*, *Malacorhynchus*, and *Stictonetta*, the last two of which have never been available for behavioral study outside Australia. In view of this, any amount of new information on Australian waterfowl must be enthusiastically welcomed; an entire book on the subject can only be regarded as a godsend.

H. J. Frith's studies on Australian waterfowl go back to the mid-1950s, when he discovered the interesting fact that several duck species of interior Australia have their breeding seasons timed by local water conditions rather than by photoperiod changes or other proximate factors. More recently he was placed in charge of the Division of Wildlife Research of the C.S.I.R.O., the governmental agency charged with conducting and integrating scientific research in Australia. This has placed him in the enviable position of organizing federally-supported research efforts related to waterfowl, and one of the fruits of this situation is the present book.

Unlike the recent monograph by Delacour, Frith has not resorted to the simple expedient of publishing extensive quotations of possible historical interest but dubious current value. Instead, each species is dealt with intensively, and the information on distribution and movements, habitats, and breeding biology are of particular value.

Some of these data are from still unpublished C.S.I.R.O. studies that would otherwise be totally unavailable to most biologists. Numerous photographs of both wild and captive waterfowl add interest, and those illustrating underwater swimming postures of various diving species are especially instructive. Particularly useful features of the book are the detailed distribution maps, the abundant mensural data, the sonograms of representative vocalizations, and the comprehensive colored paintings of Australian waterfowl. These illustrations are mostly based on live specimens and as a result the soft-part colors and postures are generally well done. That of the Freckled Duck is notable for its accurate shaping of the head and bill, although the body is too short and rotund. However, the Musk Duck suffers by comparison with Peter Scott's feather-perfect rendition of the species in Delacour's monograph. The plate of downy young was evidently not done from live specimens, since many of them are too fat, drawn off-balance, or are otherwise misleading. The Australian White-eye ("Hardhead") should not have a definite eye-stripe, the downy Magpie Goose should have a more yellow-orange bill and whitish underparts, and the *Dendrocygna* ducklings not only lack complete nape-stripes but the diagnostic markings of the two species have unfortunately been reversed. The most valuable feature of the plate is that it includes the first published color reproduction of a downy Freckled Duck.

Although it is not surprising that Frith should have concentrated on citing primarily Australian authors and regional literature, this reviewer found it a sobering experience, after having published a book and ten additional papers dealing partially or entirely with Australian Anatidae, to be grudgingly included in an otherwise gratefully anonymous category of "authors with no new information." This provincial outlook might account for Frith's numerous erroneous statements, including the idea that the Ringed Teal is a blue-winged duck, that ritualized feeding of shovelers "is usually performed face to face and is stationary," that copulation in Pink-eared Ducks has not been observed, that the courtship display of pochards is "not unlike that of the river ducks," or that the eclipse plumage of Blue-billed Ducks was previously unreported. Frith's "new" anserine tribe Stictonettini was in fact first suggested by the reviewer in 1960. Most remarkably, Frith reports that Musk Ducks "have two molts per year and both involve the wings and tail," which, if true, would be unique in the family and notable among birds as a whole. Frith confirms that the musky odor of male Musk Ducks is derived, as had been suspected, from the "uropygian" gland. There are a number of other minor spelling errors involving such names as J. C. Phillips, *Thalassornis*, and *Cairina moschata*. These weaknesses should not overly detract from the many good features which the book exhibits. Together with P. A. Clancey's recently published "Gamebirds of South Africa," it provides an invaluable source of material on plumages, measurements, and nesting biology data for a wide variety of southern hemisphere waterfowl. These books are bound to stimulate more research on species that have previously received little if any attention, and additionally provide a highly instructive counterpoint to the numerous volumes that have been published on northern hemisphere waterfowl.—PAUL A. JOHNSGARD.