

OBSERVATIONS ON BIRDS OF SOUTH-EASTERN BRAZIL. By M. H. MITCHELL. Toronto University Press. London: Oxford University Press. 45s.

The main part of this book consists of notes on 289 species identified by Mrs. Mitchell in South-Eastern Brazil during four years' residence in Rio de Janeiro. Sight identifications were checked against the excellent skin collection in the São Paulo State Museum, and Mrs. Mitchell was fortunate in having the advice of Dr. Olivério Pinto in the compilation of her notes. The systematic arrangement and nomenclature are mainly in agreement with those of Hallmayr, with the addition of several recent and reasonable modifications. There is an interesting collection of Portuguese common names and their meanings.

The notes are largely personal observations written in a pleasant informal style, which clearly show that the study of birds in their natural surroundings is of absorbing interest to the author. There are amusing accounts both of the manufacture of whistles to imitate bird calls and the use of one in an hotel dining-room which elicited a response from a Capueira Partridge waiting its turn for table use. But the notes are made with due regard to what has been said before and the text is annotated with comments from well over one hundred sources of information. We admire the thoroughness with which Mrs. Mitchell has studied the literature and clarified a number of small points, as for instance Joyner's "Rio Claro". Another admirable feature is the lengthy introductory section in which general surveys are given, again purely from personal experience, of the bird life of the various states in the area covered; and the author shows her awareness of modern subjects of field study with valuable comments on avian associations or "bird parties".

In the literature of South American ornithology the emphasis is mainly on taxonomy, largely because the writers have been "extralimital" and their sources of information preserved specimens. There is a great dearth of data on what live birds look like in their habitats, what those habitats are and how the birds behave in them. Mrs. Mitchell lived in the country and watched the birds throughout the seasons. But although this is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to ornithology, it is only fair to make the comment that the book would not be of much use to anyone depending on it for means of identification.

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