

ecology of every breeding seabird of the region, sometimes by an outside specialist, such as J. C. Coulson on the kittiwake. To many ornithologists the map section and detailed appendices at the end will be one of its most valuable features.

RICHARD FITTER

**Oiseaux de l'Île Maurice et de Rodrigue**, by France Staub and Rivaltz Chevreau. Mauritius Printing Co. Port Louis, Mauritius, 3.50.

So much has been written about the extinct dodo of Mauritius and solitaire of nearby Rodrigues that one might suppose there was nothing left to be written about the avifauna of these tiny Indian Ocean Islands. Not so, for on these two islands there still exists a unique and interesting avifauna which is at last receiving the long overdue attention it deserves. The present volume is the first popular treatment of these birds, and it comes at a time when efforts to save the endemics from extinction are gaining support. An informative book, it is an important contribution to the conservation effort.

The text, in French, covers briefly the life histories of 78 of the islands' birds, including not only the 14 endemic or indigenous forms, but also migrants, seabirds and introduced species. Much of the information is new, based on the authors' own field work, but, unfortunately, some old published inaccuracies are perpetuated. The style is an easy-to-read narrative rather than a stiff field-guide format. Unfortunately, there is neither a complete checklist nor reference maps.

The book is well illustrated with 47 good-quality photographs, 13 in colour—the first time that all the endemic birds have been illustrated in one book, and, for some species, the first photographs ever to be published.

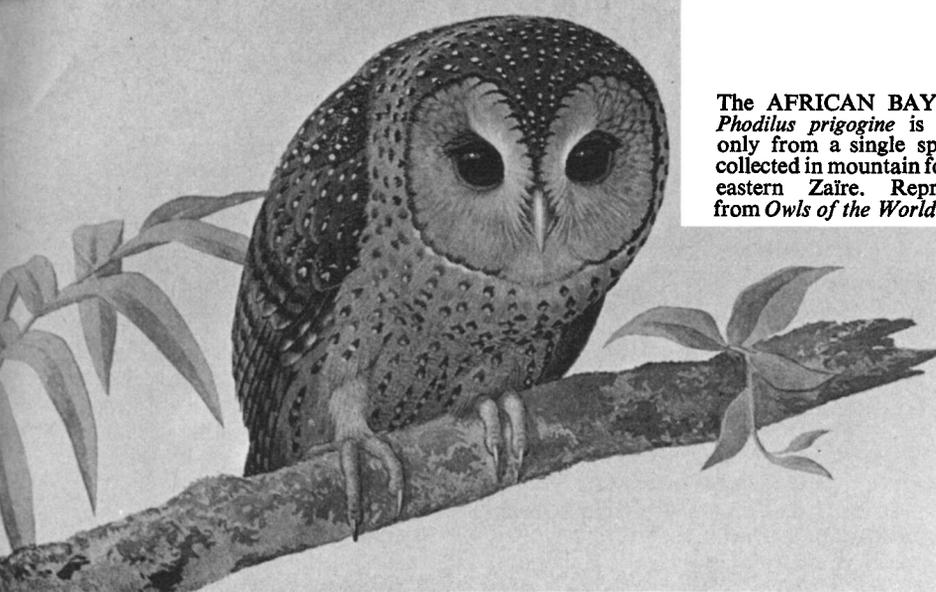
A welcome guide to the increasing number of birdwatchers now visiting Mauritius and Rodrigues, this should be a standard work for some time. An English language version should be available in 1975.

STANLEY A. TEMPLE

**Owls of the World**, edited by John A. Burton. Peter Lowe, £5.95.

To give an account of the 130-odd species of owls known in the world (many of them very ill-known) is an ambitious project, only attainable with a team of writers. The result is an extremely useful reference work but suffers from the inevitable inequalities of team work.

The Introduction and the three general chapters composing Part 1, by John Sparks, C. A. Walker and Philip Burton, present the biological characteristics, ecology, history and lore of owls competently, though with some repetition. Part 2, the bulk of the book, describes owls in six groups, each tackled by a different author, and each containing distribution maps and copious colour illustrations (photographs and paintings). First, Ian Prestt and Reginald Wagstaffe document the world-wide distribution and differentiation of the successful barn and bay owls group adequately. One might cavil at the description of *Tyto alba gracilirostris* as the Canary Islands barn owl, since this subspecies is found only on the two eastern islands, the western ones containing the widespread *Tyto a. alba*. Furthermore, the area of overlap of the white-breasted and dark-breasted barn owls (*T. a. alba* and *T. a. guttata*) is underestimated in the distribution map, since the latter occurs in the Channel Islands. The statement about



The AFRICAN BAY OWL *Phodilus prigogine* is known only from a single specimen collected in mountain forest in eastern Zaïre. Reproduced from *Owls of the World*

intermediates needs clarification because the two forms are known, in Burgundy at least, to behave more like a dimorphic species.

Michael Fogden's extremely well presented section on fish, eagle, and snowy owls is full of first-hand observation, and easily the most informative and tidy section in the book. This is partly because the group dealt with is tractable and not too difficult taxonomically. By contrast the chapter on scops and screech owls, by G.P. Hekstra, must have been a nightmare to write because of the multitudes of ill-known forms.

Heimo Mikkola on wood owls gives much valuable first-hand information on habits, diets and inter-relationships of species that he has specially studied—the great grey, Ural and tawny owls—and other species are covered competently enough. In Colin Harrison's interesting section on 'hawk owls', the inter-relationships of the three *Ninox* species in Australia make a fascinating story, as revealed by the studies of David Fleay. The intriguing fragmentation of forms in the New Guinea region is not easy to present but the author has made a very clear job of it. Howard Ginn has struggled manfully with a world-wide rag-bag under the heading of little, pygmy and elf owls, covering the genera *Athene*, *Speotyto*, *Micrathene*, *Glaucidium*, *Aegolius* and *Pseudoscops*. Islands of knowledge stand out from the sea of ignorance about the more recondite forms and the author has made the best he could of them.

Part 2 ends with a chapter on conservation by Ronald Murton and a brief note about owl pellets by David Glue. The former emphasises rightly the basic need for conserving habitats and the difficulties of gathering adequate population data for rare species, on which to base conservation measures. A very brief Part 3 contains a check-list of species, a section on calls, expressed rather unsatisfactorily in syllables, a glossary and a short list of books for further reading.

The illustrations have posed problems. The commoner species are shown in colour photographs, some quite superb, others showing overtones of colour (pages 82 & 83), while others are just plain bad (pages 100 & 101). Rarer species have been painted by John Rignall and tend to be rather two-dimensional plumage maps.

By and large, this is a very worthwhile production and, considering the lavishness of the illustrations, the price is not out of the way today.

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