

Review

Lee, W.G.; Jamieson, I.G. (ed.) 2001. *The takahe. Fifty years of conservation management and research*

University of Otago Press, Dunedin. ISBN 1-8772-76-01-4.
pp. 132. 15 × 23 × 1 cm. \$39.95.

In 1948 the rediscovery of the long-lost, flightless takahe in a remote Fiordland valley aroused enormous public interest. The news was reported in the London *Times* as well as local newspapers. This journal was renamed *Notornis*, then the generic name for the bird, and the journal's publishers adopted the takahe as the Society emblem. The story of the rediscovery of the takahe remains a perennial favourite and is now firmly ingrained in New Zealand folklore. Its rediscovery marked the dawn of a new era in conservation. Public interest was such that efforts to save the species from extinction were expected, and if takahe should be saved then so too should other rare species. But, half a century ago saving an endangered species was a pioneering task with few precedents. Takahe have been a focus for conservation for 50 years making this one of the world's longest-running endangered species programmes. Over that period takahe management has changed reflecting the growing sophistication of endangered species management. The takahe is now one of New Zealand's most intensively studied bird species with, according to Lee and Jamieson, over 90 studies having been published since 1948.

This book grew out of a symposium on the takahe held in Dunedin in 1998 to mark the 50th anniversary of the rediscovery of the species. The book consists of 9 essays and papers written by people who have been, or are currently, involved with takahe conservation. It is timely to publish a review of the biology and conservation of the takahe, for not only is the half century a symbolic milestone but the last decade has seen some significant advances in takahe conservation. Conservation scientists and managers have much to learn from the often controversial path followed by the takahe workers. Bird watchers and the general public will enjoy a retelling of the rediscovery story and will be interested in an update on the continuing takahe saga. My only reservation about this book is how well this slim volume has met the needs of both markets. I assume that the book is aimed primarily at a professional audience.

The first 3 chapters will appeal to the lay readership. The introduction by Bill Lee and Ian Jamieson

and the takahe story as told by Alison Ballance are both informative and enjoyable. A highlight of the book is the republication of an article written by Joan Watson, one of the party that rediscovered the birds in 1948. This is a truly delightful essay, which, 50 years after 1st publication, tells us more about the bushman-hunter-naturalists (a 'species' now almost as endangered as the takahe) who found the birds than about the birds themselves.

The remaining chapters are written by scientists, primarily for a professional readership. They provide conservation professionals with a solid review of various aspects of takahe biology and management. They are all well referenced, helpfully directing readers into the original literature. For professionals and university students these chapters are an invaluable resource. However, I suspect that bird watchers and lay people who buy the book after browsing the 1st 3 chapters may well feel short changed. However, these chapters are not as esoteric as they first appear and lay readers who persist with them will be rewarded by some fascinating insights into takahe biology and management.

There is an interesting chapter on the origins and prehistoric ecology of takahe. The taxonomic relationships and prehuman ecology of endangered species provide valuable insights into how the surviving populations can best be managed. This has been a source of controversy with takahe, yet despite the important contribution historical knowledge eventually made to takahe conservation these factors are still routinely ignored in the management of other species. Other chapters review the management of the birds in Fiordland, in captivity and on offshore islands.

The last chapter, by John Craig, presents a critical review of 50 years of takahe research and management. As we have come to expect from John, it is provocative and evaluates the contribution takahe management has made to the developing discipline of conservation biology. Bill Lee, an active participant in takahe research presents an "insider's" appraisal of the half-century of takahe conservation. People involved in endangered species research or management should read both chapters. A comparison of the appraisals of an active participant and a

critic will provide conservation professionals with much food for thought. For instance, in Craig's opinion the release of juvenile birds in to the Stuart Mountains was an expensive exercise doomed to failure as the assumptions on which this location was chosen were untested and ultimately proven incorrect. Lee on the other hand is less trenchant in his appraisal of this move. He agrees with Craig that in hindsight the location was not a wise choice, but points out that the releases did provide valuable experience for subsequent releases of captive-raised birds into the wild.

This book is an essential addition to all New Zealand university, secondary school, and public libraries. I hope it will also be read by people involved with endangered species elsewhere in the world. It presents an honest and balanced review of the successes and failures of takahe research and management. There are many lessons to be learned.

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Review

Onley, D.; Bartle, J.A. 1999 (reprinted 2001). *Identification of seabirds of the Southern Ocean: A guide for scientific observers aboard fishing vessels*

Te Papa Press, Wellington. ISBN 0-909-01047-1
pp. 81, Hardcover, 20 colour plates. \$34.95

First produced in 1999 as a specialist book for the fishing industry, and printed in English, French, Russian, and Spanish formats, *Identification of seabirds of the Southern Ocean* has now been reprinted and is being offered to a wider audience. It was originally intended specifically for observers studying seabird mortality from fishing vessels as part of the international effort to reduce the significant decline in some seabird populations. The guide follows the scheme of International Scientific Observation as set out by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMIR). It focuses on identifying only those seabirds that associate directly with fisheries, especially long line fisheries, in the Antarctic and subantarctic waters of the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans beyond 40°S, and covers 36 species.

The guide simplifies the process of seabird identification through a series of well-planned keys which are complemented by colour plates on facing pages and followed by specific descriptions. Derek Onley's drawings clearly illustrate the diagnostic characteristics identified in the text. After measuring the bird using methods shown in Plate 1 the observer keys out the bill (Plates 2 and 3) before being directed to the appropriate group of birds — albatross, shearwater, petrel, skua, or gull. Here further keys, descriptions, and measurements are used to determine the species.

Only those species that can be readily separated by straight-forward identification are given. Thus of the 20 or so species of albatross distinguished by recent research including DNA studies, only 15 are dealt with here. Plates are arranged so that birds of similar appearance, such as flesh-footed shearwater *Puffinus carneipes*, black petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni*, and Westland petrel *P. westlandica*, are grouped together. Following the plates is a concise section on the breeding, population distribution, and, in relation to ships and fisheries, the behaviour of each species. It is interesting to learn that during winter, between 1989 and 1997, the grey petrel *Procellaria cinerea* was the most frequently caught seabird on southern bluefin tuna long lines around New Zealand.

The authors have braved the current seabird taxonomic confusion using scientific names taken mostly from Mayr & Cottrell's *Checklist of birds of the world*. Common names are those most widely used internationally, so New Zealand readers will look in vain for "mollymawks", "grey-faced petrel" or "black-backed gull".

Strangely, given that the guide is to be used at sea, it is not a book that will stand up to wet conditions. This is no doubt a result of monetary constraints.

So does this guide have application for other users such as those involved with southern hemisphere