

REVIEWS

Recent books on kiwi

The Incredible Kiwi: A Wild South Book. by Neville Peat, 1990. Random Century New Zealand Ltd., Auckland. 124pp. ISBN 1 86941 061 0 (paperback); ISBN 1 86941 084 X (hardback). NZ\$35.00 (paperback).

Neville Peat's book "The Incredible Kiwi" was published to complement the television documentary on the kiwi filmed by Television New Zealand. The book is superbly researched and presents, in an affordable volume, an easy to read, accurate and informative account of the kiwi. It is illustrated throughout with first-class photographs.

The book starts with a delightful account of New Zealander's strange love affair with the name and image of a bird so few have seen in the wild. Peat then traces the ancestry of the kiwi and relates early human interactions with it, including the place of kiwi in Maori culture and the insatiable demand of 19th century Europeans for kiwi skins for museums and fashion accessories. The recent growth in our knowledge and understanding of these strange mammal-like birds and the growing awareness of the need for their effective conservation is recounted, and the experience gained with rearing and sustaining kiwi in captivity is discussed.

To produce a book of this scope Peat had to draw on a wide range of sources. While these provided Peat with an overview of the facts as they are currently understood, the vividness and liveliness of the text suggest that the personal experience Peat gained with kiwi in the wild through contact with John McLennan and Rogan Colbourne had a profound and beneficial effect on this book.

Kiwis. A Monograph of the family Apterygidae. by Errol Fuller, (Ed.) 1990. SeTo Publishing, Auckland. 187pp. ISBN 1 85310 220 2 (hardback) NZ \$189.00.

"Kiwis" is a lavish production, superbly illustrated by Ray Harris-Ching. "Kiwis" is presented in 11 chapters written by seven authors. To Fuller's credit the different styles and individuality of the different authors remain apparent. Unfortunately this freedom has resulted in considerable variation in the amount of detail presented in different sections by the different authors. There is also a serious inconsistency in the way that bill lengths are presented: how the measurements were taken is not given, but it would appear that they are sometimes presented as tip to cere measurements while at other times they appear to be tip to gape measurements.

Chapter 1 by J.R.H. Andrews presents a detailed and coherent history of kiwi discovery by 19th century Europeans and the slow (and continuing) efforts to unravel the taxonomic relationships of kiwi. The chapter concludes with an account of the exploits of the dedicated, and often unscrupulous, professional collectors and natural historians. While the activities of these men did unquestionable harm to kiwi populations in many locations, they were the first to raise concern about the effects habitat destruction and exotic predators were having on kiwi.

Chapters 2-6 were written by John McLennan and comprise a general introduction to Brown Kiwi followed by chapters on each of the currently recognised subspecies of Brown Kiwi, and a chapter on the Great Spotted Kiwi. McLennan's vast experience working with kiwi shows, and he presents a delightful account of the joys and the anguish that come with efforts to study kiwi in the wild. McLennan presents a well-written summary of our current understanding of the ecology of these kiwi, based on data that are so hard-won.

Chapter 7 by Jim Jolly presents a succinct account of the status, distribution, habitat, diet, breeding biology and management of the Little Spotted Kiwi.

Chapter 8, on kiwis in a pine forest, is an extended account by Ruud Kleinpaste of the study he and Rogan Colbourne made of kiwi in Waitangi State Forest in the early 1980's. The chapter is presented in Kleinpaste's unique free-flowing style which he uses to great effect to relate his personal experiences with kiwi. Many of the figures in the first half of this chapter are from published papers by Kleinpaste and Colbourne. In the second half of the chapter Kleinpaste presents a mass of unpublished data on the diet of kiwi in Waitangi. While Kleinpaste's style is entertaining, much of the detail presented here would have been more suited to publication in a scientific journal.

In chapter 9, Martin Fingland presents an informative account of the aviculture of the kiwi. This chapter comprises a history of the aviculture of kiwi, details on the design of nocturnal houses and breeding enclosures, the development of procedures of artificially incubating kiwi eggs, diseases and parasites of kiwi in captivity, and a summary of research undertaken on kiwi in captivity. He concludes with a discussion of the role of aviculture in the conservation of kiwi.

In chapter 10, William Calder III presents a treatise on a topic that has long fascinated him: the unusual allometric relationships between the kiwi and its' egg. While Calder III has had several previous publications on this subject, this chapter presents his fullest treatment yet on this topic.

The history of kiwi in art is the topic of the final chapter by Carol Sinclair Smith. While comparatively brief, this is an important and interesting chapter, particularly since one of the greatest beauties of this book is the superb artwork that accompanies the text. Ray Harris-Ching has managed to capture the vital essence of these captivating birds and to present them as living, breathing, active creatures. This is indeed the finest collection of kiwi artwork available in a single published volume. The combination of the high quality artwork and the wide-ranging text justify the price-tag. This book should become a valuable collector's item.

Kiwi - A Secret Life. by Jim Jolly, 1991. New Zealand Natural Heritage Foundation, Massey University, Palmerston North. 62pp. ISBN 0 908864 23 X NZ\$19-95 (paperback).

Jim Jolly's book "Kiwi - A Secret Life" is the first title in the "Nature of New Zealand" series. This book differs from the previous two books in

being aimed at a young audience - 9 to 14 years olds are the primary target. The stated aim of the series is “to give interesting, well-illustrated, readable and accurate information, to show scientific research in action, and to introduce young people to some of the issues associated with caring for our natural heritage”. Jolly’s book goes a long way towards achieving these admirable goals. The story is presented in a simple style and covers a reasonably broad range of topics. The introduction presents a brief history of the discovery of kiwi by Europeans. This is followed by a well-illustrated short story of a night in the life of a kiwi. Chapter 3, entitled “From egg to adult”, continues this story through breeding and incubation, and the early development of the chick. Jolly follows this with an account of his study of Little Spotted Kiwi on Kapiti Island, consideration of why kiwi don’t fly, and a discussion on the relationship between kiwi and other birds. The next section, entitled “The hidden bird of Tane - some Maori traditions”, is one I really enjoyed. The description of weaving a kahu kiwi is a story seldom told and it is encouraging to see it included in a book of this nature. Jolly then discusses the need for kiwi conservation, and concludes with a ‘fact file’ on kiwi. The use of lower case ‘a’s on *apteryx* is unfortunate in a production with otherwise very few errors. This book should achieve its goal of helping to inform younger New Zealanders about kiwi, and the list of New Zealand zoos and nocturnal houses with kiwi along with a list of further reading will hopefully encourage some of the target readers to seek more information on these fascinating birds.

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds. Vol 1, Ratites to Ducks. by Marchant, S., Higgins, P.J., Eds. 1990. Oxford University Press, Melbourne-Oxford. ISBN 0 19 553068 3. 1400 p. Price \$265.00

HANZAB presents the first review of the ratites of Australasia. The text is authoritative and broad in scope, while following HANZAB’s succinct style. Much unpublished data are incorporated with the review of published material making this an invaluable reference work on ratites. While HANZAB’s coverage of the available data on ratites is excellent there are several disturbing errors. The summary notes at the start of Family APTERYGIDAE (p 71) state that kiwi do not develop a brood patch; this is not true: male kiwi of all species develop brood patches, as do female Brown Kiwi on Stewart Island. On p 84 it is claimed for *Apteryx owenii* that “Before departure, [chicks are] brooded by male in burrow at night only”. Brooding actually occurs during the day, starting in the early morning and extending into the evening. The distribution maps for kiwi also contain major errors. Brown Kiwi (p 74) are shown to be on D’Urville Island (Marlborough Sound), while Little Spotted Kiwi (p 82) are not. The reality is (was) the other way around. The occurrence of Little Spotted Kiwi on Long Island is also incorrectly shown: Little Spotted Kiwi have been transferred to Long Island in Queen Charlotte Sound, not to Long Island in Fiordland.

Reviewed by Murray Potter