

REVIEWS

The birds around us. New Zealand birds, their habits and habitats by Geoff Moon. William Heinemann (NZ) Ltd. pp. 1-206.

Those who bought this book at the Book of the Month price of \$15.95 are lucky. Even at the increased price since then, it will be money well spent.

The brief foreword is by the late Sir Robert Falla. There are 357 colour plates, illustrating 107 species of birds, arranged in the sequence of the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*.

Geoff Moon, veterinarian turned bird photographer, a man of almost infinite patience when he wants to photograph a bird, is already renowned in New Zealand and overseas for his bird pictures. He has kept his text to a minimum, but it is adequate to explain his superb photographs. If he should not publish another book — and I hope there will be many more from his pen and camera — this volume, as well as those which preceded, will be monument to the patience, devotion and skill of one of the world's best photographers. The production is superb.

Buy it if you can. If you cannot (and as I write, three leading Christchurch booksellers are sold out), borrow it. Enjoy it, and count yourself lucky that we have a Geoff Moon to do for our delight what many of us cannot do for ourselves.

— RON SCARLETT

Waterfowl: ducks, geese and swans of the world by Frank S. Todd. Sea-World Press. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York and London. \$US45.00.

The city of San Diego in southern California must surely be the most outstanding in the world for seeing animals in almost ideal conditions of captivity: there is its Zoo, its Wild Animal Park and its Sea World, each enlightened in concept, brilliant in design and enviable in its record of animal health and breeding success. And the range of species held by the three organisations as a whole is superlative: almost every family of vertebrate — terrestrial, freshwater, marine, polar, temperate, tropical; most things from whales to humming-birds, and even some invertebrates as well.

By no means least among the collections is that of waterfowl at Sea World. Only the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge rivals it in comprehensiveness and setting; in fact, those responsible for its research and management programmes call the Sea World collection "Slimbridge West" — a humorously affectionate unofficial title that not only pays tribute to the Trust but pretty accurately reflects the scope, quality and philosophy of Sea World's achievements.

The creator and curator of all this (as the dust jacket neatly puts it) is the author of this book; and Frank S. Todd has done an excellent job. *Waterfowl* is large and lavishly illustrated and cannot help but remind you of Forshaw's *Parrots of Australia* in that it, too,

is big and glossy and relies on colour photographs to depict the species and subspecies it deals with. According to the author, every one of the world's approximately 150 species and 250 subspecies *is* dealt with; and although I must confess that I haven't unduly gone out of my way to verify this in the main body of the text (a pretty daunting task, especially when there are taxonomic hassles to keep in mind), it certainly is true of Appendix 1, which is a concise reference guide to *all* the world's waterfowl, arranged according to the systematic scheme of Delacour and Mayr, and which includes summaries of distribution, nesting and status, both captive and in the wild — a tour de force in itself!

With an average of about three pictures per subspecies (five per species) it is obvious that habitats and behaviours are illustrated too; though, to complete the matter of illustrations, I must say that one criticism I am sure I won't be alone in making is that far too many are too small to be decorative, let alone useful (some are little more than 5 sq. cm in area), though the colour reproduction is uniformly very good indeed.

Now for the text: there are sixteen chapters, one for every Tribe (except the Anserini, the swans and true geese, which quite properly has two), one for the screamers (which, according to Todd, are waterfowl's closest relatives), a general introduction, a survey of the classification of the Family (Todd sticks closely to Delacour and Mayr, though he admits the advantages of Johnsgard's reorganisation, which he gives), a survey of captive display, maintenance and propagation, and finally, a discussion of the future of waterfowl in our exploited world. There are two appendices — the one I have already referred to and another on photographing waterfowl. A glossary, selected bibliography and an index conclude this comprehensive book.

But how reliable is the text; or is the book just a pretty face destined to grace coffee tables already braced to bear such monumentals as *Parrots of the World*, *Rails of the World*, etc? With a work as compendious as this by an author so experienced, it would need a brave and knowledgeable waterfowl expert to tackle Todd on his text as a whole, and so I have taken a non-random sample, the waterfowl fauna of New Zealand, to see how that measures up as an indicator of the rest.

Black Swan: Todd says they were introduced to NZ "175" years ago. This *could* be a misprint for "115", which is correct. He states that more than 100 000 once occurred on Lake Ellesmere. Well, that's possible I suppose but one wonders where the figure originally came from. He has no figure for the usual clutch size in this species but 5-6 would be a satisfactory figure for NZ.

Canada Goose: I'm a little surprised that the author hasn't ascertained that at least one subspecies in NZ is the Giant Canada Goose — *B. canadensis maximus*.

Cape Barren Goose: The date of introduction to this country (successful, that is) was 1914, certainly not in the "late 1880s". It would not be regarded as a NZ resident or even occasional vagrant at present.

Paradise Shelduck: A weight range for females is given, strangely none for males. The commonest clutch sizes would probably be 9 and 10 rather than 8.

Grey Duck: There is no mention of their occurrence at the Kermadecs, Chathams and Snares. The clutch size range of "5-13" does encompass the most common which is probably 10.

Grey Teal: No clutch sizes are given. The "New Guide to the Birds of New Zealand" states 5-9.

Brown Teal: Todd says they occur on "the Barrier Islands"; "Great Barrier" would be correct. His clutch size is "3-4"; "5-7" would be better. Full marks to him, though, for being right up-to-date with the rediscovery of the Campbell Island teal. He comments that in *A. aucklandica chlorotis*, albinism is "not particularly uncommon". Is it right to single out this form among NZ waterfowl to mention Oliver's comments on this point?

NZ Scaup: Todd states they occur on the Auckland and the Chathams; they do not; and strictly the species name is "*novaezeelandiae*" not "*novae-seelandiae*". No clutch size is given; the *New Guide* states "5-8".

As is usual with such things, one could quibble about the estimates of numbers Todd has quoted for the NZ populations of scaup, blue ducks and brown ducks; however, whether these are the "best" figures or not, the point is at least made that concern should be felt about such species.

Two more criticisms and I have done: no NZ author has been included in the bibliography; this is surprising and rather disappointing when one recalls how often this country and its waterfowl conservation activities are mentioned in the text. And the spelling of Grzimek is not "Grizmek"; though anglo-saxons may perhaps be forgiven for refusing to believe that a name can exist without a vowel in its first three letters.

Well, even if the New Zealand errors, none of which are major, were representative of the sections dealing with the faunas of other regions, Frank Todd's batting average is still probably at least as good as most compilers of tomes like this. As an "overview" (revolting vogue word!) of the world's waterfowl it can be heartily recommended for its comprehensiveness, lack of jargon and general attractiveness (though I, for one, prefer books to be no wider than they are long). If you are an anseriphile and can afford it, you'd be a goose not to add it to your collection.

G. R. WILLIAMS