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REVIEW

Drawing Birds - An RSPB Guide, by John Busby (Christopher Helm).
Distributed in New Zealand by Benton Ross Publishers Ltd.

Many readers of "Birds", the RSPB magazine, will already be familiar with the illustrations of John Busby. A friend and pupil of the late Eric Ennion, Busby is very much his natural successor. Born in 1928, Busby's work continues the tradition of studying by direct observation from nature with resulting vitality and spontaneity. Busby is highly critical of the pseudo-scientific approach of some illustrators, though his own approach to painting is intellectual. He has very clear views about the painting of wildlife, thinking that the subject of "truth" is often confused. He discerns two kinds of truth – one that is to do with facts that can be measured and recorded, the other revealed only through the personal interpretation of the artist's experience of reality. To submerge this latter personal truth in a saturation of objective detail is not the business of art and in fact the much sought-after authenticity is lost because the effect is so contrary to the way in which we perceive wild birds in their environment. This philosophy governs the contents of the book. He discusses such matters as simplifying the difficulties of drawing live birds – basic anatomy, flight, colour and composition. Perhaps the greatest value of the book to a New Zealand reader is that it brings together examples of the work of many leading contemporary European wildlife illustrators, together with a brief curriculum vitae; these include Lars Jonsson, Keith Brockie, Peter Partington and Mick Manning. At \$62.95, it is however too expensive for all but the most serious students of both art and ornithology.

Geoff Arnold