

REVIEWS

Peter Scott and the Wildfowl Trust. *The Swans*. Michael Joseph, London 1972. £4.20 (in England).

This is a beautiful and exciting book, of 242 pages, with a frontispiece reproducing four Bewick's Swans in flight from an oil painting by Peter Scott, 48 monochrome plates and very many line drawings by a variety of artists. The contents cover practically every aspect of the lives of the swans of the world, although with some species there are as yet unanswered questions. Peter Scott contributes the introduction, Hugh Boyd deals with Classification. He follows that of Delacour and Mayr, and is thus on the side of the "lumpers." He provides a useful key to recognition of the eight species and subspecies recognised. M. A. Ogilvie discusses Distribution, numbers and migration, Myrfin Owen and Janet Kear write on Food and feeding habits, Janet Kear on Reproduction and family life, and J. V. Beer and M. A. Ogilvie deal with Mortality, including a section on parasites. This is followed by a chapter on the Swan in mythology and art by Mary Evans and Andrew Dawnay. The latter then discusses Exploitation and Geoffrey Mathews concludes with a chapter on Conservation, ending it with a plea for "universal rational birth control . . . without it all conservation efforts will be in vain." There are nine statistical appendices, a Bibliography with 350 entries and a good index.

So much for a summary of the book's contents. I said it was "a beautiful and exciting book." It is very well written and beautifully produced, a book that is a joy to own. The excitement comes from learning more of what has happened and is happening at Slimbridge and the two other areas controlled by the Wildfowl Trust, and to learn that a Japanese farmer and his sons had, by winter feeding and protection, at Suiibara, near Niigata, increased the population of Whooper and Eastern Bewick's Swans from 15 birds in 1955 to over 1,000 in 1970, in a lake of about 400 yards in diameter, bounded by rice paddies on one side, and an industrial area on the other. At Slimbridge, from November 1948, when the first Bewick's Swan "dropped in" the total built up to a maximum of 411 for any one day — and a season total of 626, during the winter of 1970-71. Each Bewick's Swan has a different colour pattern on the bill, and every Slimbridge bird was given a name. By the 1970-71 winter, 1,315 birds had been named, and two girls, Mary Evans and Dafila Scott, who must possess phenomenal visual memories, could recognise every bird.

This is a book that should be on the shelf of everyone, Scientific ornithologist or plain bird lover (not mutually exclusive terms, of course) who delights in watching Swans.

R. J. SCARLET

This is a beautiful book on a beautiful subject. The true swans of the world, six full species and two strong subspecies — or if you so wish, eight species of which five belong to the northern hemisphere and three to the southern — here come into their own in a scientific publication which at the same times does justice to their distinctive grace and eloquently pleads for their conservation.

From time immemorial swans have attracted the notice of *Homo sapiens*, hunter and artist. Not only have they often helped to feed and clothe him right down to today, but they have appealed to his aesthetic sense and often inspired his art and literature (v. chap. 7).

Since the establishment of the Wildfowl Trust new fields of research have been revealed and much has been learnt about the life and habits of many species of wildfowl which on their migrations make a mockery of national boundaries fixed by man; and the work of the Slimbridge team must have been given a felicitous fillip by the exciting information which resulted from the meticulous study of the wild Bewick's Swans which, bringing the new generation with them, return winter after winter from their arctic breeding grounds.

An introduction by Peter Scott is followed by a series of essays on various aspects of the ecology of the genus *Cygnus*. All are written by scientists who know and love their subject. For the biologist who is concerned with wildfowl problems in other lands, these essays, which are backed by maps and tables, will be of inestimable value. New Zealand is not neglected. Our native *Cygnus sumnerensis* became extinct not so long ago, a victim of the hunger of the so-called 'noble savage.' But studies of the introduced and flourishing Australian Black Swan have provided useful comparative and corroborative material.

There is, in fact, in this meaty volume much to make New Zealand ornithologists pause and ponder. Are we accepting our responsibilities towards the conservation of the world's threatened species of waterfowl? With 'our temperate climate, generous rainfall and abundance of relatively clean and unpolluted water, is it not time to consider a more liberal policy? Do we not need some sort of 'wildfowl trust' on a much more ambitious scale than anything we have at present; firstly to further the study of our declining species — alas, it is not difficult to list them — with a view to their re-establishment, if possible, in strength; secondly to consider the release in New Zealand of fine species from other lands, of course after careful study and with due regard for their ecological needs? Would not the great lagoons of Southland, the avian vacuum of Manapouri or perhaps Buller's Lake Puponga look a little brighter and better if Black-necked and/or Coscoroba Swans were rearing their families upon them? These are two handsome South Americans which belong to roughly the same latitude as New Zealand. Neither species would be likely to pose a threat to those two particularly sacred cows of New Zealand, the sheep and the trout. Is it not worth considering that New Zealand might become a 'bank' for selected species?

If the ordinary man and his children can see and learn to appreciate big birds such as swans, there is a fair chance that they may then be led on to understand the need for protecting smaller and less conspicuous animal species, which are equally beautiful or precious. The first appeal must be to the eye.

This timely and well-documented volume is graphically illustrated with photographs and sketches both serious and gay. Many of the line drawings are indeed exquisite. Peter Scott and his team of devoted biologists and artists are to be congratulated and thanked. All who read — and they will be many — will surely be strengthened in their resolve to try to save some of the world's fine creatures before it is too late. Here we have more ammunition for the armoury of the enlightened conservationist.

R. B. SIBSON