

REVIEWS

MCKENZIE, ROSS. *In Search of New Zealand Birds. How and where to find them.* Pp. 1-256, text – figs 1-53, jacket photos 1 front and 5 (A-E) back, maps 1-46, and key maps on end papers. A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, &c., 1972. \$6.50.

MARSHALL, JANET; KINSKY, F. C.; ROBERTSON, C. J. R. *The Fiat Book of Common Birds in New Zealand.* Vol. 1, Town, Pasture & Freshwater Birds. Pp. 1-94, pls 1-40. 1972. A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, &c., 1972. \$1.75.

1972 is a year to be remembered in New Zealand ornithology, the year when two first-rate books on New Zealand birds appeared virtually hand-in-hand from the same publisher within a few days of each other. They will be used in the same way as companions and complementary to one another. Let me at once congratulate A. H. & A. W. Reed Ltd on this achievement. The demand for popular natural history books in New Zealand, particularly for the needs of schoolchildren and their teachers, is so great that I fear that publishers have had it all too easy in this boom period of production which has, regrettably, included the appearance of a number of ill-conceived, inaccurately written or crudely illustrated books which have quickly found themselves in the hands of those ignorant of their shortcomings. Whether publishers note reviewers' comments I am never sure but Reeds may believe me when I say that they have rendered a good service in providing these two volumes, adequately compensating for any less worthy natural history publications for which they may have been responsible.

Ross McKenzie, author of the first book to be discussed, is a well-known bird man and staunch member and supporter of the OSNZ in all its activities and throughout its existence. He acknowledges Mr R. B. Sibson in his dedication as his ornithological "godfather." Mr McKenzie, himself, has been and is such a godfather to dozens of members of the OSNZ and to many other unaffiliated bird watchers and nature lovers in New Zealand. And not only in New Zealand for Ross McKenzie has been an unrivalled, almost unique, guide to many visitors to this country, ranging from a good many of the "greats" of overseas ornithology to those coming simply as tourists with an appreciation for the natural beauties and attractions of New Zealand. Indeed, it was from the suggestion of a distinguished American visitor that this book was born. If there was an award for whoever had done most to introduce New Zealand birds and their haunts to the world, then I think we would be hard put not to back Ross McKenzie. True, others have written more profound papers and sat on more committees or achieved ornithological eminence in other ways, but the author of this guide book represents the best of the amateur tradition in New Zealand bird study; each of us knows full well what contact with H.R.McK. (even if only by correspondence) has meant to us. Now we can share this with a wider audience. I recall my first meeting with him when, as a somewhat raw 18-year-old student eager to sit at the feet of the great, I tagged along with him on an OSNZ trip to Kapiti Island. On that day, and subsequently when I rashly became a Regional Organiser, I learned not only the value of a telescope but was introduced to the solidarity, integrity

and forthrightness (and this no lavish praise) that has characterised his words and ways. But this review is not of the man, but of the book. We know the quality of the man; the book measures up in every way.

Mr McKenzie's book is attractively printed, setting a fine standard of typography and layout; the many maps are well drawn, surprisingly detailed but clear; the photographs (perhaps not always up to the standards of Moon and Soper) relieve the text well and provide, in a way, two books in one; and the text, itself, is encyclopaedic, a bird watcher's guide to "how and where to find them."

Key maps show the division of New Zealand in numbered geographic regions, those areas one might be covering in a good holiday, and the text is related to them so that quick reference can be made to any area of interest. For each such region its background, whether city environs or country district, is briefly stated, geographically and historically as well as birdwise; a list of the relevant Automobile Association and Lands & Survey maps is conveniently provided; accommodation available is noted and birds of special interest are tabulated. The traveller is then guided along the roads (and tracks) in a fashion reminiscent of an AA itinerary, but with the ornithological highlights and interests described in blow-by-blow detail; truly "how and where to find them." One could give examples of how particular regions are treated but it would spoil the reader's pleasure to reveal some of the unusual, and often characteristically humorous, turns of the writer's hand. It will be better to get out and use it!

One can find errors, mis-spelling of place names and so on, perhaps also a lack of depth of treatment of places one especially knows, but these are trivial complaints for what the book gives us. Armed with Ross McKenzie's book in one hand and Errol Brathwaite's *Companion Guide* in the other (not forgetting the binoculars around one's neck and notebook and pencil somewhere else), those of us who think we know New Zealand and its birds may well have a more pleasant and profitable holiday than we would ever have imagined, while those who know not New Zealand and its avian pleasures will not wish for a better, friendlier or more informative guide.

Thank you, Ross McKenzie!

Fred Kinsky and Chris Robertson, also from within our fold as members of the OSNZ, have, with their artist Janet Marshall (who appears on the title page in full status of a joint author, and rightly so), done a fine piece of work. It is, however, not because we know the authors from the pages of *Notornis* or because one of them is President of the OSNZ that we speak highly of their efforts; the book stands on its own merits and will do so for a long time to come. Indeed, if ever there was a much-needed little, inexpensive guide to what we might see around us, this is it. And it is a cheap Christmas present if ever there was one!

This Fiat book, modelled on Nancy Adams' successful volume on trees, is simply enough constructed and is the forerunner of a second volume dealing with mountain, bush and shore habitats (for which we eagerly await). In 80 pages and 40 plates, some 43 species are dealt with, usually with one species to an opening, coloured figure on the left and simple text on the right. Each species is illustrated carefully and quite pleasingly in its colours, not so harsh and much

bolder than those of the "Field Guide," and with a peculiar attraction that overrides any feeling of inaccuracy of stance, proportion or colouration. Briefly listed on the facing page are "Field Characters," "Distribution and Habitat," and "Breeding" and the conciseness of these entries is commendable. Pedants may find something to quibble over here and there but for those who demand detail or want to know the exceptions, the "For Further Reading" section will lead them to Oliver's "New Zealand Birds" or to the "Annotated Checklist." The species in this first volume of "Town, Pasture & Freshwater Birds" include White-faced Herons, Mallards, Skylarks, Pipits, Hedge Sparrows, Redpolls, Magpies and so on, with such lesser-known, but none-the-less easily seen species as the Cirl Bunting, the Australian Coot, and the Spur-winged Plover. A reviewer in a city newspaper (*Evening Post*, Wellington, 7 Nov. 1972, p. 24) who extolled the virtues of this "excellent book about birds" laments the exclusion of the Tui and the Bellbird "which are both more commonly seen nationally than some of the 40 birds included . . ." One cannot have everything in one's own backyard and what is "common" in my garden set on the forested slopes of eastern Wellington Harbour is not even the same as two other ornithologists find in their own gardens a few hundred yards up and down the road respectively. However, Ross McKenzie's book comes into its own now, providing the key to "how and where to find" these "common" birds and the search for them can be readily extended into something quite exciting stimulated from the possession of the little Fiat book.

Use of the Fiat Book of Common Birds will make us richer and wiser in knowing what is around us and it will be the answer for those who have longed for "something" to tell them what "it" is in their garden or on their holidays not so far from the urban sprawl; to echo the words of the writer of the preface, Dr R. A. Falla, Chairman of the Nature Conservation Council — "The readers of this book may be assured that every one of the birds figured and described has something to contribute to their enlightenment and enjoyment."

E. W. D.

D. L. SERVENTY, V. N. SERVENTY, & JOHN WARHAM. *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*. Pp. 1-254, figs 1-127, col. pls 128-142. A. H. & A. W. Reed, Sydney, &c., 1971.

It is a regrettable practice among professional ornithologists to submit the results of their researches for publication in the widest possible spectrum of journals. As a result, the literature of the sea-birds of the Australasian region has for too long been scattered among a multiplicity of books, reports and journals (not all of them ornithological) throughout the English-speaking world, often unknown and too often inaccessible to all but workers in museums and universities. To have all this work summarised in a single volume could not fail to be a welcome event; for such a volume to be produced by three workers pre-eminent in recent research in this field makes the volume a landmark in the literature of Australasian birds.

Following a two page preface, which explains the scope and purpose of the book, with acknowledgements of help received, the