

Birds of Fiji in Colour. Painted by W. J. Belcher with ornithological notes by R. B. Sibson. 54 unnumbered pages including 24 coloured plates. Auckland and London: Collins, 1972. \$3.60.

It is pleasing that a selection of the Belcher paintings has at last seen the light of day, and the publication of this slim volume will surely stimulate an interest in the fascinating, albeit restricted, avifauna of the Fiji Islands, and perhaps serve as a prod to the authorities in Fiji to provide sadly needed reserves for its preservation.

There are 90 of Belcher's accurately painted bird pictures held by the Suva Museum, and one could wish that more of the beautiful and truly endemic species such as the Red-throated Lorikeet, red-breasted Musk Parrot, Silk-tail, and Slaty Flycatcher had been chosen in place of the more widespread species such as the Reef Heron, Golden Plover, White-collared Kingfisher, Pacific Swallow, and White-breasted Wood-Swallow. As Mr Bruce Palmer points out in his introduction, four paintings were stolen by an American visitor to the home of Belcher's widow, and of course these were of Fiji's most beautiful birds, including some of the *luteovirens* doves, which Casey Wood in 1926 described as "the chief glory of the Fijian avifauna."

It is unfortunate and rather disappointing that the plates have lost some of their original brilliance and good colours by reproduction, giving a wrong impression of some birds. For example, the blackish Giant Forest Honey-eater is actually a bright olive green, the clear yellow of the Golden Whistler appears as an unattractive buff, and the bright green plumage and vivid green bill and eye patch of the Velvet Dove are quite lost in reproduction.

The text is eminently readable and suitable to a publication of this kind, although one cannot help disputing some of the author's assumptions. For instance, the coughing sound made by Peale's Pigeon is not connected with the "digestion of pulpy fruits" as he suggests, but is definitely a note of warning or surprise. *Layard's White-eye* is not confined to the highlands, nor are forest clearings the most handy places in which to find them. We have found that both this species and the Grey-backed are present at all levels, and frequently in mixed flocks. Light in style and content, we cannot regard the book as an "invaluable work of reference" as suggested by Mr Palmer, nor do we think that such was the author's intention.

One could be mildly critical of the layout of the book, for the unnumbered pages do not make for easy reference, and to have had the text facing the relevant plate would have been preferable.

There is an almost complete lack of illustrations of Fijian birds, and as a popular introduction to some of them, this book is an admirable beginning. With New Zealand's increasing interest in and responsibility to the rest of the South-West Pacific, ornithology must not be overlooked or disregarded; and this book of fine plates by a New Zealand artist, and interesting text by a New Zealand ornithologist, is a valuable contribution towards developing a real interest in Fiji's birdlife.

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