

The Sea Swallow, Vol. 22. Being the Annual Report of the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society 1971/72. 68 pp., illus.

Sea birds are of interest to a great many members of the OSNZ, although few have the opportunity of studying them in the open sea and often have to content themselves with meeting the petrels, penguins and albatrosses of the Southern Ocean washed up on the beach patroller's terrain. The Royal Naval Bird Watching Society, whose restricted membership includes only a handful of New Zealanders (amongst whom your reviewer is privileged to be included), comprises some 300 members of the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy and allied services. The main role of the Society is in utilising members' opportunities for observations of birds at sea by encouraging them to fill in Sea Passage Report Forms for their voyages throughout the world as well as providing, by the publication of *The Sea Swallow*, a way in which they may write up accounts of islands visited, land birds at sea, and so on. This journal is, in fact, complementary to *The Marine Observer*, a periodical issued by the Meteorological Office (U.K.) and one that is not as well known to marine biologists and ornithologists as it ought to be. Not surprisingly, a great mass of information has accumulated since the Society began its work 25 years ago. Much of this has been published in the Society's Annual Report which is *The Sea Swallow* but there is some inevitable delay in presenting such detail so that, for instance, the Report for 1971/72 published in 1973 summarises passage reports to 1969. Nevertheless, *The Sea Swallow* is an important journal and necessary for all those concerned with the distribution and numbers of seabirds. Apart from runs held by individual members, the only sets of this journal held in New Zealand libraries are in the National Museum, Wellington, the Department of Zoology, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, and the New Zealand Oceanographic Institute, Wellington, which holds the complete series from Volume 1 in 1947. These are available, of course, through the Interloan Service of the National Library of New Zealand.

Dr W. R. P. Bourne, M.B., Ch.B., the well-known writer on Petrels and their kin, has aided the Society immensely for a long time in preparing the passage reports for publication and everyone will be indebted to him for this labour. In the latest volume to be issued, there is, for example, a long (pp. 29-60) "Review of observations on seabirds, 1967-1969" by W. R. P. Bourne and T. J. Dixon, of the Seabird Group, Aberdeen University, in which a great deal of useful and important information from all parts of the world is recorded based on "400 pages of reports, 255 census sheets, 54 pages of notes, and 41 reports of birds examined in the hand." The compilers make some useful comments on the problems of recording and handling such information and on more efficient and reliable methods of recording bird distributions and densities at sea particularly in forms suitable for mechanical handling by computer. To this reviewer's mind there is, however, still the basic question mark hanging over many records of birds allegedly properly identified which may reach the unsuspecting computer. A very well-known New Zealand seabird authority once told me that he doubted everyone else's identifications and would not vouch for his own too often. Admirable though the RNBWS summaries are, and all the more so because of Dr Bourne's vetting, there is still

a profound need for better guides and critical studies, such as we have had in *Notornis* on prions and the Soft-plumaged Petrel, by people who really know their seabirds, which might stress, in particular, the pitfalls awaiting the beginner or those, experienced elsewhere, who move into a new geographical area. As more research and fisheries vessels are used in local waters, further opportunities for observing at sea will come about, and much information such as the RNBWS presents will be amassed here. We must ensure as best we can that the identifications, at least, are well-founded. We may, then, be a leap ahead of the well-known seabird man and take other people's identifications without the usual grain of salt.

This *Sea Swallow* concludes with a review by "W.R.P.B." of *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds* by Serventy, Serventy & Warham in which the reviewer has this to say: "This is one of the more important seabird publications of recent years, by three of the most experienced authorities on Australasian seabirds . . . The information provided is much more accurate and comprehensive than in some other recent books, and the authors supplied much of it themselves. . . ." One wonders what motivates the reviewer's final remarks: "It is a pity this outstanding work took a decade to be published; some more recent antipodean experts are going to find it hard to compete with it."

We congratulate the RNBWS on the celebration of its 25th Anniversary and echo the hope of the President, Admiral Sir Nigel Henderson, G.B.E., K.C.B., "that in the next 25 years the Society will go from strength to even greater strength and will continue to provide interest and enjoyment for those who participate in its work."

E. W. D.



New Zealand water birds. An artist's journal, by Elaine Power. Pp. [88], col. pls 22, b & w pls 20. Collins: Auckland and London, 1975. \$8.40.

This is a delightful book! What more can one say but echo the words of a reviewer of Mrs Power's first book of paintings *Small birds of the New Zealand bush* (1970): "It is hard to find words to express the delight which this book has given me." (R. J. Scarlett, *Notornis* 17: 134; 1970). Another reviewer of this first book ("R.B.S.," *Emu* 72: 37; 1972) made this prophecy: ". . . with it we may see the dawn of a new era in the perceptive portrayal of New Zealand's native birds." Mrs Power has amply fulfilled this hope not only with her later volume *Waders in New Zealand* (1971) but with this most enjoyable "artist's journal" of water bird studies. She is now firmly established as one of the leading bird painters not merely in New Zealand but on the world scene. Happily she combines an informative and accurate text with her sensitive and realistic portraits so that for overseas readers, in particular, a very fine and useful introduction to the life and appearance of many of the characteristic birds of our country is provided.

Those who know their birds will in the field will always find something to quibble about in the stance, colouration, or incongruous setting in which any bird is portrayed by an artist, whether it be by Peter Scott, Roger Tory Peterson, Chloe Talbot-Kelly, Molly Falla, Janet Marshall, or Elaine Power. Perhaps the camera does not lie