

*Scenic Reserves of Canterbury.* By L. W. McCaskill for the Department of Lands and Survey. 36 pp., illus. Wellington: Government Printer, 1974. \$1.35.

In 1972, the Lands & Survey produced the first of a series of reports made by Mr Geoff. Kelly enumerating and describing the flora and fauna of the reserve lands of New Zealand, done as part of the New Zealand contribution to the International Biological Programme, a biological survey of reserves organised by the Botany Division of the DSIR. The volume on Canterbury runs to 390 pages of text with maps and containing much new information. What a fine basis this work seemed to provide for detailed ornithological studies on restricted habitats! Unfortunately, only 90 copies of this report were produced; their distribution was, accordingly, restricted and their very existence is little known. It has always seemed to me that if such an important job is worth doing, it is worth doing well; in other words, let it be known to those who would make good use of it.

Happily, my feelings are mollified by the appearance of Mr Lance McCaskill's excellently-written and copiously-illustrated booklet on the reserves of Canterbury, a district important and of very great interest ornithologically. The great tradition of T. H. Potts, W. W. Smith, E. F. Stead and others less prolific in their writings, has not been carried on in recent years. It was, for example, disappointing to have the bird sections of *The Natural History of Canterbury*, edited by Prof. G. A. Knox in 1969, written by relative newcomers to the Canterbury scene and not by those with the deep background that might have been more revealing in comparisons of times past and times present. A plethora of bird papers now issues from the Zoology Department of the University of Canterbury but these do not paint the picture of the variety and significance of the birds and the habitats in the Canterbury Land District. The appearance of this useful booklet might well serve to re-orientate ornithological studies towards habitats as such.

Mr McCaskill, prominent in the OSNZ at its foundation, has been deeply involved in conservation and the environment from long before these words achieved the prominence they do in to-day's literature. A tribute in the *Christchurch Press* of 27 December 1974 (p. 8) says of him: "It seems that since he retired in 1965 Mr L. W. McCaskill has done as much work as many people do in a life time, and that in spite of the fact that early in 1971 he was smitten by a stroke. He has carried into his retirement the same dynamic qualities and energy which characterised his work as an agricultural instructor, agricultural teacher, training college lecturer, lecturer at Lincoln College — he ended as associate professor and head of the rural education department — and then as the first director of the Tussock Grasslands and Mountain Lands Institute." Those who know Mr McCaskill or who have read his book on Molesworth Station and that on the history of soil conservation in New Zealand, *Hold This Land* (a delightfully modest account of much of his own drive and achievements in this field), need to be told no more. Those who want to know further of the accomplishments of this remarkable man should read the article in *The Press* in their public library. Mr McCaskill,

at any rate, knows his Canterbury and his birds and the booklet reflects this experience and life-long interest.

The Canterbury booklet is the first of a series of 12 covering the scenic reserves of the whole of New Zealand. Copy for the last of them went to the printer in August 1974 so those of us who have interests elsewhere will not have too long to wait.

Mr McCaskill's major task since his retirement in 1965 was to carry out a survey of all the reserves from Cape Reinga to Stewart Island. Between 1965 and 1971, accompanied by officers from the Lands & Survey and from the Forest Service, he visited 691 of the 960 reserves and reported on them. In 1972, the then Minister of Lands, Mr Duncan MacIntyre, asked him to produce his results in book form for public use, and this is the result.

The booklet begins with a discussion of scenic reserves in general, their purpose and their classification, introduces the scenic reserves of Canterbury and then describes 56 different reserves, ranging in nature from "Scenic A" ("Reserves with scenic values in a panoramic sense, viewed in the main from the outside, and not used actively by the public") through categories "B," "Conservation" to the rather limited number of "Scientific" reserves "where preservation for scientific study of plant and animal communities, soil types, and geological features, is the primary concern" in addition to several "Reserves for the Preservation of Flora and Fauna" for entry to which a permit is required from the Commissioner of Crown Lands. Under each reserve is given its area, date of reservation, classification, geographical and ecological description and notes on birds and plants of special interest.

Although only 0.4% (15,268 in 3,620,138 hectares) of the Canterbury Land District consists of reserves, the far-sighted policy of the Lands & Survey Department in reserving and protecting these areas of scenic and scientific value has been rewarding. In addition, the 210,680 ha of State indigenous forest and 40,462 ha of State exotic forest brings up the total area of "reserved" land to just over 11% of the land district.

It should be noted, however, as Mr McCaskill says — "Apart from the Lewis Pass reserves and Peel Forest, most of the individual areas of bush in scenic reserves are extremely small and consequently very susceptible to damage by fire, stock, noxious animals, or over-use by people. As some of the lowland podocarp remnants in particular can be looked on as museum pieces, to be jealously guarded, it may be necessary before very long to consider restrictions on their use for recreation."

The message is clear. While, undoubtedly, we should have concern for our West Coast beech forests and view the introduction of exotics with scientifically (and perhaps also aesthetically) appropriate caution, we should accept Mr McCaskill's first booklet (and the other 11 in due course) as a challenge to look closely at what is on our own backdoor step, record what is there and consider its future before progress, neglect, lack of interest or over-use, any of the many ecological hazards, removes it from us. Mr McCaskill, as on many occasions during his distinguished career, has pointed the way.

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