

## REVIEWS

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*The Life of Birds* by Joel Carl Welty. 2nd Edition. W. B. Saunders Co., Philadelphia. pp. xii + 625. Many figures, photographs and tables. 1975. N.Z. \$16.65.

This is a revised, enlarged edition of a one-volume survey of bird biology first published in 1962. It was then, in this reviewer's opinion, the best book for the general reader covering its field and despite several competing works, still seems to retain the lead although the price has soared meanwhile.

The book consists of 24 chapters reviewing the present state of knowledge of a wide variety of bird topics. A review of the orders and families of birds following "Peters" and Wetmore is accompanied by a brief survey of new techniques for assessing relationships based on analyses of body proteins, ectoparasites and so on. Then follow 3 chapters on anatomy, 3 on body functioning, 4 on behaviour and vocalisations, 4 on breeding and allied topics, 2 on bird ecology and population regulation and one each on zoogeography, migration and orientation, the origin and evolution of birds and birds and man. Each chapter is complete in itself, is copiously illustrated and ends with a short list of suggested further readings.

Welty has succeeded well in presenting succinct, modern, well-documented accounts of the various topics. His list of about 1700 references includes a few as late as 1974, but mostly his coverage is up to 1972 and for that reason some recent work such as that on continental drift and on the possible origins of birds from dinosaurs is not discussed. The book is not for specialists and these will note inconsistencies (e.g. on p. 317 the Manx Shearwater is named *Procellaria puffinus*, on p. 487 *Puffinus puffinus*) and some errors of fact and interpretation, but considering the scope of the work the factual accuracy seems high.

This book does not compete with Farner and King's *Avian Biology* which is more advanced, and it complements rather than competes with Thomson's *New Dictionary of Birds*. For Australasian readers a drawback is the bias towards studies made in America, Europe and Africa. Work undertaken in New Zealand is seldom mentioned and I noted not one reference to *Notornis*. Nevertheless the book can be fully recommended to those who need an up-to-date survey across the whole field of bird biology.

J. W.