

*The Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds* by William T. Cooper and Joseph M. Forshaw (with a foreword by Rt Hon. M. T. Somare, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea). 1977. Sydney: Collins. 304 pp., maps, b. & w. field sketches, col. pls. 62 including 1 on dust cover, 415 x 290 mm. \$125.00.

Having so recently written a review (*Notornis* 24 (2): 146) of an article on "The World's Glamour Birds" by W. S. Peckover, with two paintings by Bill Cooper, I did not expect to be so fortunate to see a book containing 62 paintings by the same artist. W. T. Cooper (of fame for his illustrations in *A Portfolio of Australian Birds* with K. A. Hindwood in 1968, and *Parrots of the World* with J. M. Forshaw 1973) is a talented Australian artist, and the publishers are to be congratulated in producing the present sumptuous volume.

When an ornithologist thinks of *Birds of Paradise* the names of John Gould (*Birds of New Guinea*, 1888), Tom Iredale (*Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds*, ill. Lilian Medland, 1950) and Tom Gilliard (*Birds of Paradise and Bowerbirds*, 1969) immediately come to mind. Their books are now hard to get (although a small volume of Gould's plates with a text by A. Rutgers was published in 1970) and the present volume is, therefore, doubly welcome. Readers who wish to compare the styles of the artists should also examine the paintings by Walter A. Weber in Dillon Ripley: "Strange Courtship of the Birds of Paradise" (*National Geographic* Feb. 1950: 247).

Comparisons may be invidious particularly by one who once thought Lilian Medland's paintings unsurpassable, but it cannot be denied that Cooper has a style combining graphical accuracy with the highest qualities of artistic merit. The plumage of many of the birds does, of course, give vast scope to the artist's ability — if also making for difficulties — but Cooper has portrayed the fine feathering to perfection. In some plates, those, for example, of the Blue Bird of Paradise, and the Raggiana Bird of Paradise on the dust cover, the tail feathers seem literally to shimmer as the birds vibrate in their ecstatic courtship displays. It is a pity, therefore, that the single disappointing plate, that of the King Bird of Paradise, appears to have been reproduced to make the male look like a plastic toy. Other plates of this species give the same impression, however, so perhaps the bird is difficult to portray or it really does look artificial!

Forshaw is an accomplished writer and compiler of information, and his bibliography must be particularly valuable to a student of these birds' distribution and habits. He has included material published since Gilliard's work but has not attempted to duplicate it except "to complete lucid accounts of various species." The present book was indeed "planned as a companion volume to Gilliard."

This is a book for ornithologists to read and re-read, and for bird lovers to treasure and hand down as valued family possessions for generations to come.

J. M. C.