

REVIEW

Penguins of the World, by Pauline Reilly, 1994. Oxford University Press, Melbourne. xii + 164 pp. ISBN 0195535472. \$NZ19.95

This is an easy to read, comprehensive book systematically dealing with each penguin species, with separate chapters on general penguin biology and conservation. Reilly combines her own experiences of penguins with information from Oxford's 1990 landmark publication *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, Volume 1. The result is an accurate and up-to-date summary. One omission I noted was that the distribution map for the Yellow-eyed Penguin lacks its southern breeding sites on subantarctic Auckland and Campbell Islands. Jeff Davies' superb penguin illustrations from the Handbook are reproduced and he has added a new plate on the *Spheniscus* penguins as most of this group were not dealt with in the Handbook. Drawings of behavioural postures and interesting photos are throughout the text.

The crested penguin group are noted by Reilly as migratory except for the Fiordland Crested Penguin yet the non-breeding distribution of all crested species is virtually unknown. Satellite tracking and other technological advances should help unravel such mysteries in the near future.

Rockhopper Penguins are somewhat subjectively described as the most aggressive of the penguins. Almost all New Zealand species would be candidates for this award. The numerous cuts and bruises on my legs inflicted through several layers of clothing while passing through a dense Erect-crested Penguin colony combined with the ear-piercing screams of thousands of vitriolic birds were a remarkable, unforgettable and painful testimony to the ill temper of this species.

While no penguin species are on the brink of extinction, Reilly notes that five out of 17 of the world's penguins are threatened (including our Yellow-eyed and Fiordland Crested Penguins). However, the knowledge of population trends in all New Zealand species is fragmentary. Snares Crested Penguins have never been thoroughly surveyed and it is premature to conclude that the population has "stabilised". Erect-crested Penguins are certainly declining with breeding having ceased at Campbell Island, virtually none now breed at the Auckland Islands, and recent work shows a decline at the Antipodes Islands.

Several penguin populations once suffered from large-scale direct exploitation, such as Macquarie Island King Penguins which were herded into boilers for their oil. Fortunately the deliberate killing of penguins is now less common. Nevertheless, as Reilly points out, just as serious but more insidious threats, e.g. penguin food exploitation, predation by introduced animals, and sea temperature rises possibly as a result of the greenhouse effect, are complex and challenging conservation issues that will need tackling in order to ensure that populations of these extraordinary creatures are secure.

Alan Tennyson