

Review

Lee, W.G.; Jamieson, I.G. (ed.) 2001. *The takahe. Fifty years of conservation management and research*

University of Otago Press, Dunedin. ISBN 1-8772-76-01-4.
pp. 132. 15 × 23 × 1 cm. \$39.95.

In 1948 the rediscovery of the long-lost, flightless takahe in a remote Fiordland valley aroused enormous public interest. The news was reported in the London *Times* as well as local newspapers. This journal was renamed *Notornis*, then the generic name for the bird, and the journal's publishers adopted the takahe as the Society emblem. The story of the rediscovery of the takahe remains a perennial favourite and is now firmly ingrained in New Zealand folklore. Its rediscovery marked the dawn of a new era in conservation. Public interest was such that efforts to save the species from extinction were expected, and if takahe should be saved then so too should other rare species. But, half a century ago saving an endangered species was a pioneering task with few precedents. Takahe have been a focus for conservation for 50 years making this one of the world's longest-running endangered species programmes. Over that period takahe management has changed reflecting the growing sophistication of endangered species management. The takahe is now one of New Zealand's most intensively studied bird species with, according to Lee and Jamieson, over 90 studies having been published since 1948.

This book grew out of a symposium on the takahe held in Dunedin in 1998 to mark the 50th anniversary of the rediscovery of the species. The book consists of 9 essays and papers written by people who have been, or are currently, involved with takahe conservation. It is timely to publish a review of the biology and conservation of the takahe, for not only is the half century a symbolic milestone but the last decade has seen some significant advances in takahe conservation. Conservation scientists and managers have much to learn from the often controversial path followed by the takahe workers. Bird watchers and the general public will enjoy a retelling of the rediscovery story and will be interested in an update on the continuing takahe saga. My only reservation about this book is how well this slim volume has met the needs of both markets. I assume that the book is aimed primarily at a professional audience.

The first 3 chapters will appeal to the lay readership. The introduction by Bill Lee and Ian Jamieson

and the takahe story as told by Alison Ballance are both informative and enjoyable. A highlight of the book is the republication of an article written by Joan Watson, one of the party that rediscovered the birds in 1948. This is a truly delightful essay, which, 50 years after 1st publication, tells us more about the bushman-hunter-naturalists (a 'species' now almost as endangered as the takahe) who found the birds than about the birds themselves.

The remaining chapters are written by scientists, primarily for a professional readership. They provide conservation professionals with a solid review of various aspects of takahe biology and management. They are all well referenced, helpfully directing readers into the original literature. For professionals and university students these chapters are an invaluable resource. However, I suspect that bird watchers and lay people who buy the book after browsing the 1st 3 chapters may well feel short changed. However, these chapters are not as esoteric as they first appear and lay readers who persist with them will be rewarded by some fascinating insights into takahe biology and management.

There is an interesting chapter on the origins and prehistoric ecology of takahe. The taxonomic relationships and prehuman ecology of endangered species provide valuable insights into how the surviving populations can best be managed. This has been a source of controversy with takahe, yet despite the important contribution historical knowledge eventually made to takahe conservation these factors are still routinely ignored in the management of other species. Other chapters review the management of the birds in Fiordland, in captivity and on offshore islands.

The last chapter, by John Craig, presents a critical review of 50 years of takahe research and management. As we have come to expect from John, it is provocative and evaluates the contribution takahe management has made to the developing discipline of conservation biology. Bill Lee, an active participant in takahe research presents an "insider's" appraisal of the half-century of takahe conservation. People involved in endangered species research or management should read both chapters. A comparison of the appraisals of an active participant and a