

REVIEWS

New Zealand Birds: a Sound Guide, Volume 2, Broad-billed Prion to Pitt Island Shag; Volume 3, Darter to Brolga

Two further cassettes are now available in Les McPherson's sound guide to New Zealand birds. This series, designed to present recordings of all the birds on the New Zealand checklist, should be complete in seven volumes by late 1990. Cassettes and booklets of the present volumes keep to the same format as volume 1 (reviewed in *Notornis* 36 (1): 79, 1989).

Volume 2 presents recordings of 54 species or subspecies, mostly seabirds. Side 1 includes the prions, *Procellaria* petrels and shearwaters and side 2 the storm petrels, diving petrels, tropicbirds, pelican, gannet, boobies and the shags. Average track length is a little over 1 minute. On side 1 all the recordings are of a high quality. With the Narrow-billed Prion the atmosphere of a busy petrel colony is vividly conveyed but there are so many birds present that it is difficult to identify individual calls clearly. The overall quality of recordings on side 2 is also high, although those of several of the shags contain extraneous sounds. Some of these may cause occasional doubt as to whether a particular sound was made by the featured species. Species or subspecies missing are four prions (Antarctic, Auckland Island, Lesser Fulmar, Chatham Fulmar), Norfolk Island Little Shearwater, Kermadec Storm Petrel and two shags (Little Black, Bounty Island).

Volume 3 presents recordings of 48 species or subspecies and is largely devoted to waterbirds. Side 1 includes Darter, frigatebirds, herons and their allies, swans, geese and some ducks. Side 2 includes the remaining ducks, diurnal raptors, gamebirds and Brolga. Again, nearly all these recordings are of a high quality. In one or two (e.g. Royal Spoonbill) the presence of other species may cause some confusion, but in most the featured species is clear and prominent. Missing species are NZ Little Bittern (probably extinct) and Red-legged Partridge.

A few comments can be made about both volumes.

1. In a few recordings, other species are obvious. These may occasionally cause problems, particularly for those not conversant with our avifauna. Having said this, however, it is recognised that it may not always be possible to avoid using such recordings because they are either the best or the only ones available. The handbooks list any background species heard on a recording but this may not always be helpful if the listener is not familiar with *their* calls.

2. The handbooks contain all the information on location, date, time etc. that most could want. Many of the entries also provide details of identification (e.g. adult or chick, male or female), probably one of the most useful features for many listeners. In one or two cases the addition of a few words would increase this usefulness considerably; with Chestnut-breasted Shelduck, for example, we are told that males and females can be heard but not which is which.

3. The spoken introductions to each recording contain several idiosyncratic pronunciations, notably of 'prion' in vol.2 and of 'egret' and 'scaup' in vol.3. These are only a minor irritation but could perhaps have been avoided.

It is often easy when reviewing a production such as this, made up of a large collection of items, to find fault with a few of them. It is also easy to forget just how difficult (and time-consuming) it is to obtain high-quality recordings in the conditions that prevail where many of these birds exist. The comments above should not obscure the fact that both these volumes are of a high overall standard. When it is completed the whole series promises to provide a unique record and a resource that will have many applications.

Volumes 1, 2, 3 are available from McPherson Natural History Unit, PO Box 21083, Edgware, Christchurch, New Zealand. Price is NZ \$15.00 per cassette post-paid within New Zealand, overseas postage extra. Anyone who may be able to help with missing species is invited to write to the same address.

John Dowding



Philatelic twitching for armchair ornithologists

The world's first international stamp exhibition with birds as its theme will be held during the 20th International Ornithological Congress in Christchurch, 6–9 December 1990.

Birds are the most popular theme for stamp collectors. Over 7500 stamps of nearly 2000 species were available in 1988.

In New Zealand the current definitive issue of bird stamps has raised interest in avian philately. Some 40 species are now illustrated on New Zealand stamps, and around 170 species listed in the New Zealand checklist have appeared on stamps of the world. It is timely that a catalogue of bird stamps of the world and a book about New Zealand birds on stamps are now available to collectors.

Collect Birds on Stamps, by J & H Eriksen. Stanley Gibbons, London 1983. 2nd edition 1988.

Softback, 400 pp, many b/w illustrations. Price £8.50 Sterling (\$49.50 in a New Plymouth stamp shop).

This is a thematic stamp catalogue which lists each bird stamp by country, giving its sterling value, English name, Stanley Gibbons catalogue number and price in pounds sterling. The birds are then indexed twice, by English and zoological names, and given a species number. Finally each species is listed in numerical order and stamps are tabulated by country and catalogue number, forming a 62 page checklist.

The catalogue covers the issues of wild birds listed in the *Stanley Gibbons Stamps of the World Simplified Catalogue* up to 1987. It includes overprints and surcharges but excludes variations of watermark, perforations etc. Birds forming part of a coat of arms, symbolic birds, poultry, peace doves and those too stylised to be identified are also not listed.