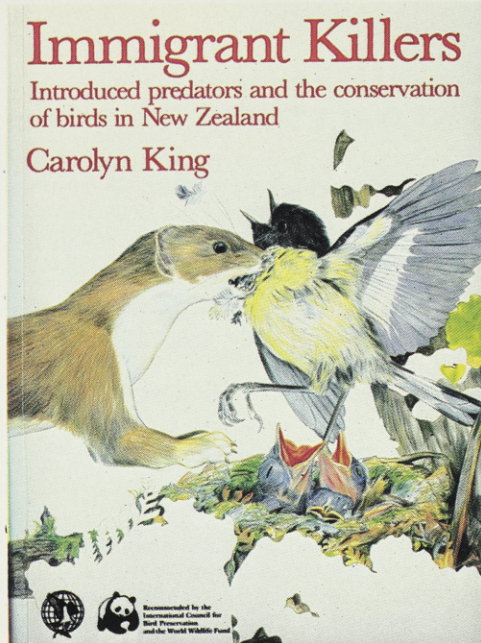


Book Reviews



Immigrant Killers — introduced predators and the conservation of birds in New Zealand. By Carolyn King (Oxford University Press, 1984). 224 pp; \$45 hardback, \$27.50 paperback.

New Zealanders have had a strange and turbulent relationship with the mammals that they accidentally or deliberately introduced. At first many species were of course nurtured and encouraged to spread. Then, as problems arose, there followed many decades of indiscriminate killing and almost universal loathing that approached a sort of religious fervour. The underlying dogmas (eg, killing on sight is beneficial) were seldom questioned. Now we are entering a new and more balanced phase.

A recent book by Graeme Caughley (*The Deer Wars*) exposes our changed relationship with deer. Research suggests that at least in the steepest hill country, erosion may have more to do with amount of rainfall than with the presence or absence of herbivorous mammals. Each deer is now worth its weight in devalued dollars and a strange new law makes poachers out of those who would kill a deer without the landowner's consent.

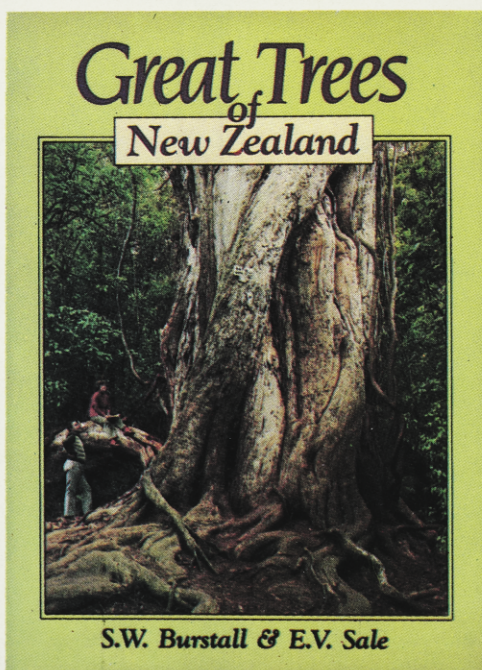
Now Carolyn King challenges our prejudices against predatory mammals (especially mustelids) in her beautifully produced, thoroughly researched and readable account of the impact of these creatures in New Zealand. The book is written partly for overseas people seeking to understand "one of the world's best-known conservation horror stories". It is in text-book style with copious illustrations and with notes, references and tables of data collected together at the end. The first four chapters summarise the biogeographical history of the New

Zealand fauna and give a detailed and skillful account of the impact of Polynesian and European man on it. Chapter 5 is an excellent review of recent research into the predators and their current effect on native birds. Chapter 6 compares the impact of predators on Lord Howe Island, the Hawaiian group, Britain and Australia. Chapter 7 reaches conclusions, some of them admittedly provocative.

Many of us on a quiet Sunday stroll might suddenly reach for a stone and turn decidedly savage at the sight of a stoat with a luckless fantail imprisoned in its jaws. But Dr King's reasoned account seeks to make us more detached. It is not widely understood that most of New Zealand's vulnerable birds were already in serious decline when stoats were introduced, and that no native birds are certain to have been reduced or exterminated by mustelids alone. Birds on the mainland today are mainly those that can cope with predators, and to see the death of an individual fantail is to learn nothing about the effect of predation on the population as a whole. The surprising breeding habits of stoats make them difficult to reduce by trapping and poisoning. Control of predators on the mainland is "outrageously expensive" and (excepting kokako, black stilt, takahe and kakapo) is not guaranteed to increase the density or distribution of any bird. Also, reducing mustelids may lead to harmful increases in rodents. These are some of the points we are invited to consider.

Dr King is to be congratulated for a book that combines easy reading with a scholarly approach. *Immigrant Killers*, a work of lasting importance, should be read by all with an interest in conservation in New Zealand.

Brian Gill, Curator of Birds, Auckland Museum



Great Trees of New Zealand
S. W. Burstall and E. V. Sale
(A H and A W Reed, 1984,) 288pp, 163 b/w photographs, 42 colour plates.
\$29.95

This book looks at some native and exotic trees. Throughout New Zealand, 100 great trees have been selected that the authors feel are special, because of large size or for historical events. Maori mythology is an important factor in the selection of some native trees.

The historical perspective given in the descriptions of early plantings, sources of origin and associated exotic introductions, gives the reader a better understanding of the development of our present landscapes.

New Zealand does grow great trees. Apart from our magnificent native trees, many exotics have flourished here, often exceeding the rate of growth and size in their place of origin. In world terms, we have exotic trees of great size, and yet they are at best only about 150 years old, as found in Northland.

This book had its origin when Bob Burstall was measuring the radiata pine trees at Albury Park in South Canterbury, thought to be the first small commercial planting (1865) of this species anywhere in the world. He reflected on the other fine trees in the area, measured them, and so began the documentation of New Zealand trees and plantings.

The first planned exotic forest in New Zealand is also in South Canterbury. Raincliff Forest was planted in 1880 and it did not include radiata pine or Douglas fir. Raincliff today is a favourite visiting place for tree growers.

For the tallest trees you have to go to Waitati, near Dunedin, where Mountain ash, *Eucalyptus regnans*, planted in 1870 grows to about 70 metres tall. If you visit these trees when they are flowering, you will be rewarded by the chorus of bellbirds feeding in the canopy.

Trees mark past events. In parts of the North Island, only trees mark the sites of the armed camps of the Land Wars. In the 1860's the pakeha Armed Constabulary planted the necklace poplar, *Populus deltoides* 'Frimley', while the Maori planted the Lombardy poplar, *Populus nigra* 'Italica', near their pa in the central North Island during the early days of the Hau Hau movement. The tree's upright form was later associated with the Ringatu faith's "upraised hand".

The book is divided up into ten broad geographical regions. Each is introduced by a description of the vegetation before man's influence, followed by a description of the great trees and associated vegetation. In a second section, there is a brief description of notable trees in the same regional groupings. If you are interested in less common trees, these lists could be most useful. At the end there is a very full cross referenced general index.

The book is easy to delve into and will stimulate people interested in trees to seek them out in their own area and in other places when they are on holiday. It should be a useful and interesting addition to references on New Zealand trees.

Bruce Treeby, Horticultural tutor, Lower Hutt Technical Correspondence Institute.