



A Living New Zealand Forest

by Robert Brockie (David Bateman)
\$95; special price to Forest and Bird members \$85

In 1966 the DSIR commenced a major series of studies of the Orongorongo Valley forests near Wellington – a study of the links, interactions, balances and imbalances of the forest plants and animals. The study continued for 25 years and the 1,200-ha research block became one of the most intensively examined forest communities anywhere in the world. It generated over 80 scientific papers, a score of departmental reports and many of its findings have already been incorporated into conservation management practices.

Here for the first time the study, its findings and their implications for all New Zealand's forests are put together in a coherent form in non-technical language. The results, if we didn't already know it, make depressing reading. Far from being pristine, our forests are being radically altered and their stability and tranquillity is largely illusory. Natural disturbances, such as droughts, gales and earthquakes which for millenia the forests took in their stride, have been supplemented, particularly in the last 150 years, by the depredations of foreign animals. The activities of these animals says Brockie "have outstripped the self-healing power of the forest, degrading its botanical integrity, reshaping its makeup and structure, consigning it to an impoverished future. Alien predators and competitors came to dominate the native animal life of the forest." This is certainly the book's central message.

While the overall results are the most important, it is the detail of the various forest processes and interactions that provide the fascination: the changes with the seasons; the fact that nearly a third of the rain falling on the Orongorongo forest is held in the canopy and evaporates without reaching the ground; that the main food of



M. J. MEADS: FROM A LIVING NEW ZEALAND FOREST

The native fly, *Pales* sp., sunning itself on hard beech leaves in the Orongorongo Valley. The larva of this fly is a parasite of pupae of the native *Helm's* butterfly, effectively holding the butterfly population in check.

feral cats is rats and possums, not native birds; and that rabbits have adapted to living in the bush as well as they do in open country.

Brockie was one of the team leaders for part of the study. He writes elegantly and the book is well organised and produced. Some of the 30 colour plates are not particularly good but that is maybe because they were record shots taken over a 25-year period. All the plates are thoughtfully captioned as are the 150 well-drawn figures and diagrams.

Ian Close

The New Zealand Descriptive Animal Dictionary

by Malcolm Foord

Malcolm Foord's animal dictionary is a valuable resource book for libraries, natural history researchers and schools. The book's sub-title says it all: "The Common Names of the Animals, Native and Introduced, Large and Small, on the Land and in the Waters of New Zealand and her Outlying Islands, with a Short Description of Each". Scientific names are included in each description but not as headwords.

Over 8,000 names – all known vertebrates and invertebrates – are listed in 500 pages, covering almost 4,000 species or subspecies. The descriptions are suc-

cinct and in plain English. In addition to his own extensive knowledge of New Zealand's fauna Foord has drawn material from a wide variety of sources and these alone make a valuable bibliography of works on New Zealand animals.

The only part of the dictionary that could be improved is the Maori names. These often differ between iwi, explaining the proliferation of names for some species. More recent work on Maori names for insects in northern New Zealand will add to this dictionary. But dictionaries are organic books. Their compilation is a monumental task (Foord spent 10 years on this one) and once started can always be added to. Foord published this dictionary himself. If you cannot find it in your bookshop it can be purchased directly from the author, 39 Park Street, Dunedin at a special price to Forest and Bird members of \$29.50 plus postage of \$4 (South Island) \$5 (North Island).

Mark Bellingham

A Field Guide to New Zealand Birds

by Geoff Moon (Reed) \$34.95

Bird lovers and photographers will be familiar with Geoff Moon's outstanding photography in his large format bird books and calendars. In this new field guide each species has an informative text and is well illus-

trated with photos, although it doesn't include many seabirds or rare vagrants. In recent years there has been a rash of simpler bird field guides and of these Moon's guide is easily the best.

This guide shows the power of photographs for bird identification. However, we still lack a good comparative photographic field guide, like the American Audubon guides, which point out distinctive features of different birds and compare them with similar species. Perhaps it will be Geoff Moon's second edition.

Mark Bellingham

A Field Guide to the Alpine Plants of New Zealand (third edition)

by John T. Salmon (Godwit Press)
\$39.95

This is the third edition of John Salmon's alpine plant guide. The authoritative text and excellent photographs continue to make it the best reference book for novices to the alpine flora. The guide's division of plants into habitats, e.g. grasslands, scrub and streamsides, makes it easy to use and this is assisted by a full index.

But the book's claim to be "fully revised", or even revised at all, is rather far-fetched. The publisher has changed but this reviewer could not find any changes in the descriptions of the plants or the photographs used. The book does not include any recent revisions of plant names or taxonomy (the *Leptinella* and *Meliccytus* – formerly *Cotula* and *Hymenanchera* – revisions from the *New Zealand Flora* volume VI of 1988 are not included) nor does it refer to a number of recent texts. The book also continues to suffer from Salmon's annoying habit of inventing "common" names for plants, for example curved-leaf grass tree for *Dracophyllum recurvum*, and the lack of Maori names where they are well accepted and well known e.g. wild irishman (matagouri) and mountain cabbage tree (toi).

Mark Bellingham