

Book reviews

Stewart Island: the last refuge

by Neville Peat, photos by Erwin Brinkmann (Random House New Zealand) 1992, 118pp, \$49.95
 "It is hard to speak of the scenery of Stewart Island without using a superabundance of superlatives," wrote pioneer botanist Leonard Cockayne in 1909. His opinion still holds true today, thanks to the island's geographic isolation and a climate politely described as inhospitable. But when the sun shines and the roaring forties let up, Stewart Island looks like a primeval paradise of beaches, forests and mountains. I was particularly interested to learn of the extraordinary diversity of plant species and communities, the abundance of tree daisies, and also that plants of alpine or sub-alpine habit further north, grow at sea level on the island.

Neville Peat's readable and informative commentary looks at the island's natural features, its plants, animals and landscapes and its human and geological history. Sadly, as Peat explains, this primeval world is no longer pristine, for possums and deer ravage the forests, and cats and rats plunder the birdlife. But to a Mainlander, the birds are remarkably numerous, and the forest still runs from the mountains to the sea.

The text reflects the author's love of Stewart Island and its little community. And this love is evidently shared by Erwin Brinkmann, whose photographs capture the rugged and brooding landscape and the essential wildness of this untamed island.

Ann Graeme

The Rockpool Fishes of New Zealand

by Chris Paulin and Clive Roberts (Museum of New Zealand) 1992, 177pp, \$49.95

Of the 1,000 fish species in New Zealand waters, 83 are found in the narrow rock pool area between the tides, and over two-thirds of these latter species are endemic. This is the best book to date about them.

Paulin and Roberts have included a wide range of information to assist snorkellers, coastal fossickers and others

identify and understand the fishes of the intertidal zone. The large format publication is devoted unreservedly to live fish, providing relief from the lengthy descriptions of edibility in many other books on fish.

Easy to use for the layperson or amateur marine biologist, the book gives details of the ecology of fishes, including unusual features of feeding or mating. For each species there is specific



Clingfishes are found on the bottom of rockpools with their ventral fins modified into suction disks for sticking onto rocks or seaweed. All 12 New Zealand species are endemic. The urchin clingfish shown here lives in close association with sea urchins and will often be seen sheltering beneath the spines. From *Rockpool Fishes of New Zealand*.

information, a clear line drawing (by Helen Casey), a photograph of the fish in the wild and a map of its New Zealand distribution.

The authors have also included a short history on the collection of fish specimens and a description of the coastal environment.

A simple key helps to distinguish similar fishes and the book is well referenced for the coastal naturalist who wants further information.

Barry Weeber

The Mosses of New Zealand

by Jessica Beever, K. W. Allison and John Child, (University of Otago Press) 1992 (2nd edition), 214pp, \$79.95

Mosses are all around us and are the major constituent of the lush green carpet that clothes much of New Zealand's forest trees and ground. Generally overlooked because of their small size, they abound from the coast

to the alpine herbfields; a few hardy species even live in city pavement cracks. Many mosses play an important ecological role through their pioneering ability to establish on bare ground, acting as a germinating "bed" for other plants and as a surface "sponge", thereby decreasing soil erosion from wind and rain.

New Zealand has a very rich moss flora both in abundance and diversity, with about 550

species. Although most are small, New Zealand does have one of the world's tallest mosses and others which form large pendant veils across tree branches.

Sainsbury's *A handbook of the New Zealand mosses* (1955) and Allison and Child's original *The mosses of New Zealand* (1971) are well outdated. This major revision by Dr Beever of Allison and Child's book fills a large gap, adding over two decades of recent knowledge.

The book includes 75 descriptions plus illustrations of New Zealand's commonest mosses, distinguishing characteristics of a further 380 species and, to complete this comprehensive study, a listing of 98 rare, local or poorly understood mosses. Included is a clearly set out 42-page key to all genera and common species, a glossary and bibliography.

This new edition contains 49 new colour photographs, with beautiful close-ups and cellular

plates and 82 original line drawings by Dr Beever. These new drawings frequently compare related species.

Jessica Beever and the publishers are to be congratulated on producing such an attractive, comprehensive and user-friendly book. There is no longer an excuse to ignore these beautiful plants.

Ewen Cameron

The Living Forests of New Zealand

by the New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust, (David Bateman Ltd) 1992, 224pp, \$49.95

The Native Forests Restoration Trust grew out of Stephen King's tree-sitting experiences in Pureora forest in the late 1970s. Set up in 1980, the trust has begun what David Bellamy described as the first major rainforest restoration project in the world – an attempt to link up the remnants of the once-great Pureora forest. As 6,000 hectares of pines are harvested from previously clearfelled land, native trees will be planted over a 30-year restoration period.

The trust raises money through subscriptions, public appeals and government grants to purchase cut-over land and carry out its replanting schemes.

This book is an intelligent coffee-table publication, a story of a love affair with the forests of New Zealand based around 200-plus wonderful forest photos by John Cobb and Geoff Moon.

Although John Cobb's text is reduced to two-page bites and long captions it manages to range eclectically through the country's forests, their many facades and intricacies, from the rare survivors of the Three Kings to the stunted rata forests of Auckland Island. Along the way it examines cycles of change, cycles of regeneration, what happens beneath the leaf litter, how forests survive natural disasters, the frogs, the parrots, the fungi and other inhabitants (even the unwanted possums and the cats) which go to make up the intricate web of a forest ecosystem. A good pictorial introduction to what makes this country's forests special.

Ian Close