

## Forest and Bird illustrator remembered



A woman whose paintings of native birds and plants appeared on the covers of some 60 issues of *Forest & Bird* has recently been remembered through a retrospective exhibition in Dunedin, and in a series of postcards featuring her work.

Lily Daff made a memorable series of paintings of native bird life and flora for *Forest and Bird* in the 1930s. Besides their appearance on the journal covers, they were also published in books and in slide sets, as part of *Forest and Bird's* advocacy.

Lily Attey Daff was born in Upton, London on March 16, 1885. She attended part-time art classes in London, took some commercial correspondence courses, and worked with Raphael Tuck and Sons, the famous producers of Christmas and greetings cards. In 1926, dissatisfied with life in England, and seeking independence after her mother's death, she came to Wellington.

An anonymous member of the Native Bird Protection Society, 'A.L.H.', writing in 1963, recalled introducing 'a recent arrival from England, Miss Daff, an artist of undiscovered merit to the Society's secretary, Captain E.V. Sanderson'.

To further its aims, the Society had decided to publish a series of albums reproducing original watercolour paintings of New Zealand birds accompanied by

suitable text. It was an ambitious undertaking. W.R.B. Oliver, an ornithologist and society committee member (soon to become Director at the Dominion Museum in 1928), met Daff and, recognizing her abilities, recommended her as artist for the project. She was to paint native birds in their natural habitat of plants, trees and flowers, under guidance from museum ornithologists.

Three albums were planned with 24 birds in each, under the titles *New Zealand Forest-Inhabiting Birds*, *New Zealand Sea and Shore Birds* and *New Zealand Open Country and Wetland Birds*. The illustrations for the first album were completed in 1931 in consultation with W.R.B. Oliver at the Dominion Museum. It was published in 1933 and reprinted in 1948 and 1959.

The paintings for *New Zealand Sea and Shore Birds* were completed by May 1933, with guidance from R.A. Falla at the Auckland War Memorial Museum, but the album was not published until 1940, with a second printing in 1953. Falla's text was acknowledged but not Daff's illustrations, until the 1953 printing.

Lily Daff worked as a freelance artist until 1934 when she gained full-time employment as artist and display designer at the Otago Museum where she remained until she died on May 3, 1945. The planned third album, '*Open Country and Wetland Birds*', was delayed by the war and then abandoned on Miss Daff's death.

In early 1974, to celebrate 50 years of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, 50 of Daff's bird paintings were published by A.H. & A.W. Reed as *An Album of New Zealand Birds*.

In total, Daff painted 53 watercolours for the society. They became familiar to the public through the pictorial albums and on the covers of *Forest & Bird*, on the covers of school writing pads,



### Parakeets

as collectors' cards, postcards and Christmas cards. In 1957, the Society made film strips of the bird paintings for sale.

Daff also illustrated Oliver's *New Zealand Birds* published in 1930, and the second to fifth editions of Pérrine Moncrieff's popular *New Zealand Birds and How to Identify Them*.

The originals of Lily Daff's paintings for the Society are now housed on loan in the Alexander Turnbull Library. Other originals are held by the Hocken Library and the Otago Museum.

It is through her paintings for *Oystercatchers*

*Forest and Bird* that Daff is best remembered. Her dedicated work ensured that two or three generations of New Zealanders came to know, value and remember their native birds.

The Hocken Library in Dunedin recently showed a large selection of her work with that of two other illustrators, Rona Dyer of Dunedin and the late Eileen Mayo of Christchurch. (A commemorative catalogue is available at \$11.95 from the library.) Also, the Upper Coromandel branch of *Forest and Bird* has recently produced a series of six postcards featuring her paintings.

— Margery Blackman.

