

# Book reviews

looks like is not going to be too riveted by its nasal mites.

I suppose the fact is, this is more of a history book; and, alas, a pretty depressing history it is—largely a sad tale of the decimation of the Hawaiian Islands' avifauna through years of predation and deprivation by rats, cattle, rabbits and modern agriculture—all introduced, of course, by man, who has tried to salve his conscience by also introducing Hawaii's incongruous open aviary of 'exotic' birds.

Fortunately, during the last year or so some conservation consciousness is growing in Hawaii, and there is definitely much magical wildlife still to be seen. That is why I'm going! I dare say I shall appreciate this book much more as a work of reference after I get back. It is clearly meant for the 'ornithologist'. Like I said . . . I'm just an 'average birder' (though I do know a tern when I see one!).

Bill Oddie  
Writer and broadcaster

**Species at Risk: Research in Australia**  
Proceedings of a Symposium on the  
Biology of Rare and Endangered Species  
in Australia, sponsored by the Australian  
Academy of Science and held in  
Canberra, 25 and 26 November 1981  
Edited by R.H. Groves and W.D.L. Ride  
Springer-Verlag, 1982, approximately  
US \$34.10

The editors of this volume have done well to have issued it within a year of the symposium on which it is based. The book includes papers on a variety of general as well as specific (case-study) topics, all of them of Australian concern but with global implications—some of them painful. In the very first paper D.F. McMichael asks 'What, precisely, do we mean by 'at risk'?', and puts the proposition that our limited resources, human as well as financial, simply will not allow us to save all species, and we will increasingly have to draw up priority lists based on clearly articulated criteria. An unpalatable prospect, but one which conservationists will increasingly have to acknowledge: will we have to adopt a programme akin to what disaster specialists call Triage, or will our efforts continue to be *ad hoc*?

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The Case History papers are a mixed bunch. Some trace the history of efforts devoted to saving individual species (the mallee *Eucalyptus caesia*; the orange-bellied parrot; Leadbeater's possum), others ponder the implications of genetic variation, or its lack, for conservation of particular plant and animal species. Briscoe *et al.* even propose a new taxonomy of rock-wallabies and find that one species, *Petrogale godmani*, is in danger of disappearance through genetic introgression. Davies, Smith and Robinson offer a scathing comment on how the penny-pinching habits of a (former) government threatened to overturn the effects of the half-million-plus dollars previously spent on saving the noisy scrub-bird. The series of case-studies ends with a paper by Strahan and Martin on the koala, which as I recall achieved a certain notoriety at the time of the conference and will still shock many people.

The 'Overview' papers that conclude the volume raise again the problems of viable population size (Frankel), the value of rare species (Main), and research and management prospects for rare plants (R.H. Groves) and animals (Ride and Wilson). All authors stress the importance of scientific research as a background to sound conservation. There are even some 'good news' stories. I well remember how at the symposium R.H. Groves showed a slide of 'the only remaining example' of the plant *Stylidium coroniforme*, and the delight of the audience when the botanist S.D. Hopper stood up to announce that the known world population had just been doubled!

There are still success stories to be told, and the opportunities for new successes are probably greater in Australia than anywhere else. In this business-like report conservationists will find the problems aired and well discussed, and case-studies reviewed; though hard-going for the general reader, the book can be recommended to the practising conservationist both as an exemplar of concepts of universal applicability and for its own sake as a report on one of the world's most important natural biological laboratories.

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