

## BOOK REVIEW

**ERIC HOSKING'S WILDFOWL.** Photographs by Eric Hosking, text by Janet Kear. 153 pages, 146 photographs, one diagram, Croom Helm, London and Sydney, 1985. \$37.50.

The title may lead you to think that this is a coffee-table book, in which the text merely fills the gaps between photographs by a celebrity. In fact Janet Kear deserves equal prominence. As an experienced scientist, she summarises in an interesting way a large body of research. The photographs are not equal in technical quality to those in many illustrated books, but are fascinating in their subject matter. They illustrate various types of behaviour, taxonomic groups and habitats; and they were taken in places as dispersed as Spitzbergen, Iceland, the Falkland Islands, the Galapagos Islands, the Auckland Islands, Kenya, and northern Australia. The late Konrad Lorenz sets the tone of the book in his introduction, in which he rejects the assumption that science must be boring to be respectable, and refers to ethology as one science "in which success is absolutely dependent on that non-rational joy which fixes the gaze of the investigator unflinchingly on the object of his research . . ."

Janet Kear presents a fascinating array of information about evolution, courtship, nesting, parental care, feeding, migration, and relationship to humans, among the 143 species of ducks, geese and swans that constitute the wildfowl, Australasian species receive much attention. Nine are illustrated; and the author notes (p. 22) that several are in some way 'special'. The evolutionary tree on p. 12 shows that the Magpie Goose, Cape Barren Goose and Freckled Duck each has no close relatives. The Magpie Goose is the most primitive of wildfowl in evolutionary terms, and the least adapted to aquatic life. The Stifftails — represented in Australia by two species — are the most advanced and the most fully adapted to aquatic life. The Magpie Goose and Musk Duck are exceptional in feeding their young. Another Australasian oddity is the Paradise Shelduck, in which the female is the more brightly-coloured.

In all, the book is an absorbing combination of information and illustration.

**DAVID CLOSE**