

Working for Wildlife: A History of the New Zealand Wildlife Service. By Ross Galbreath. Bridget Williams Books in association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1993. 200 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-90891-243-9.

COINCIDENTALLY with receiving this book for review, I came across a short account in the *Observer* for 4 January 1896 about a man of 'high standing' in Wellington organizing the shooting of stitchbirds on Little Barrier Island sanctuary, and selling 90 skins to Baron Rothschild alone. This reinforces the impression created by this book that the story of the protection of New Zealand's indigenous species was, until very recently, a matter of 'too little, too late'.

Not that Dr Galbreath makes this point; indeed, he seems consciously to avoid value judgements. His book, especially in the earlier chapters, is a summary of over a hundred years of wildlife management, starting with the first attempts in the 1860s to acclimatize all manner of European species and ending with the establishment of the Department of Conservation. His summary of the continual evolution of complicated administrative structures and the rivalries of public and private interest groups is necessarily too brief to give much insight into the personalities of the many strong-minded people involved. Demarcation disputes over the ownership of particular policies and the lobbying of interest groups delayed new initiatives, and conservation of native flora and fauna was largely nominal until the 1920s. With income predominantly coming from fish and game licences, work in these areas took the largest proportion of funds, and conservation issues were never adequately tackled. The formation in 1945 of the Wildlife Branch (retitled Wildlife Service in 1974) to provide the long-called-for 'unity of control' failed to achieve this unity, and the Branch itself was not united, the most notable rivalries being between field officers and scientists. From the 1950s conservation efforts were much more active, clearing islands of goats, pigs, or rats so that threatened species had their 'ark'. The book traces the conflicts of interest between conservationists and farmers, who wanted deer exterminated, and hunters, who wanted sufficient preserved to provide sport. Changes in public sentiment are highlighted, showing the influence of the television chronicle of Old Blue and the saving of the Black Robins.

The scientific aspects of conservation work are well covered (the author's scientific background assists here, as do the photographs). There was never enough scientific knowledge; for instance, not until 1980 was it possible to distinguish the sex of kakapo. A final answer to the oft-raised question 'should research serve the needs of field management, or should field management be guided by research?' (p.115) was not found; in practice, the field officers made the bulk of the decisions and got results through 'the usual Wildlife Branch approach — a minimum of resources and much dedicated effort' (p.117) — and much personal discomfort in their field work.

The book reveals the importance of private vested interests, arguing that National lost the 1972 election by ignoring both conservationists (over Lake Manapouri) and the fishing lobby (by transferring functions from acclimatization societies to government agencies). Increasing public pressure meant that conservation changed from meaning 'wise use' of forests to 'preservation by locking up' — the Forest Service's dismissive phrase. Responding to the new mood, the Labour government's new requirement of Environmental Impact Reports after 1973 created the right of the public to participate in policy making, and a heightened profile for the Wildlife Service. The next Labour government put an end to interminable administrative compromises by merging (submerging?) the Service in an entirely new organization.

The ending of the book is rather like the ending of the Wildlife Service: abrupt. With the birth of the Department of Conservation, the story ends, with no attempt at drawing

any general conclusions. This extremely competent and thorough (if brief) explanation of the administrative history of wildlife management is unlikely to be modified in the future, but it leaves several questions unanswered. The relative significance of enthusiastic amateurs and vested interests compared with officials and politicians in developing policy and administrative structures should have been assessed more explicitly, and the structures designed to save wildlife and their habitat needed closer analysis: and is the Department of Conservation an improvement (as the account implies)? How successful was the Wildlife Service overall? The scientist/field officer split, and the split between both these groups and the administrators, could have been developed: did these rivalries delay desirable outcomes, or were they just the typical jealousies inherent in any system? Can the splits (which persist) ever be resolved? Should there have been more academic training of field officers? Was the saving of indigenous species really part of a Pakeha search for national identity (p. 207)?

The reader is left with the impression that the author has been obliged to avoid making value judgements because of the nature of 'public history'. It would be a pity if this variety of history has to opt for a non-controversial chronicle of events that underplays the personalities and the passions. Perhaps because many of those involved in recent developments are still alive, and government departments were looking over the author's shoulder, he felt obliged to take a detached viewpoint, but detachment can lead to a bald tale that is likely to limit its interest largely to those directly involved. Certainly the rigours of a two-year time-frame from start of project to completion limited the possibilities for adding the 'human interest' aspects that would widen the book's appeal. It is written solely from departmental files, scientific literature and other primary documents; the lack of oral interviews is presumably a deliberate omission, but it is unfortunate. Hidden away in the final footnotes (p.244, no.32) is Ralph Adams' eulogy for the Wildlife Service. 'Hatched in obscurity, nurtured spasmodically, fledged through commitment, destroyed in full flight!' If the emotions implied in this eulogy had been brought out in this book it would have become much more than the commendable piece of research it is. Personalities and value-judgements have a place in public history too!

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Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley. By Ian Carter. Auckland University Press in association with the Broadcasting History Trust, Auckland, 1993. 339 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1869400852.

JAMES SHELLEY, who was born in England in 1884 and died there in 1961, was Professor of Education at Canterbury College (1920-1935) and Director of Broadcasting (1935-1949). Little known now, Shelley was once the most public professor in New Zealand. Inter alia, he founded the Canterbury College drama society and the Canterbury Repertory Theatre, inaugurated novel schemes of adult education, and played a significant part in the campaign for better school buildings. He had a lifelong interest in art and drama and was a considerable actor. He was a skilled craftsman and miniature painter and produced stage settings, costumes, properties, illuminated addresses, apparatus for the psychological laboratory he established at Canterbury, and an improved gramophone stylus with equal facility.