

## REVIEW

### *New Zealand Birds: a Sound Guide; volume 1. North Island Brown Kiwi to Blue Petrel*

This cassette is the first in a series which aims to present recordings of all the species and subspecies of birds on the New Zealand checklist. This daunting task has been undertaken by Les McPherson, who has himself recorded much of the material to be used over the past 20 years. Other recordings were commissioned and the balance obtained from a wide variety of sources (both local and overseas) by donation or exchange. Volume 2 should be available by the end of 1988 and it is hoped to have the series of four or five cassettes completed in time for the IOC in 1990.

Volume 1 covers 59 species or subspecies, with recordings dating from 1955 to 1986. Side 1 deals with the kiwis, penguins, grebes, albatrosses and some mollymawks; side 2 contains the rest of the mollymawks, fulmars and the gadfly petrels. The average track length is a little under 1 minute, but there is considerable variation, with the shortest at 10 seconds (North Island Brown Kiwi) and the longest at 2 minutes 17 seconds (Snares Cape Pigeon). The overall quality of these recordings is very high, especially when it is considered that most of them had to be obtained in the windy and inhospitable conditions which normally prevail on subantarctic islands and in Antarctica itself.

Obviously, limits must be imposed on the length of each recording in a production such as this, and nearly all the selections are well judged. The only real disappointment for me was the recording of the North Island Brown Kiwi – less than 10 seconds of call and from a male only. Considering that this could be one of most useful calls in the present volume, it is a shame that a slightly longer recording featuring both sexes was not included. On the other hand, many of the selections are a surprise and a delight; no doubt each listener will have his or her own favourites, but I find it hard to go past the strange, other-worldly but beautiful trumpeting of the Emperor and King Penguins.

Each recording is introduced on the tape by its common name. The two voices used (one male and one female) are clear and there are no irritating gaps between selections. The handbook which accompanies the tape is clear, is easy to use and has all the information that most listeners could need. Each listing shows the scientific and common names of the species or subspecies and a brief note on the subject, e.g. "Calls of adult at nest, with chicks in background". This is followed by the location, date (and in some cases time of day) of the recording, its duration and the name of the recordist. The only faults I can find with the handbook are trivial - in one instance *Eudyptula* is misspelt and in a few cases recent changes in taxonomy have altered scientific names.

In his written introduction Mr McPherson notes that "It is inevitable in a production of this kind that there will be some omissions". The only ones that I can find are the NZ Dabchick (a rather silent species at the best of times) and seven of the rarer *Pterodroma* species (*solandri*, *alba*, *magentae*,

*longirostris*, *pycrofti*, *leucoptera* and *axillaris*), some of which may never have been recorded. Aside from these, coverage is complete and thus includes the highly unlikely and the exotic – recordings of Moseley's Rockhopper Penguin, Magellanic Penguin and Black-footed Albatross all testify to the compiler's industry and perseverance. Ultimately it is hoped to produce a supplementary tape at the end of the series to accommodate as many of the omissions as possible; anyone who may be able to fill any of the gaps is welcome to write to the address below.

Mr McPherson is to be congratulated on his enterprise; when this series is complete it will form an outstanding and unique record of the calls and songs of New Zealand's birds. It deserves to be available in every library and should be in the collection of all those with a serious interest in our avifauna. The present volume brings us a wonderful collection of sounds, many of which most of us will never have the chance to hear in the wild. Later cassettes, particularly those dealing with land and shore birds, will have obvious applications in the fields of education and bird identification. In addition, the whole series will be an indispensable aid to the growing number of foreign birdwatchers visiting New Zealand.

Volume 1 is available from McPherson Natural History Unit, P.O. Box 21083, Edgware, Christchurch, New Zealand, for NZ\$15.00 post paid.

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