

Book Review

A SELLER'S MARKET †

Field Guide to the Alpine Plants of New Zealand, by John Salmon. Reed, Wellington, 1968. 327 pp. Price \$5.60.

The compact 5 by 8½ in. format of this book is a great improvement on the earlier *New Zealand Flowers and Plants in Colour* by the same author; it is particularly well sized to slip into the car glovebox, and the non-slip-off plastic cover is the best thing yet for this kind of use. The presentation is again based on photos with extended captions, with an average of three photos per opening. The layout very nearly achieves that rare attainment of picture and caption always on the same opening.

This new book is much less bitsy, and illustrates an arbitrary selection of plants likely to be found above the timber line, arranged as before in a habitat grouping—subalpine scrub, grasslands, stony places, bogs and swamps (a small section), streamsides and shaded places, and herbfields and fellfields (the largest section). There is also a bracket of more general photos labelled "Ecology", and a final essay tying together the various sections.

In general the text is straightforward, and the concluding essay is a useful popular account which might better have been put at the front. The use of metric measurements throughout will perhaps come as a slight shock to some, and would be more palatable with the inclusion of a scale (the left edge of the inside front hard cover would be a good place). Similarly a glossary to explain words like divaricating, decumbent, obovate, pubescent, etc. would be helpful, but perhaps in a book of this kind the use of simpler descriptive terms would be even better. For this reader at least the text is marred by occasional lapses such as: "tussock grasslands . . . so familiar to and so beloved by every true New Zealander". At times too a certain looseness creeps in: this is perhaps understandable in the extended captions which form the bulk of the book, for this is from an author's viewpoint a tiresome format not conducive to elegance. In the text we meet for example "itinerant" Penwiper plants—happy thought!—followed by instructions where to look for them! Elsewhere the reader would probably conclude that fellfield vegetation is found only on steep slopes, rather than the more usual gravel shelves and places of little slope; the role of frost is not mentioned. Referring to caption 456, *Euphrasia* is only a partial parasite, and the bald "living upon the *Aciphylla*" is a bit hard to take. I pondered too over the bracket

† This review was originally intended to be just a comment from one interested in photography. However, on closer acquaintance a more detailed treatment seemed warranted, and may prove useful to those who (like the reviewer) have already bought the book.

of photos headed "Ecology"; they might better be labelled "Vegetation", for few of the photos are overtly ecological, and fewer of the captions are ecological in any sense of function or interpretation. Indeed, some of the captions strain the evidence of the photo: 448 for example certainly shows shrubs and tussocks, but does not show the claimed "From scrub to tussock-grassland". This is a pity, for the caption would not be difficult to illustrate, and vegetation change and the consequent pattern is an interesting topic well worth portraying. Other unsatisfactory captions are 117, which claims to show "Scarlet Bidi-bidi in flower" whereas it is densely in fruit, and 256, where over 90% of the photo is a moss, or perhaps *Raoulia tenuicaulis*, which is not mentioned in the caption; the casual reader would suppose the leaves belonged to the two flowers of *Claytonia australasica*. Plates 159-163 illustrate the vegetable sheep *Haastia pulvinaris*, and the author is prompted to relate some experiences with these fascinating plants. Unfortunately for botanical accuracy we are led to believe that these daisies bear their "seed" in capsules. *Haastia* is no different in this respect from other daisies; each "flower" is an inflorescence of florets, each floret produces a single-seeded fruit (or achene), and the fruit or "seeds" are borne on a receptacle.

In all, about 375 species are illustrated in 481 photos; of these species about 180 also appeared in the second edition of the earlier book. Of the 180, at least 23 of the photos are re-used, though three are laterally inverted, one is rotated 90°, and one is a duplicate shot after tidying. The remainder are new photos generally improved both in reproduction and in inherent picture quality. Thus while the considerable overlap between the two books does perhaps reduce the value for money, the improved quality makes up for it. The total impression of the pictures is one of marked improvement over either edition of the earlier book — so much so that the overall standard is acceptable. To what extent the failings in picture quality are due to printer, publisher, or photographer is hard to say; the printer (Kyodo Printing Co., Tokyo) is certainly responsible in the first instance for the numbers of photos blurred by faulty register, the blotches of stray colour, and at least for some colour casts and the variation in colour. Variation is slight in one edition, but colossal at times between the two editions of the earlier work or between photos common to all three. In considering responsibility however, we must remember that when the publisher is content to accept the work, he also accepts the responsibility. An interesting comparison may be made at this point with *Flowers and Plants of Victoria* from the Australian branch of the same publishers, and printed by the same Japanese printer. To my eye this book (production of which was stimulated by Dr Salmon's first book) has achieved a far higher standard than the two New Zealand ones. The quality of the original photos may play a large part, and one

is tempted to speculate on the film used. In his first work Dr Salmon included a section on photography, and noted he had found Ferrania reversal film processed by himself "admirable". However, the final printed result was less than admirable. In the supplementary photos of the second edition the use of Kodachrome increased considerably, but the Alpine book gives no clue to the film used, other than the fact that the quality is better. The Australian volume depends mainly on Agfa CT18, a film probably well suited to the bright reds and blues of the Australian flora. Bright colours or no, examination of the photos illustrating plants common to Australia and New Zealand (e.g. raupo, *Solanum laciniatum* in flower, or *Cotula coronopifolia*) certainly suggests that Agfa CT18 and Kyodo Printing Co. go together rather better than some other combinations.

A personal evaluation of the 481 plates is that about one third are good, one half adequate, and one sixth inadequate. Of the last mentioned, 30 are spoiled by faulty register. Many plates have too much of one primary colour: often this results in no more than a slight colour cast, but a few are terrible. A fair proportion of the photos are studio work, yet they vary as much as the outdoor ones. One of two (e.g. 298) are "posy of flowers" compositions with little appeal. In a number of cases my enjoyment of the picture has been reduced by the hue chosen for the uniform artificial background. For the original, a tasteful background can at times enhance picture quality, but it is risky for applications such as bulk reproduction. With some exceptions (e.g. plate 414), natural background photographs are far more pleasing, and failing that the dependable black background takes a lot of beating. However, what constitutes a good background is a subject on which photographers are split fairly deeply (those interested may compare the alternative approach by inspecting the *Plants of Victoria* volume). A number of the photos stand out — for example plate 36, or 98 with flash fill — but the author's ability to produce fine photographs is somewhat obscured by failure to maintain critical standards at the selection stage.

Most photos show enough to help with gross recognition. Some show diagnostic features well, and a few designed primarily to aid identification are most helpful. The close-ups of whipcord hebes are examples of technical illustration at its best, an example which might well be adopted by others attempting to provide means of identifying organisms. The inclusion of the month the photo was taken is a useful detail.

Part of the pleasure of the book is to see in flower some of the plants one has not intercepted at the right moment in the field — common oddments like the chickweed *Stellaria gracilentia*, or rarer ones like the yellow eyebright *Euphrasia cockayniana*. Useful too to have photos to hand of what these things look like, even when

trying to identify other similar species. Which brings me to the question: will the book meet the publisher's claim and "give positive identification of the plants encountered"? Of course it won't, since there are 1000-odd species of higher plants in the altitudinal range the book covers, and only 375 species are illustrated. The author makes no such claim — the book, he says "is offered not as a complete survey . . . but . . . to illustrate those plants most commonly met with . . .". This it does, and the altitudinal/habitat arrangement is suited to general use. There is no provision for identifying plants by keys or critical examination; it is more the good old-fashioned way of comparing the plant with the picture and then reading through the amplifying notes to check. This is perhaps adequate for users who just want to get as far as "it's a spear-grass", but you can't go much further if you are unlucky enough to have a plant that is not illustrated. On the other hand, for those with a deeper interest, armed perhaps with other more detailed but inadequately illustrated works, the photos in this book will be of great assistance, and help one negotiate the pitfalls and dead-endings of keys. Incidentally, the book's index is good; only once has it failed me.

Unfortunately the quality and usefulness of this work is marred by an excess of mistakes of one kind or another. Some are merely irritating; for example the map on p. 11 which shows Mt Terako shifted across the Clarence almost to Molesworth, or the score or so spelling and typographical errors. More serious, however, was the realisation that a number of identifications seemed to be wrong, and some of the associated statements also seemed doubtful. The first run through, looking mainly at the pictures, produced over a dozen mistakes, some of which are glaringly obvious. For example, plate 294 is labelled *Viola lyallii*, but the diagnostic stipules of *Viola filicaulis* are plain to see. The accompanying text is based on Allan's *Flora*, and agrees with the data for *lyallii* up to the end of the remarks about "damp places", but then "such as subalpine scrub" is popped in — surely the place of *filicaulis* as photographed rather than *lyallii*. Since then the identifications throughout the book have been checked by Mr A. P. Druce and Dr C. J. Burrows, and the results appear below. I am grateful to them for their work. Some of their identifications must necessarily be tentative; they have had only the photos, and not the plants, to study. A few corrections admittedly depend on special knowledge: for example the true *Coprosma parviflora* is found only in North Auckland. Hand correction of the book is recommended (though personally I resent being obliged to deface it); remember also that the information in the captions may be irrelevant to the new identifications.

Some errors have unfortunate consequential results — one of the worst is plate 262, where *Epacris alpina* is presented as *Hebe pauciramosa*. Unfortunately we are invited (p. 244) to compare

plate 375 (*Here pauciramosa* var. *pauciramosa*, not var. *masonae* as stated) with the *Epacris*. Another interesting one is plate 87, where what seems to be one of the rarest plants in New Zealand (*Pittosporum obcordatum*) is presented as *Myrsine divaricata*. Was the subject of this photo really found at Lewis Pass? It would certainly be a welcome new record. The plant seems more likely to have come from Otari Gardens, Wellington.

Other errors have crept into the captions. Plate 184 is *Hymenanthera angustifolia* as stated, but the species is not known from the stated locality. The caption for plate 109 states that *Chionochloa flavescens* occurs from Egmont and Hikurangi south, whereas it does not occur north of the Tararuas. Similar errors occur elsewhere in the book. Some mistakes are downright annoying: plate 115 depicts a more distant view of the same plant as plate 403 in the earlier book. In the first edition it was wrongly labelled *Gahnia pauciflora*, in the second it was correctly labelled *Gahnia procera*, but without a change in the text which still refers to *G. pauciflora*, and now in the new book it is again wrongly labelled *Gahnia pauciflora*.

This careless approach is not good enough. The public is entitled to expect scholarly standards from scholarly authors who write popular books. The average person must take these books on faith — he has no means of checking the information. In my view both author and publisher have fallen short of the standards that could be expected. Identification mistakes alone add up to 78 of the 481 plates — some 16%. A good number of these are straightforward and could have been picked up by botanical referees given pictures and text in final form or proof.

The Australian book, in contrast, though from the Australian branch of the same publishers, was a joint venture of the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, a professional photographer, a lecturer in photography (the chairman), a Government botanist, and a university biogeographer. For books of this kind, collective authorship is one way of avoiding the hazards which can beset the one-man venture.

How can the public learn the merits or demerits of a book? At the present time evaluation is seldom assisted by the reviews which appear in dailies or weeklies; they seem to go overboard when it comes to natural history books, and especially is this so for glossy ones. For example the "Dominion" of 25 May 1968 had this to say of the present book: "It is not necessary to say much . . . The book is absolutely first rate . . . excellently . . . produced . . .". One would be forgiven for thinking that the publishers supplied their own book reviews; they certainly have an easy market.

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REFERENCES

- COCHRANE, G. R., B. A. FUHRER, E. R. ROTHERHAM (chairman), and J. H. WILLIS. 1968: *Flowers and Plants of Victoria*. Reed, Sydney. 216 pp. 9¼ x 11½ in. approx. Price \$9.95.
- SALMON, J. T., 1963: *New Zealand Flowers and Plants in Colour*. Reed, Wellington. 204 pp. 2nd. ed. 1967, 235 pp. 9¼ x 11½ approx. Price formerly 65/-, now \$8.

PLATE	NAME USED	CORRECT NAME
3	<i>Olearia odorata</i>	<i>O. virgata?</i>
5	<i>O. ilicifolia</i>	<i>O. i. × O. arborescens</i>
7	<i>O. moschata</i>	<i>O. m. × O. sp.</i>
49, 50, 51	<i>Coprosma parviflora</i>	<i>C. sp. (unnamed)</i>
52	<i>C. parviflora</i>	<i>C. depressa?</i>
67, 68	<i>Pseudowintera axillariss</i>	<i>P. colorata</i>
75	<i>Hebe canterburiensis</i>	* <i>H. subalpina</i>
79	<i>H. brachysiphon</i>	<i>H. sp. (or 2 spp. ?)</i>
87	<i>Myrsine divaricata</i>	<i>Pittosporum obcordatum</i> (var. <i>kaitaiaensis?</i>)
97	<i>Gaultheria rupestris</i>	<i>G. crassa</i>
109	<i>Chionochloa flavescens</i>	<i>C. pallens?</i>
114	<i>Poa caespitosa</i>	<i>Notodanthonia viridis</i>
115	<i>Gahnia pauciflora</i>	<i>G. procera</i>
132, 134	<i>Pernettya macrostigma</i>	<i>P. m. × Gaultheria depressa</i> var. <i>novae-zelandiae</i>
142	<i>Aciphylla glaucescens</i>	<i>A. sp. (unnamed)</i>
143	<i>A. aurea</i>	<i>A. horrida</i>
146	<i>A. ferox</i>	<i>A. aurea</i>
148	<i>Coprosma petriei</i>	<i>C. pumila</i>
150	<i>C. petriei</i>	<i>C. petriei</i> var. <i>atropurpurea</i>
151	<i>C. brunnea</i>	<i>C. cheesemanii?</i>
168	<i>Raoulia mammillaris</i>	<i>R. eximia</i>
173	<i>R. hookeri</i> var. <i>apice-nigra</i>	* <i>R. tenuicaulis</i>
174	<i>R. parkii</i>	* <i>R. australis</i>
174a	<i>R. parkii</i>	* <i>R. hookeri?</i>
175	<i>R. australis</i>	<i>R. tenuicaulis</i>
189	<i>Cotula perpusilla</i>	<i>C. squalida</i>
218	<i>Hebe buchananii</i>	<i>H. pinguiifolia?</i>
235	<i>Aciphylla carnosula</i>	<i>Anisotome carnosula</i> , (now <i>Lignocarpa carnosula</i>)
238	<i>Geranium microphyllum</i>	* <i>G. sessiliflorum</i>
240	<i>Myosotis australis</i>	* <i>M. sp.</i>
242	<i>M. explanata</i>	<i>M. eximia?</i>
247	<i>Drosera spathulata</i>	<i>D. stenopetala</i>
249	<i>D. stenopetala</i>	<i>D. arcturi</i>
261	<i>Carex flaviformis</i>	<i>C. sinclairii</i>
262	<i>Hebe pauciramosa</i>	<i>Epacris alpina</i>
265	<i>Nertera dichondraefolia</i>	<i>N. sp. (unnamed)</i>
270	<i>Hebe traversii</i>	* <i>H. subalpina?</i>
279, 280	<i>Myriophyllum votschii</i>	<i>M. pedunculatum</i>
281	<i>Gunnera monoica</i>	<i>G. dentata</i>
292	<i>Gnaphalium keriense</i>	<i>Gnaphalium sp. (unnamed)</i>
294	<i>Viola lyallii</i>	<i>V. filicaulis</i>
296	<i>Arthropodium candidum</i>	<i>Libertia pulchella</i>
299	<i>Pterostylis australis</i>	<i>P. montana?</i>
302	<i>Colobanthus strictus</i>	<i>C. buchananii</i> or <i>C. acicularis</i>

PLATE	NAME USED	CORRECT NAME
310	<i>Ourisia sessilifolia</i>	<i>O. macrophylla</i> var. <i>lactea</i>
344	<i>Gentiana corymbifera</i>	* <i>G. divisa</i> ?
347, 348	<i>Gaultheria depressa</i>	<i>G. crassa</i>
349, 350	<i>G. depressa</i>	<i>G. depressa</i> var. <i>novae-zelandiae</i>
352	<i>G. crassa</i>	* <i>G. hybrid</i>
358	<i>Marchantia polymorpha</i>	<i>M. sp.</i>
375	<i>Hebe pauciramosa</i> var. <i>masonae</i>	<i>H. p. var. pauciramosa</i>
394	<i>Celmisia bonplandii</i>	<i>C. sp.</i>
407	<i>C. walkeri</i>	<i>C. sp.</i>
410	<i>C. parva</i>	<i>C. glandulosa</i> ?
413	<i>Pterostylis oliveri</i>	<i>P. montana</i> ?
415	<i>Aporostylis lyallii</i>	<i>Caladenia lyallii</i>
416	<i>Thelymitra longifolia</i>	<i>T. decora</i>
433, 433a	<i>Pratia macrodon</i>	<i>P. angulata</i>
440, 441	<i>Pimelea prostrata</i> var. <i>erecta</i>	* <i>Pimelea oreophila</i>
447	<i>Senecio adamsii</i>	<i>S. elaeagnifolius</i>
449	<i>Chionochloa flavescens</i>	<i>C. pallens</i>
451	<i>Dracophyllum prostratum</i>	* <i>D. pronum</i>
456	<i>Aciphylla monroi</i>	<i>A. polita</i>
460	<i>Drosera spathulata</i>	<i>D. stenopetala</i>
461	<i>Nertera depressa</i>	* <i>N. balfouriana</i> ?
464	<i>Myriophyllum votschii</i>	<i>M. pedunculatum</i>
465	<i>Drosera stenopetala</i>	<i>D. arcturi</i>
473	<i>Ourisia vulcanica</i>	<i>O. caespitosa</i>
475	<i>Leucogenes grandiceps</i>	<i>L. leontopodium</i>

- NOTES: (1) List prepared by A. P. Druce, with additions (marked *) by C. J. Burrows.
- (2) The plants identified as *Astelia cockaynei* (plates 312-314) and *A. nervosa* (plates 315, 316) are now known as *A. nervosa* and *A. fragrans* respectively.
- (3) *Thelymitra uniflora* (plate 418) is now included with *T. venosa*.

A SISTER PUBLICATION

Our good wishes go to the Canterbury Botanical Society on the appearance of their *Journal* (No. 1—November 1968, No. 2—September 1969). We hope this venture brings the same interest and pleasure that the development of our own publication has brought the members of this Society.