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## BIRDS OF THE SULLIVANS COVE AREA, CITY OF HOBART

J.G.K. Harris

In 1978 the Bird Observers Association of Tasmania (B.O.A.T.) was requested by the Sullivans Cove Development Committee to provide a report on the species of birds inhabiting the Sullivans Cove area to assist in the formulation of planning guidelines for the area's future use. The Sullivans Cove Study Area, as indicated in Fig. 1, comprises the main commercial wharves of the City built around the inlet known as Sullivans Cove, together with a surrounding zone of mainly commercial buildings and two small park areas. The report was based on observations made by J.G.K. Harris, J. Berry and A.W.J. Fletcher over the period 1973 to 1978. This paper is adapted from that report.

Sullivans Cove and its foreshore consist of four types of bird habitat, each with its own distinct bird population. The first and dominant habitat is the built-up area with little or no trees or shrubs. This area includes the railway yards and wharf service areas behind the wharf. Very few birds frequent this habitat and most of those that do would generally be considered the least desirable. The major species are three introduced birds, the house sparrow, common starling and feral or domestic pigeon. All three of these nest in the area. The native silver gull also frequently scavenges in the area and the two native swallows, the welcome swallow and the tree martin are both fairly commonly seen hawking for insects around the buildings. The tree martin definitely nests in the area using pipes in the sides of buildings as ready-made nest sites. The welcome swallow probably also nests under eaves of the buildings.

The second habitat and that with the greatest variety of birds is the park-land, which, is currently restricted to St. Davids Park and Franklin Square and the area in front of Parliament House. A total of 30 species have been recorded in these areas, but it is very noticeable that 15 of these, all the native bush species, are almost exclusively found in the vicinity of the large blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) in St. Davids Park. The other species consist of seven introduced birds, the silver gull, aerial feeders (swallow and swifts)

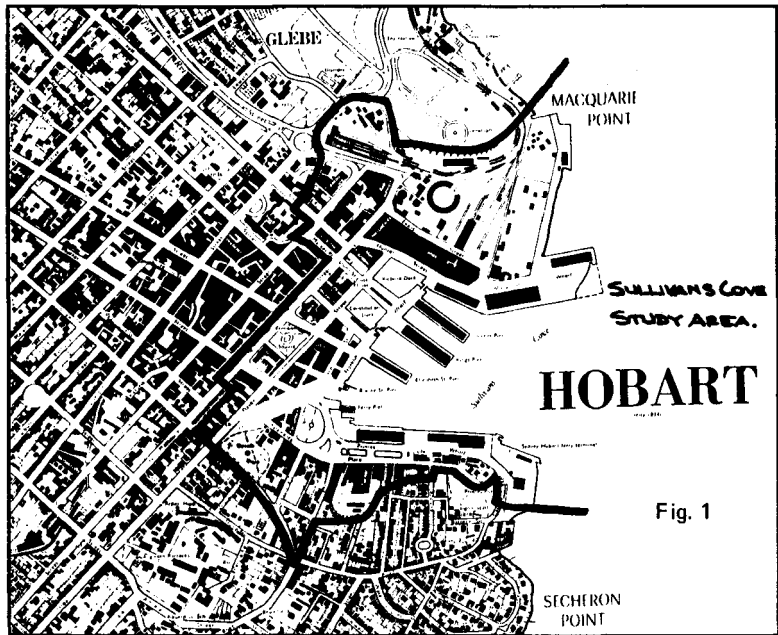


Fig. 1

and occasional raptors. Most of the introduced species nest in the area, but none of the native bush birds have been found nesting.

The third habitat is the wharf and docks frequented by three species of gull, one tern and two cormorants with occasional sightings of little penguins.

Finally there is the River Derwent outside the dock area in which at odd times purely marine species can be observed. There is even one record of a wandering albatross straying up the river in a gale.

#### List of Bird Species Recorded

The habitat in which the species was recorded is denoted by a number and appears on the right of the list.

1 = Built-up areas

2 = Parks

3 = Wharfs and docks

4 = River Derwent

	Habitat
Hoary-headed grebe – <i>Poliiocephalus poliocephalus</i> Occasionally seen swimming in the dock area.	3
Little penguin – <i>Eudyptula minor</i> Fairly regular in the river occasionally entering the docks.	3, 4
Wandering albatross – <i>Diomedea exulans</i> One recorded following a ship up the river in a gale.	4

Giant petrel – <i>Macronectes sp.</i>	4
Irregularly recorded following ships up the river, usually in stormy weather.	
Short-tailed shearwater (muttonbird) – <i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i>	4
Enormous flocks in the river at certain times of year, particularly late summer.	
Australian pelican – <i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	4
Irregularly recorded flying over the river.	
Australian gannet – <i>Morus serrator</i>	4
Common in the mouth of the Derwent, but only occasionally coming up as far as Hobart.	
Black cormorant – <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	3, 4
Common on wharf. Frequently seen perched on ships or dockside buildings with wings held spread out to dry.	
Little pied cormorant – <i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucus</i>	3, 4
Common in the wharf area.	
White-faced heron – <i>Ardea novaehollandiae</i>	3, 4
Flies over wharf area not infrequently, but only occasionally seen to land in the area.	
Great egret - <i>Egretta alba</i>	3, 4
Large pure white heron, occasionally seen flying over wharfs and river.	
Black swan – <i>Cygnus atratus</i>	4
Common in upper reaches of the Derwent near Granton. Often seen flying over the wharfs and occasionally lands on the river.	
Mallard - <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	3
Introduced bird (ancestor of domestic duck). Two were seen regularly in the wharf area in the year following the Tasman Bridge disaster. They were fed regularly by passengers queuing for the Derwent ferries.	
Collared sparrow hawk – <i>Accipiter cirrhocephalus</i>	2
Several records from St. David's Park and Parliament Square. Probably feeding on starlings during their pre-roost gathering in St. David's Park. One definitely seen to kill a starling in the park.	
Peregrine falcon – <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	2
One observed flying over Parliament Square.	
Brown falcon – <i>Falco berigora</i>	2, 3
Fairly regular over wharves and parks. May feed on rodents around docks and grain silo.	
White-bellied sea-eagle – <i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	4
Irregularly seen flying over the river.	
Wedge-tailed eagle – <i>Aquila audax</i>	3, 4
Irregularly seen soaring over wharf area.	

Masked lapwing (spurwing plover) – <i>Vanellus miles</i>	3
Occasionally seen in wharf area.	
Great skua – <i>Stercorarius skua</i>	4
Several records from the Derwent where they follow ships up river in stormy weather.	
Arctic jaeger – <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	4
Follows ships up river. Feeds by chasing gulls until they drop their food.	
Silver gull – <i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	1, 2, 3, 4
Common in all areas. Regularly fed in Franklin Square. In most cities in the world, feral pigeons are hand-fed in town squares. The silver gull may be responsible for Hobart's feral pigeon population remaining at a fairly low level by usurping them in this regard.	
Pacific gull – <i>Larus pacificus</i>	3, 4
Commonly seen in wharf and river areas but in much smaller numbers than the silver gull.	
Kelp gull – <i>Larus dominicanus</i>	3, 4
Common in New Zealand and many Antarctic islands. Only first seen in Australia in 1940's, but now common in the Derwent River. Commonest at rubbish tips and sewerage outfalls and probably less frequent in wharf area than Pacific gull.	
Feral pigeon – <i>Columba livia</i>	1, 2, 3
Fairly common, breeding on stone shelves on buildings. Numbers considerably lower than in most modern cities.	
Spotted turtle-dove – <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	2
Common in St. David's Park and Parliament Square. Nests in trees within the area. Often seen feeding on spillage from grain silo.	
Swift parrot – <i>Lathamus discolor</i>	2
Small bright green parrot with red throat, tail and underwing. Commonly seen chasing each other in squealing flocks between St. David's Park and Parliament Square. Commonest when the blue gum is in flower when they feed on nectar and/or pollen from the flowers. In years of poor flowering of the blue gum flocks of 80 or more have been seen eating elm seeds in St. David's Park.	
Green rosella – <i>Platycercus caledonicus</i>	2
Endemic parrot recorded twice in St. David's Park	
Eastern rosella – <i>Platycercus eximius</i>	2
Brilliantly coloured parrot common near the Olympic Pool and occasionally straying over Hobart Railway Station. Also twice recorded from St. David's Park.	

<b>Pallid cuckoo – <i>Cuculus pallidus</i></b>	<b>2</b>
Summer visitor from the mainland. Occasionally recorded from park areas.	
<b>Masked owl – <i>Tyto novaehollandiae</i></b>	<b>1</b>
One photographed by a <i>Mercury</i> newspaper photographer at a window of an old warehouse (since demolished to build a new court house). Could have been regular in the past feeding on rodents around warehouses, but unlikely to be seen again except as a chance vagrant.	
<b>White-throated needletail (Spine-tailed swift) – <i>Hirundapus caudacutus</i></b>	<b>1, 2</b>
Large flocks commonly seen hawking for insects above the city during February and March. Breeds in the Northern hemisphere.	
<b>Welcome swallow – <i>Hirundo neoxena</i></b>	<b>1, 2, 3</b>
Common. Hawks for insects particularly around parks and wharves. Almost certainly breeds in the area.	
<b>Tree martin – <i>Cecropis nigricans</i></b>	<b>1, 2, 3</b>
Very common. Hawks for flying insects. Normally nests in holes in trees, but several have been recorded nesting in holes in buildings and in pipes in the side of the ship 'Darling River' which was moored to a wharf in the area for about two years.	
<b>Blackbird – <i>Turdus merula</i></b>	<b>1, 2</b>
Introduced bird and a considerable pest in fruit growers. Has a beautiful song which is often heard around St. David's Park where several pairs nest. One of the commonest species in St. David's Park all the year round.	
<b>Grey fantail – <i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i></b>	<b>2</b>
Recorded twice in Franklin Square and regularly in St. David's Park.	
<b>Brown thornbill – <i>Acanthiza pusilla</i></b>	<b>2</b>
Small flocks in St. David's Park. Searches for insects in mainly native shrubs.	
<b>Yellow wattle-bird – <i>Anthochaera paradoxa</i></b>	<b>2</b>
Largest Australian honeyeater and endemic to Tasmania. Occasionally seen in park area.	
<b>Yellow-throated honeyeater – <i>Licherostomus flavicollis</i></b>	<b>2</b>
Endemic. Small numbers in the park area when the blue gum is in flower.	
<b>Black-headed honeyeater – <i>Meliphreptus offinis</i></b>	<b>2</b>
Small endemic honeyeater with all black head. Always in small flocks and never far from eucalypt trees. Recorded occasionally from the blue gum in St. David's Park.	

Crescent honeyeater – <i>Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera</i>	2
Appears in suburban Hobart in large numbers in autumn and is readily attracted to native flowering shrubs.	
New Holland honeyeater – <i>Phylidonyris noveahollandiae</i>	2
Fairly regular in St. David's Park when the blue gum flowers.	
Eastern spinebill – <i>Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris</i>	2
Occasionally recorded in St. David's Park.	
Silvereye – <i>Zosterops lateralis</i>	2
Fairly common in St. David's Park where it may breed. Feeds in flowering eucalypts and other native shrubs. Flocks to exotic berries especially blackberry and cotoneaster in autumn and winter when it is very common in the Hobart area.	
Spotted pardalote – <i>Pardalotus punctatus</i>	2
Recorded a few times from the vicinity of the St. David's Park blue gum. Feeds amongst foliage, mainly of eucalypt.	
Striated (Yellow-tipped) pardalote – <i>Pardalotus striatus</i>	2
Similar to spotted pardalote but more numerous.	
European goldfinch – <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	2
Introduced from Europe. Common in St. David's Park where it nests. Feeds on seeds of weeds especially thistles, groundsels and other members of the Compositae family.	
European greenfinch – <i>Carduelis chloris</i>	2
Introduced from Europe. Regular in St. David's Park but less numerous than goldfinch. May well nest in the park. Feeds on larger seeds than does the goldfinch.	
House sparrow – <i>Passer domesticus</i>	1, 2, 3
Introduced from Europe. Very common, nesting in eaves of buildings feeding mainly on scraps discarded by man.	
Common starling – <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	1, 2, 3
Introduced from Europe. Probably at times the commonest birds in the area, because St. David's Park is used as a staging post in autumn and winter by birds flying to roost under the Tasman Bridge. Enormous numbers congregate in the trees just before dusk, flying on to the Tasman Bridge just as darkness falls. At other times they are mainly found in the park areas feeding on invertebrates picked out of the lawns. Nests in the area in eaves of buildings.	
Forest raven – <i>Corvus tasmanicus</i>	1, 2, 3
Half a dozen or so ravens scavenge regularly, particularly around the wharves and parks. Could possibly breed in tall trees around Parliament Square or St. David's Park.	

# THE CONSISTENCY OF BIRD OBSERVATIONS IN A HOMOGENEOUS ENVIRONMENT

Ann V. Ratkowsky

In my paper 'The Bird Species of Mt Nelson in Relation to Microhabitat and Recent Bushfires', the Tasmanian Naturalist No. 57, May 1979, I counted the number of different bird species in three areas of the dry sclerophyll bushland in the hills of Mt Nelson, Hobart. The three areas had different geographical and vegetative characteristics.

The present study was carried out to investigate the consistency of the number of bird species observed when the habitat is as uniform as possible, i.e. when it consists of a single type of micro-habitat. In the dry sclerophyll bushlands of the Mt Nelson hills, I selected three reasonably homogeneous line transects, each of which was about 2 km in length and which required a walking time of 30 minutes to traverse. These three transects are labelled A, B and C, and a fourth transect labelled D is in fact transect A walked in the reverse direction on the return trip; thus A and D serve as a control. My method of observing bird species was the same as I have used before, i.e. I recorded each species seen or heard in each transect. The results are given in the following table:

(1) Day	(2) No. of species observed in transect				(3) Average per day over all transects	(4) Range of no. of species in col. (2)	(5) No. of species that occurred in all four transects and its percentage of the average number in col. (3)
	A	B	C	D			
1	9	8	9	9	8.75	1	5 (57.1%)
2	13	13	15	14	13.75	2	9 (65.5%)
3	12	11	11	11	11.25	1	8 (71.1%)
4	12	13	14	15	13.5	3	11 (81.5%)
5	12	13	13	14	13.0	2	10 (76.9%)
6	17	19	18	18	18.0	2	14 (77.8%)
7	16	16	17	16	16.25	1	11 (67.7%)
8	18	18	18	17	17.75	1	12 (67.6%)
Average	13.6	13.9	14.4	14.3	14.03	1.6	10 (71.3%)

The average number of bird species in the four transects (col. 2) did not differ significantly, although there was considerable variation in the average number of species per day (col. 3). A further measure of consistency is the small range (col. 4) between the maximum and minimum numbers of species observed in the four transects.

On any given day the same species were often observed in each of the four transects (see col. 5), e.g. on Day 6, fourteen species were common to all transects. This represented 77.8% of the average number of species observed on that day. These percentages varied from 57.1 on Day 1, which was exceptionally windy, to 81.5 on Day 4. These high values further demonstrate the consistent results that can be obtained with 30 minutes of observation in a relatively homogeneous environment.

There were four species of birds sufficiently abundant so that they were observed every day in every transect: Superb Fairy-wren, Brown Thornbill, Yellow-throated Honeyeater, Forest Raven. Other species which were observed every day in practically every transect were: Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Black-headed Honeyeater, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote.

The reader interested in a more systematic and thorough study of the effects of different time intervals and weather upon the number of bird species recorded is referred to a recent publication: "A comparison of counting methods to obtain bird species numbers" by A.V. Ratkowsky and D.A. Ratkowsky, *Notornis* 26:53 - 61 (March 1979).

## ROAD KILLED PLATYPUS

R.M. Tyson, St. Leonards

Why do Platypus *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* become road killed victims? Recently I have visited four (4) sites where platypus have been killed on the road. Each of these places have been where a water course crosses under the road through pipes.

These sites are:

- (a) Half a mile west of Nunamarra where water is piped from the St. Patricks River to supply the water treatment plant at Waverley near Launceston. The pipes in this instance cut through a hill finally corssing under the road approximately 400 metres in distance.
- (b) Strathroy Bridge just south of Launceston. The water in this case is little more than a trickle passing through quite large pipes under the bridge.
- (c) Approximately one and a half miles west of Glengarry. This is where a small stream is piped under the road.
- (d) Several miles south of Exeter. This site is similar to C.

There are a couple of logical answers to why the platypus left the water. One is that the platypus was swimming up stream and could not get into the pipes because of the concentrated water flow and also in some cases the sharp rise into the pipes. Likewise the platypus could have been swimming down stream and did not want to fall or be swept out the other end.

Or, could it be that when confronted by structures made of pipes (culverts, etc.), the platypus, finding it unfamiliar to the course it has been following simply gets out of the water, returning when conditions become more favourable?

Platypus, of course, are often seen swimming under some bridges. However it could be that in these cases the river bed is usually unaltered.



# FOOD OF THE WHITE-BROWED SCRUBWREN

R.H. Green

Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery  
Launceston

The zoology section of the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston, has since 1974 been collecting material and data at Maggs Mountain, central northern Tasmania with special reference to the fauna of the area.

An annotated list of the vertebrate animals of the area was published in 1977 in *Records of the Queen Victoria Museum* No. 58.

Amongst the material collected was a series of 24 White-browed Scrubwrens *Sericornis frontalis* from which the stomach contents were removed and preserved. The birds were collected principally by mist netting in summer and autumn in mixed sclerophyll forest at an altitude of 450 m in the vicinity of the Arm River camp where the Museum's field station is established.

A subsequent examination of the preserved gut contents has revealed scrubwrens from the Maggs Mountain area have an omnivorous diet, taking both invertebrates and seeds in approximately equal proportions. Of the 24 samples examined, all contained invertebrates, 19 contained seeds and nine contained small particles of gravel.

The invertebrate material was broken into small fragments and no attempt was made to identify items, though fragments of beetles were noted in six samples. Insect eggs were found in two samples and remains of ants were found in another two.

The seeds have been examined at the Seed Testing Laboratory, Department of Agriculture, Launceston, by Mr. Bruce Turner and Mrs. C. Knowles who have kindly provided me with the following list. Because many of the seeds were broken or partly digested, determination was difficult and sometimes only tentative. The number of samples in which each occurred is also given.

## *Monocotyledons*

GRAMINEAE	unidentified grass	1
	<i>Vulpia</i> sp.	1
CYPERACEAE	unidentified sp.	3
LILIACEAE	<i>Dianella</i>	1

## *Dicotyledons*

RANUNCULACEAE	<i>Ranunculus</i> sp.	7
GERANIACEAE	<i>Geranium</i> sp.	12
OAXLIDACEAE	<i>Oxalis</i> sp.	3
LEGUMINOSAE	<i>Pultenaea</i> sp.	1
COMPOSITAE	<i>Senecio</i> sp.	1
	<i>Cirsium</i> sp.	3
PRIMULACEAE	<i>Anagallis</i> sp.	1
SCROPHULARIACEAE	<i>Veronica</i> sp.	1
LABIATAE	<i>Prunella</i> sp.	1
unidentified seeds		8

One sample contained five species, five contained four species, four contained three species, five contained two species, four contained one species and five contained only invertebrate material. The greatest number of seeds in any one sample was 65 of four species.

The plants listed are mostly those which might be found growing on the edge of clearings and on the edge of streams or ponds, and include at least two introduced weed species. They are mostly plants producing hard seeds which lack a fleshy outer covering. The muscley nature of the bird's stomach together with the presence of gravel would assist in the digestion of seeds. The broken and partly digested seeds amongst the gut contents indicate that this scrubwren is not just insectivorous as was generally believed but that it utilises a variety of seeds, in addition to the invertebrate animals, as items of its diet.

## **NOTES FROM KING ISLAND (Received 17th October 1979)**

**Mrs. P.F. Barnett**

Hon. Secretary, Field Naturalists Club of King Island

A few months ago on a field expedition to our Forestry Reserve, we found one of the known sea eagles dead under the nest. As the forester had seen him alive the day before, he was quite fresh and, with Ansett Airlines co-operation, was sent off that day to Bob Green at Launceston Museum who, although sorry the bird was dead, was very pleased to receive it and has since advised made into a very fine study skin. Luckily the bird had been frozen so that on learning a few days later that a neighbouring farmer was using a poison (Luci-jet) for crows, the stomach contents were able to be sent to Mount Pleasant laboratories where the poison was found in the intestinal contents. We have at least 9 sea eagles nests on the Island but it is a pity to lose one in such circumstances, about which we can't do a thing.

Also recently a sea elephant was noticed on the beach just south of City of Melbourne Bay where each day until about 4 or 5 p.m. he took to the water then came ashore either onto the rocks or on the beach. A bull of approximately 14 ft, he stayed in this area for at least 3 weeks but had recently moved further south and we're not sure whether he is still here or not now. It is amazing to see that great bulky body suddenly and so easily rear up and rather terrifying to look into that great chasm of a mouth.

# SNARES CRESTED PENGUIN: A THIRD AUSTRALIAN RECORD

R.H. Green

Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston

The partly feathered skeleton of a crested penguin was collected by Mr. Peter Duckworth on Plain Place Beach, Okehampton, about 5 km north-east of Triabunna, in June 1979. Recognising its probable importance, Mr. Duckworth had the specimen sent to the National Museum of Victoria where Mr. A.R. McEvey and Mr. K.N.G. Simpson identified the remains, with a reasonable degree of certainty, as that of Snares Crested Penguin *Eudyptes robustus* Oliver, 1953. Its sex was indeterminable.

This species breeds on Snares Island south of New Zealand and its distribution is restricted to the adjacent seas. Stragglers rarely reach Macquarie Island and Australia. Simpson & McEvey (The Emu 72:110 - 111) give details of the two previously recorded from Australia, one being in the South Australian Museum (Reg. No. B1071) from Cape Banks, South Australia in January 1914 and one in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (Reg. No. B2367/10002) from Seven Mile Beach, south-eastern Tasmania in August 1951.

The present specimen is therefore the third known Australian record. It has been lodged with the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston (Reg. No. 1979/2/338).

## BOOK REVIEWS

### ENCOUNTERS WITH NATURE

L. Brown

Published by Oxford University Press. Price \$21

No one writes more attractively on African wildlife than Leslie Brown, former government official in that country, and all his life an ardent amateur naturalist. His newest book is so full of interest that the reader, naturalist or not, will find it hard to put down. What commends it particularly is that, apart from the tiger, only the barest reference is made to the so-called "big game" which have already been tediously over-played in most African books and on TV. Refreshingly, it mainly covers a comparatively little known segment of nature in Africa, such as the antbear, badgers, the mountain nyala, flamingos, and other smaller and no less interesting creatures that normally we hear little about.

It is on birdlife that Brown probably is at his best. Nightjars and the two kinds of flamingos, as well as the curious honey-guides and the many eagles, form subjects for some fascinating stories, all drawn from his personal experiences. Most dramatic of these is perhaps his account of a search for nesting flamingos in which he barely escaped with his life while wading through a deposit of mud. It is taken from an earlier book, but loses nothing by being repeated. Quaint flashes of humour lend spice to the book; and there are some very nice drawings by Doris Tischler.

Michael Sharland.

## BOOK REVIEWS Cont.....

### KOSCIUSKO ALPINE FLORA

A.B. Costin, M. Gray, C.J. Totterdell, D.J. Wimbush

Published jointly by C.S.I.R.O. and William Collins Pty. Ltd.

Price \$25

Written and illustrated by an evidently dedicated team of four, this Flora of a strictly limited area is an extremely satisfying book.

"Plants grow neither in random mixtures nor in isolation, but as members of communities. . . any diverse area such as Kosciusko usually supports a mosaic of plant communities reflecting the main combinations of environmental conditions." This quotation from the book is indicative of the change of emphasis that has occurred in comparatively recent years from the study of the individual to that of the whole eco-system.

To this end habitat maps and tables are provided and historical and environmental factors are considered, though as its title tells us, the book is essentially a Flora with a dichotomous key. Excellent colour photographs are an additional aid in identifying plants, and for those with limited botanical knowledge the photographs of grasses and sedges will be particularly useful. Plates 4 - 60 are mostly scenic, topographical, and plant-community pictures. Plates 61 - 350 are essentially of individual plants. However, as the authors say "those (not familiar with botanical terms) who take the initial trouble to key out the plants rather than take the short cut of matching them against the illustrations will find, to their satisfaction, that they are also training themselves to identify plants in any environment."

Although alpine areas vary because of differing rock, altitude, latitude and climate, some factors are common to all, so that in many respects this book applies also to Tasmanian alpine areas. Even for the Tasmanian mountain flora, the key in this book will be useful as far as the genera and in some cases to the species, although Tasmanian species not occurring in the Kosciusko area are of course not included.

Important to conservation, the sheer beauty of the alpine scene is very well communicated in the superb photographs.

Because of its balanced appeal to the scientist, field naturalist and the book-lover, 'Kosciusko Alpine Flora' should be very successful. Certainly most field naturalists will want to own it for frequent reference.

The Club's library copy came with the compliments of CSIRO.

Kelsey Aves.