

BOOK REVIEW

Antarctic Wildlife Photographs by Eric Hosking, text by Bryan Sage. Croom Helm, London and Canberra, 1982. 160 pp. £12.95.

When I first heard that the renowned naturalist Eric Hosking was visiting the Antarctic as a lecturing tourist on board the MS *Lindblad Explorer* my immediate reaction was that it would not be long before we have yet another dreary travelogue illustrating the usual dramatic scenes of the region. This was perhaps unfair because someone of Mr Hosking's vast experience as a photographer could be expected to do better than average.

The resulting book is a photographic record of Eric Hosking's two cruises on *Lindblad Explorer*, the first of which took him to the South Shetland Islands and northern Antarctic Peninsula, and the second from Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego to Stewart Island, New Zealand, via the Ross Sea region. The text, which serves to complement these illustrations has been written by Bryan Sage, an industrial ecologist and environmentalist with considerable Arctic experience and described in the blurb of the dust cover as 'an expert on the Antarctic region'.

A brief Introduction of eight pages sets the scene of the Antarctic environment and outlines the aim of the book: '[It] is not meant to be a detailed account of the ecology of the Antarctic; that requirement is met by other very learned and comprehensive works'. The map of the Antarctic region is rather confusing as several major localities are misplaced or unnamed (e.g. Snow Hill Island, Palmer Station, Gerlache Strait, Possession Island), while other very minor features are named unnecessarily in the same typeface as major features (e.g. Spit Bay on Heard Island, while Iles Kerguelen are unnamed although its highest peak, Mount Ross, is given).

Chapter 1 (8 pages) provides a brief historical background of the Antarctic, although I feel some account of developments and scientific aims and achievements during the past two decades would have been valuable to the uninitiated reader. Chapter 2 (26 pages) describes in outline the ecology of the major regions (continental, maritime and sub-Antarctic). The most entertaining inhabitants of the south polar regions and perhaps the most easily photographed and observed, the penguins, are described in Chapter 3 (40 pages), while the equally fascinating albatrosses are treated in a further 16 pages in Chapter 4. The remaining avifauna of the localities visited are illustrated and discussed in Chapter 5 (20 pages). The wildlife section concludes with Chapter 6 (14 pages) which deals with seals. Whales and the marine ecosystem (other than birds and seals) do not feature very prominently, and I was also sorry that so little reference to and illustration of the vegetation and invertebrate fauna is given; perhaps Mr Hosking forgot his macro lens! Mr Hosking was also in an ideal situation to illustrate the impact of tourism and other human activities on the wildlife and environment, a topic unfortunately not covered in the book. The final chapter (13 pages) serves as a guide to wildlife photography for would-be visitors to the Antarctic region. There are two appendices listing the distribution of breeding birds in each of the three major sectors discussed, followed by a three page Index.

Bryan Sage's text is remarkably authoritative and accurate, considering that he is not personally acquainted with the Antarctic. He has obviously made a considerable effort to research the subject. The result is a succinct semi-ecological account which will prove of great interest and a source of popular information to a broad spectrum

of readers, particularly those unfamiliar with the biome. There are several minor inaccuracies of little consequence, and very few typographical errors. It is pleasingly written in a fresh and lively idiomatic style.

Since the book is primarily a work of illustrations the standard of photography and choice of subject matter merits some comment. Eric Hosking has long been recognized as a master of wildlife photography ('the doyen of the world's wildlife photographers' it states in the dust cover blurb) and he was unquestionably a pioneer in technique and innovative photography until the introduction of the modern SLR and TLR cameras and their accessory lenses and, more recently, electronically automated metering systems. Thus with a modern camera system and given the magnificence of the Antarctic scenery and tameness of its fauna, it is almost impossible for a photographer not to produce pictures of outstanding quality. Granted, for a tourist, much depends on the opportunities which arise for actually seeing spectacular scenery in good weather and many of the species of animals. Most tourists certainly are not as fortunate as Mr Hosking was on his cruises and in his book he illustrates a very wide range of subjects. Many of the c. 120 colour photographs are very beautiful, but personally I felt that remarkably few were outstanding as photographic masterpieces, although as wildlife or scenic illustrations they are often delightful. I wonder if the many one-and-a-half-page format illustrations would not have been better reduced to one page; certainly several of these pictures do not merit this large format and may have been better as half page studies. A few photographs are slightly tilted, a mistake anyone can make when photographing from a moving ship, but which should be corrected when printed. The section on advice to photographers, while fairly elementary, will be of value to potential travellers in the icy south. A note on how to care for and protect photographic equipment during travel in small craft or indeed when using it on an exposed deck in stormy seas, would have been useful. His concluding remarks are that in wildlife photography in the Antarctic a high percentage of failures must be expected (I would dispute this) and the cardinal rule is to take plenty of film and not be afraid to use it. As a guide, during his two cruises Eric Hosking took about 15 000 photographs, or about a dozen films per day. For those who can afford such extravagance, how can they fail to take a few good snaps?

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