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BOOK REVIEW

John Gould in Australia: letters and drawings.

Ann Datta, 1997. Melbourne University Press, Carlton South. RRP \$80.00.

The 19th Century was a time of great European activity, expanding colonies, trade and exploration was at its greatest. One man seemed to exceed allcomers with his zeal and apparent penchant for expansion, trade and exploration in the field of wildlife; that man was John Gould. Very few have equalled this, and few have approached it. In essence his input into the discovery and introduction of new and exciting animals in Australia is unsurpassed.

Ann Datta's current book looks not only at these achievements, but also at the man himself. The Natural History Museum holds a wealth of information on this account and, as seen among the book's pages, a fine series of previously unpublished illustrations. The book is separated into parts, the first dealing with John Gould the man, the second a seemingly unending listing of the paperwork and correspondence held in the Natural History Museum Library. The book is well researched, and written in a straight-forward way allowing the reader to be engrossed in its character. I found both parts very informative and in many cases useful to my demands with a penchant for Australian ornithological history.

The whole episode of Gould's life is interwoven by the author with interesting snippets or detailed descriptions. It becomes swiftly apparent that Gould was not a 'one-man show'; a multitude of collaborators assisted him. The 'squattocracy' allowed him freedom of movement throughout his Australian travels, while aristocracy smoothed out other potential problems. His dealings with both are condensed in the second part of the book.

The book's production, illustration selection, and subject matter are good. Although not primarily an ornithological text it does fill such a vacancy. It delves not only into the interests of Gould but also gives us an insight into the times and places and Gould's associates. The book contains a wealth of data on the man, his dreams, and his achievements. That one man succeeded in this penchant for expansion, trade and exploration in wildlife is wonderful. Ann Datta's book on Gould is well worth its cost.

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