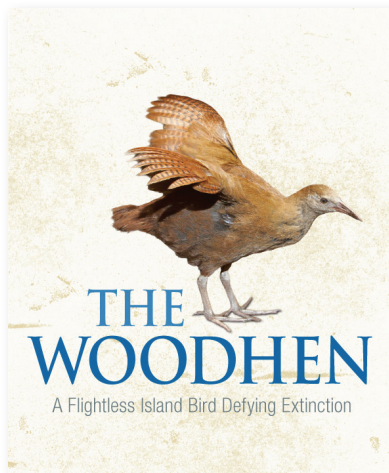


## Book Review



### **The Woodhen: A Flightless Island Bird Defying Extinction**

Clifford B. Frith. 2013. CSIRO Publishing. Hardback, numerous colour photographs and illustrations, 240 pp. ISBN 9780643108707. RRP \$59.95.

*The Woodhen* is the engrossing story of human recklessness that pushed a unique island flightless bird species to the brink of extinction with only 15 individual birds known to still exist in 1980. The book tells the fascinating story of the foresight of a few enlightened scientists and subsequent management actions that have increased the population to what is now probably a secure status.

Clifford Frith has, however, delved far beyond just documenting the human intervention to try and save the endemic Lord Howe Island Woodhen. The first third of the text has superbly told the story of the discovery of the island, its use by seafarers and early settlement to the development of

Lord Howe Island as a modern tourism destination. And, of course, he has outlined the Island's ecology and its wildlife. He also very astutely diverts the reader's attention away from the subject bird species to discuss the Woodhen's place among the world's rails and the evolution of flightlessness – the very cause of the inability of the species to cope with humans and introduced predators.

The remainder of the book is devoted to the demise of the LHI Woodhen population and its resurrection. The recovery was achieved by the risky removal of birds from their mountain-top rainforest stronghold to a captive breeding facility and the expertise of an aviculturist to successfully breed progeny for release back to the wild, where the primary predators had been removed.

The book also discusses the post-captive-breeding monitoring of the released birds and their successful reestablishment in the lowland and mountain slopes of the Island.

For three years in the mid 1980's, I was involved in the scientific monitoring of the successful reintroduction of Woodhens to the lowlands of Lord Howe Island. I had the honour of initiating the capture and banding of the post captive-breeding population and the training of the scientific monitoring team, led by Bob Harden, to capture and band Woodhen to improve monitoring techniques. So I was delighted to accept the offer to review Clifford Frith's documentation of the story of the Lord Howe Island Woodhen. It is a wonderful account of the trials and tribulations of the Woodhen and those that were entrusted with ensuring its survival. I commend this superbly told story and historical account, as an inspiration to all that have an interest in active intervention to enhance the survival of threatened species.

Jeff Hardy  
Ermington, NSW



• Lord Howe Group from the north.

Photo: I. Hutton