

Book Review

Eagle's Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand in Colour: Two Hundred and Twenty-eight Botanical Paintings by Audrey Eagle. Collins, Auckland and London, 1975. Price \$50.00.

*"For she herself has said it,
And it's greatly to her credit"*

and what she has said is this: "The most important feature of this book is the meticulous care that has been used in illustrating the plants in their natural size and colour". Well meticulousness can be a cold virtue on its own, but this book is plainly a labour of love and enthusiasm as well. It took Audrey Eagle the best part of twenty years; numbers of botanically unimpeachable names were badgered into helping; the bush itself was at the back door, needing little encouragement to invade the house.

Mrs Eagle's coloured drawings conscientiously display the texture of each freshly snipped-off twig with its leaves, flowers male and/or female, and fruit. Each leaf is the right kind of bushy green (or rather greens), tomentum if present is satiny-buff, smooth or fluffy white, *Traversia* which I've never seen suggests the aromatic stickiness of *Olearia semidentata*, *Urtica ferox* almost has the fingers smarting. I am used to clear orange fruit on patotara and softly gleaming orange ones on stinkwood, but a Stewart Island coprosma would look wrong in the Waikato bush. My impression is that Audrey Eagle has learned her drawing and painting from Mother Nature rather than any School of Art, especially the commercial kind, which might have used "slicker" or more "professional" techniques in conveying venation or the outlines of close-up detail, but could teach Audrey Eagle nothing about the smell and feel of the bush. All specimens are painted shadowless on the white background that seems to be a convention of botanical illustration; there is therefore no three-dimensional trompe-d'oeil, but rather the effect of flowers against a window, or of specimens in the hand rather than on the tree.

The botanical notes look trustworthy enough to please the fastidious professional, and interesting enough for the beginner to enjoy and understand. Since the drawings are done "natural-size" (i.e., as they would look held just beyond squinting distance), all botanical facts can be conveniently tidied away at the back, apart from the unobtrusive male and female signs, number and name: a Good Thing, to my mind.

Those of my generation who have been collecting, over the years, a fair-sized library to help them identify New Zealand trees and shrubs, will still find it hard to resist this handsome, costly and "compleat" extra, reaching for Mrs Eagle as their more house-bound ancestors reached perhaps for Mrs Beeton.

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