

Reviews

Land of Wonder, ed. by Alec H. Chisholm. Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1964. Price 42/-.

The chief problem which troubles an anthologist is the necessity to choose between including in a reasonably-sized book, large quantities of the work of a few outstanding authors—thus enabling his readers to really judge their merits—or small morsels from a large number of writers, so covering the whole field. In *Land of Wonder*, Alec Chisholm has wisely made the latter choice, for this is the first real anthology of Australian nature writing, and a survey of this genre in Australia has been much needed.

There is, among Australian literary critics, a strange attitude of disregard for this part of our literature; strange because Australian literature is derived from that of England, and there nature writing holds an honored place. *Land of Wonder* should draw much-needed attention to a neglected Australian literary form, neglected not by writers as this book shows, but by the critics.

The width of the field is revealed by the wide range of sources from which Chisholm has drawn his samples, and he is to be thanked, surely, by all who enjoy reading about our Australian environment, for rescuing so much fascinating material from the obscurity of out-of-print books and vanished magazines. The amazing thing is that from so diverse a field such a high standard of literary merit should prevail.

The unusual drawings on silk by Margaret Coen are delightful, entirely in sympathy with the text, and enhance this book, which will not only bring pleasure to lovers of Australian literature but will certainly enthuse its readers about Australian natural history itself.

This reviewer has been a devotee of Australian nature writing since as a small boy he first read *Nature Notes* by Donald Macdonald, Charles Barrett, and the young Alec Chisholm himself. He now has to thank Alec Chisholm for introducing him to a number of writers whose work he has not previously encountered, and he looks hopefully to the day when the same editor, illustrator and publisher will decide to do the same worthwhile service to the even more neglected field of Australian nature verse. —JACK HYETT.

The Birds Outback—A 10 in. L.P. recording of the calls of some of Australia's inland birds; available from the N.S.W. Gould League of Bird Lovers, Sydney, at 36/6, plus 2/- postage.

The calls of 40 of our inland birds, mostly familiar species, are well presented on this record, the second of a series, *The Birds of Australia* being published by the N.S.W. Gould League. Introductory comments to each call have been kept to a minimum, further information on each species being printed in a libretto which accompanies the record. This arrangement is much better than that used on the first record in the series which had no libretto and in which much of the playing time was taken up with commentary.

The overall standard of reproduction is sufficiently high to satisfy the average radiogram listener, and for most parts, the expert. One or two bands sound a little wobbly, no doubt the result of using a parabola with the microphone whilst recording. Indeed, the band labelled "A Flock of Galahs" would have been better left out. However, the inclusion of some of the rarer birds, Wedgebill, Gilbert Whistler, Brolga—a magnificent effort—and Spotted Bower-bird will more than compensate most listeners for these small shortcomings.

Incidentally, the first part of the Gilbert Whistler call sounds suspiciously like that of its close ally, the Red-fored Whistler, a species which has only recently been recognized as occurring in N.S.W.

Six of the calls on this record were already included on the first in the series, *The Birds Around Us*, although one of these is referred to as Jacky Winter on one record and Brown Flycatcher on the next. Furthermore, the use of the name "Lowan" by the commentator in preference to the long-accepted "Mallee Fowl", only serves even more to emphasise the chaotic state which Australian bird vernaculars seem to be in at present.—GRAEME CHAPMAN.