

MUSINGS

Tamatea Dusky: The remarkable story of Fiordland's Dusky Sound

by Peta Carey

Tamatea / Dusky Sound is a massive area, virtually uninhabited and rarely explored, despite its widely-regarded natural beauty.

Remote and relentlessly buffeted by westerly winds, this archipelago in the southwest corner of Fiordland National Park draws unique, adaptable individuals requiring tenacity and endurance to match the physicality of its landscape and waterways.

In Tamatea Dusky (Potton & Burton), writer and documentary maker Peta Carey explores the background of the sound, and the often overwhelmingly complex task over the past two centuries of managing and conserving its flora and fragile birdlife.

It's a constant battle. Without any natural enemies, introduced deer thrive, ravaging the forests, and rampant stoats and rats plunder the ground dwelling kākāpō, tokoeka (brown kiwi) and the nests of rockwren and tīeke / saddleback.

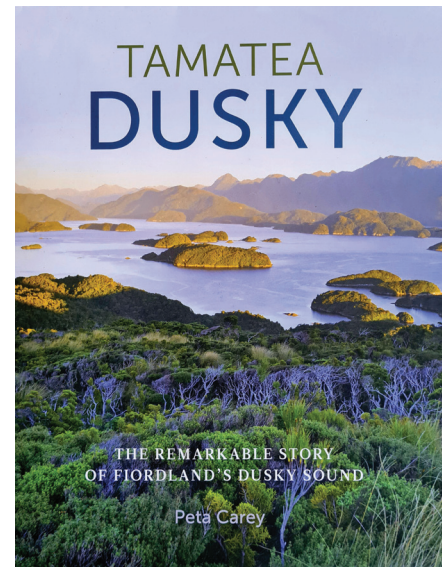
The characters Carey presents are driven, sometimes flawed, and often deeply marked by their immersive experience of life in the Fiordland bush.

Consider the trials of Richard Henry. As Aotearoa's first wildlife ranger, he was appointed sole caretaker of Resolution Island after it was set aside as a nature reserve in 1891.

Arriving in 1894 after surviving a suicide attempt the previous year, Henry, then aged 49, set about building a shelter. Accompanied by a part-time assistant and a dog, he started the Herculean task of using his 16-foot sailing dinghy to translocate as many ground birds as possible from the mainland in crates. He spent 14 years sailing in and around the wild waters of the sounds chronicling their progress, and making his own highly-regarded observations despite a lack of any formal education. His surviving notes are still referenced by scientists today.

Deer culling in Fiordland is another compelling tale, starting with 'The Deer Menace Conference' in 1930 and the hunters who went bush during the Depression to earn a few bob, followed by the float planes and the helicopters. Big money was to be made in the widely-chronicled wild deer recovery era - a live hind in 1970 was worth \$3500 - and there were plenty of wild characters chasing it.

Carey's own experience with pest control in Fiordland and her extensive time in the area



provide vivid insight into the challenges faced by Department of Conservation rangers. Brutal weather and seas, the constant struggle for resources, and the huge amount of tiger country terrain to cover on foot humping traps have made the endeavour a test of endurance.

Peta Carey's obvious love for the region, combined with her fluid storytelling ability and visual eye, have created a book that steps well above the ubiquitous, glossy coffee table offerings appearing at this time of year.

TIM BREWSTER

Cryptic (species) crossword answers

Across

- 3. passive acoustic monitoring
- 6. beastie
- 7. wētāpunga
- 8. egg

Down

- 1. backbone
- 2. protodendrophagus antipodes
- 4. camouflage
- 5. holotype