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## Review of Observations of wildlife

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Review of Observations of Wildlife by Peter Scott (Phaidon, 1980).  
Johngard in the Auk (April 1981) v. 98.  
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**Observations of wildlife.**—Peter Scott. 1980. Oxford, Phaidon Press Limited. Distributed in U.S.A. by Cornell University Press. 112 p., over 60 monochrome and 39 color plates by the author. \$19.95. (A

deluxe edition is available in the U.K. for £41.)—Nearly everybody has a childhood hero, but only rarely do those heroes survive the test of time to stand even taller in the mind's eye when approaching a half-century of one's own lifetime. Sir Peter Scott is a man of such stuff; his enormous artistic abilities and capacity for converting those talents into the environmental education of several generations of Britons, and toward the conservation of the earth's natural resources, cause him to stand uniquely alone in the international environmental scene. His book is an informal retrospective look at his own life, his artwork, and his concerns for conservation and biology. It is also a perfect vehicle for his drawings and paintings, which range from quick pen sketches in his field diary (which must be the most beautiful scientific notebook in existence) to reproductions of formal oil paintings as large as 3 m across. It is this lagniappe of illustrations that catches the eye initially, and will be the reason for many to buy the book. Nevertheless, the text should not be ignored while savoring the beauty of the plates.

There are more than 100 of Scott's illustrations, and they cover an artistic period of more than 40 years. The vast majority (all but eight of the color plates) are of waterfowl, and it is a special attribute of Scott's paintings that the viewer not only can perceive the relative position of the sun, but usually also is aware of the way the wind is blowing and how strong it is. Thus, each bird is not simply artistically suspended in vacant space, but rather is skillfully maneuvering with its flockmates through an ocean of air. Scott does not dwell long on his distinctive painting style, or on his philosophy of bird art. Yet a few of his paintings show the influence of impressionism, such as his charming "wigeon in a popple," and many of his back-lighted swan paintings have an ethereal quality that approaches mysticism.

It would have been easy for Scott to live a private life, retiring early from the public scene as a naval hero and television personality, to spend the rest of his days comfortably, gathering around him a collection of geese to sketch and paint. Instead, immediately after World War II he almost single-handedly established the Wildfowl Trust, which from its humble beginnings has become an international mecca for waterfowl biologists and the nerve center for research on wildfowl and wetlands for all of western Europe. There the Hawaiian Goose was saved from virtual extinction, and a major pioneering effort was later undertaken in reestablishing this species in the wild. He also helped obtain and develop several subsequent wildfowl centers, was instrumental in organizing the World Wildlife Fund, has been chairman of the Fauna Preservation Society, and has been active in the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The book recounts many of these activities and glosses over his associated innumerable honors, somehow never making much of the fact that even one of these accomplishments would have been enough to satisfy the ambitions of almost any other person.—PAUL A. JOHNsgARD.