***Milton Keynes Natural History Society***

**Book Review**

**By Ian Saunders**

**‘GHOSTS OF GONDWANA, THE HISTORY OF LIFE IN NEW ZEALAND’**

**by George Gibbs**

George Gibbs is a retired University lecturer and entomologist, based in Australia. This is the most authoritative book available on the wildlife of New Zealand, and how it came to be. Drawing largely on the latest discoveries in biogeography and molecular biology (especially the ‘molecular clocks’ used to measure rates of evolution), he pieces together the story of how New Zealand's flora and fauna came to be. With close looks at various groups of plants and animals, including parrots, cicadas, freshwater arthropods, ratite birds, frogs, lizards and primitive "jaw moths", he tells the history of the islands and identifies the sources of their unique wildlife.

Interesting facts: Kiwis are the closest living relative of the Elephant birds of distant Madagascar, while New Zealand's giant, extinct, flightless Moas are related to the small, extant, winged Tinamous of South America.

The book is quite scholarly - with discussions of continental drift and cladistics - which may not be to everyone's tastes, and although handsome it does contain some obvious typos and figures that would have benefitted from more captions. Also, my copy cost £45, but you might pick up a first edition for half this price.

If you are interested in learning about the biology of the only country where the bird of the year is actually a bat (which is also described) this is the book for you!

*‘Ghosts of Gondwana, The History of Life in New Zealand’ by George Gibbs. Fully Revised edition, 2016. Published by Potton and Burton.*