

***BIRDS OF TASMANIA – SUSAN LESTER***  
**WATERCOLOUR PORTRAITS**  
**REMARKS BY**  
**HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC**  
**GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA**  
**BALL ROOM, GOVERNMENT HOUSE, THURSDAY 15 JUNE 2023**

Good evening. I warmly welcome you all to the launch of *Birds of Tasmania – 200 Watercolour Portraits* by the late Susan Lester.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea and waters.

This beautiful book is a truly significant addition to the ornithology of Australia and to Tasmanian publishing. The significance of this book goes well beyond Australia.

The story behind this book is captivating and was played out across some 35 years of dedication, friendship, disappointment and mystery. Then came the generosity and determination to do full justice to Susan's work.

Professor Libby Lester is here this evening – she will talk to us soon. Libby is the younger sister of Susan, who passed away in early 2022. Libby wrote the Foreword to this book, aptly entitled "Taking Flight", which records the full story, from Susan being commissioned to do the 200 paintings in 1987, through to the decision last year to publish.

It is a remarkable, thoroughly Tasmanian journey.

Susan's watercolour paintings are superbly lifelike. Their size and colouration on the page, the hint of branch or rock, or sand or water, gives them personality. Susan had the gift of the finest wildlife and botanical artists.

Dr Bob Green's accompanying texts are equally assured. They are the work of a seasoned professional ornithologist. He has some acute observations and delightful personal touches. Here is just one – he writes of the Masked Owl, a difficult bird to locate and watch due to its being nocturnal and sparsely distributed. He writes:

“I was fortunate to be able to watch the behaviour of one of these fine birds on many occasions as it prepared for hunting. Its diurnal roost was well concealed in the middle of a large Sugar Pine and, as darkness closed in, it would leave and fly to another tree about 50 metres away. There, for some 15 minutes, it would preen and fluff its feathers, and occasionally pass faeces and regurgitate indigestible food pellets, as if emptying itself out for the night's intake of fresh prey. Several times it would call, apparently signalling to a distant mate, offering a guttural 'chirrp' followed by a strident, loud 'karsh' like the expulsion of air under pressure.”

End of quote. That is on page 222. You can look at Susan's Masked Owl on the page opposite. It appears that its eye is reflecting a brilliant full moon, just for the viewer. This is just one example of Susan's talent, gifting to the viewer such a personal engagement with this beautiful bird, so rarely seen in life.

Many individuals and organisations have had input into this magnificent publication. May I congratulate you all:

- The Lester family
- The family of Bob Green
- The design and production team of Warner Design: Lynda Warner and Tracey Diggins
- Outside the Box/ Earth Arts Rights as the publishers and project managers
- The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
- Dr Eric Woehler OAM
- And the hundreds of GoFundMe campaign donors, who are listed in the book.

I look forward to formally launching *Birds of Tasmania* shortly, but first we'll hear from Libby.

Thank you. David ...