

Looking forward to space odysseys

THE ROAD TO THE STARS.
By Iain Nicolson. Cassell.
224pp. \$9.95.

MESSAGES FROM THE STARS. By Ian Ridpath. Fontana. 220pp. \$3.25.

INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE. By I. S. Shklovskii and Carl Sagan. Picador. 509pp. \$4.95.

Reviewer:
DAVID C. NICHOLLS

THESE three books are important reading for anyone interested in the possibilities of extraterrestrial life, space travel and man's colonisation of the stars.

They provide a source of reliable information which should prove of interest to those confused by some of the wilder speculations put forward by Von Daniken and colleagues.

Shklovskii and Sagan are the deans of the subject of scientific discussion of extraterrestrial life. 'Intelligent Life in the Universe' was a landmark when published in 1966, and has recently been released as a

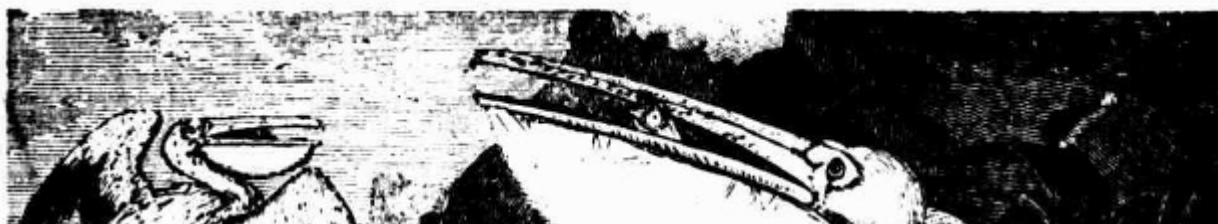
and has recently been released as a paperback. It is a lengthy book and is somewhat tortuously written, possibly due to having been in part translated from Shklovskii's book in Russian.

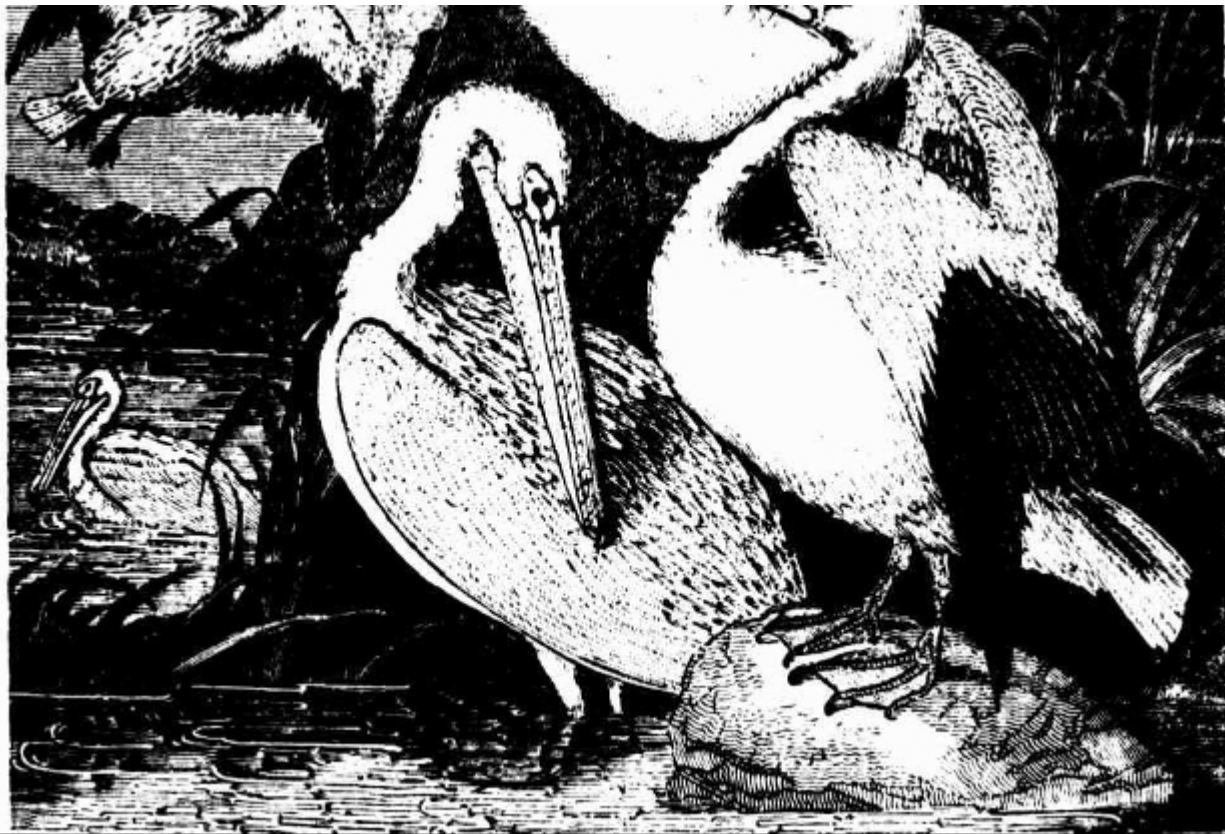
Certainly not light reading, it covers a very wide range of subject matter, which requires a background of perhaps fifth or sixth year high school science to be readily followed. Much new knowledge has been gained on the solar system since the book was written, and in this area it is a little dated.

For instance, much new information has been obtained on conditions on Mars and Venus by Russian and US probes. Both planets were once considered seriously as possible sites for primitive life, but have now virtually been ruled out due to their hostile environments.

However, it is impeccably researched and stands as a "Book of Genesis" in our ideas of life in the universe. It is a pity Von Daniken did not pay more attention to this book before launching into his pseudo-scientific extraterrestrial speculations.

Ian Ridpath's book, 'Messages from the Stars' addresses the question of communications from interstellar space. It is a briefer and





In 'The Illustrated Bird', edited by Maggie Oster and designed by Sonja Douglas, Doubleday of New York have put out a book in lavish colour about 30 birds such as the pelican (above, an 1834 French print) quail, peacock, crane, swan, wren, owl, thrush, swallow, parrot etc. The colour plates are magnificent and the reading, of lore and literature, interesting. The price is a very reasonable \$7.95, and it would make a fine gift.

more up to date book, and covers such topics as the information gained from the US Mars probes, communication with extraterrestrial life by radio and space probe, and takes an objective look at the evidence for UFOs.

The author takes time to evaluate a theory put forward by Temple in 'The Sirius Mystery' (since taken up with enthusiasm by Von Daniken) which suggests that an obscure African tribe has had contact with amphibious beings from the star Sirius! One is left in no doubt that the proposition is, at best, im-

the proposition is, at best, improbable.

The book concludes with an evaluation of the UFO phenomenon. While necessarily brief, it is commendably objective, and should be of interest to those confused by the flood of UFO literature available today. While not dismissing the possibility of extraterrestrial contacts, the chapter is unlikely to please uncritical UFO enthusiasts.

Overall, the book makes interest-

ing holiday reading, and requires little technical background.

'The Road to the Stars' by Iain Nicolson is a stimulating and most enjoyable book. It looks in detail at the potential for travelling out into the galaxy. With its matter-of-fact approach to the colonisation of other planets, colonies in space and long range near-speed-of-light space craft, the book should prove a delight to all who enjoyed "Star Trek" and "Star Wars". Yet it is essentially not a work of science fiction, but a carefully-argued look at our present ideas on possible means of propulsion and the requisite life support systems for interstellar probes.

While not dismissing the possibility of humanity wiping itself out after taking the first few tentative steps into space, the author considers that colonisation in space presents a real solution to the restrictions posed by a finite earth.

The three introductory chapters provide a particularly readable co-

The three introductory chapters provide a particularly readable account of the physical and factual

background to subsequent discussions. This makes the book's technical details accessible to anyone with an enquiring mind.

The book is accompanied by some excellent colour illustrations by Andrew Farmer in the best traditions of paperback science fiction art.

In the chapter 'Breaking the Rules', the author indulges in a little exuberant speculation on ways of defeating the tyranny of Einstein's speed of light interstellar speed limit, by means of the mysterious objects known as Black Holes. However, the author himself admits the fanciful nature of the discussion.

The book concludes with a chapter entitled 'The Next Ten Thousand Years' — a most stimulating scenario. One is left with considerable frustration at the prospect of not being around to see history unfold.

All told, this book can be recommended without reservation to anyone who has ever looked up in wonder at stars in the night sky.