

William Anderson—Ornithologist

By TOM IREDALE, Sydney, New South Wales

The fame of any naturalist depends on publicity, but not necessarily vulgar advertisement. If publicity be denied, whatever the cause, then he is born to blush unseen, a Milton mute. Thus we have the story of William Anderson, a great ornithologist, and one of the earliest, if not the absolute earliest, to investigate Australian bird-problems.

Yet to 999 out of every 1,000 ornithologists in the world the name is entirely unknown, and it is to render a little belated justice that this note is written. It will be as well to mention at the outset that William Anderson was the naturalist on Captain Cook's fatal Third Voyage, and his own death on the voyage, followed by that of his friend and captain, relegated him to an undeserved obscurity.

On Cook's First Voyage were the splendid naturalists Banks and Solander; these proposed to accompany the Second Voyage also, but circumstances intervened, and Banks nominated the fiery-tempered Forster in his place. Immediately Forster and Cook became at cross purposes, and Cook befriended William Anderson, the assistant surgeon, and later selected him as the naturalist for the Third Voyage. Let us read Cook's own account:

"Mr. Anderson, my surgeon, who had been lingering under a consumption for more than twelve months, expired between three and four this afternoon. He was a sensible young man, an agreeable companion, well skilled in his own profession; and had acquired considerable knowledge in other branches of science. The reader of this Journal will have observed how useful an assistant I had found him in the course of the voyage: and had it pleased God to have spared his life, the Public, I make no doubt, might have received from him such communications, on various parts of the natural history of the several places we visited, as would have abundantly shewn, that he was not unworthy of this commendation. Soon after he had breathed his last, land was seen to the westward, twelve leagues distant. It was supposed to be an island; and, to perpetuate the memory of the deceased, for whom I had a very great regard, I named it *Anderson's Island*."

A footnote reads: "Mr. Anderson's Journal seems to have been discontinued for about two months before his death, the last date in his MSS. being of the 3rd of June."

Referring to Cook's account of the Last Voyage* we find that Anderson's account of Van Diemen's Land occupies eleven pages, and we read:

"There are several sorts of birds, but all so scarce and shy, that they are evidently harassed by the natives, who, perhaps, draw much of their subsistence from them. In the woods, the principal sorts are large brown hawks or eagles: crows, nearly the same as ours in England: yellowish parroquets, and large pigeons. There are also three or four small birds, one of which is of the thrush kind; and another small one, with a pretty long tail, has part of the head and neck of a most beautiful azure colour, from whence we named it

* Vol. I, p. 109, 1784.

motacilla cyanea. On the shore were several common and sea gulls; a few black oyster catchers or sea pies; and a pretty plover of a stone colour with a black hood. About the pond or lake behind the beach, a few wild ducks were seen; and some shags used to perch upon the high leafless trees near the shore."

The editor of the *Last Voyage*, in the Introduction (p. lxxvii) explained:

"Captain Cook, knowing, before he sailed upon this last expedition, that it was expected from him to *relate*, as well as to *execute*, its operations, had taken care to prepare such a journal as might be made use for publication. . . . The Journal of Captain Cook, from the first moment that it came into the hands of the Editor, has been ready for the press . . . is also enriched with considerable communications from Mr. Anderson, Surgeon of the *Resolution*. The confessed abilities, and great assiduity, of Mr. Anderson, in observing everything that related either to natural history, or to manners and language; and the desire which, it is well known, Captain Cook, on all occasions, shewed to have the assistance of that gentleman, stamped a great value on his collections."

Cook wrote in his Journal (p. 4) :

"Mr. Anderson, my surgeon, who, to skill in his immediate profession, added great proficiency in natural history, was as willing as he was well qualified to describe everything in that branch of science which should occur worthy of notice. As he had already visited the South Sea Islands in the same ship, and been of singular service, by enabling me to enrich my relation of that voyage with various useful remarks on men and things, I reasonably expected to derive considerable assistance from him, in recording our new proceedings."

A footnote is added:

"The very copious Vocabulary of the language of Otaheite, and the comparative specimen of the language of the several other islands visited during the former voyage, and published in Captain Cook's account of it, were furnished by Mr. Anderson."

All we know about Anderson is that he died on August 3, 1778, but when and where he was born we have no information. There is, as far as I have been able to discover, no figure or drawing representing this ill-fated but very able naturalist. It may be noted that Ellis published an account of the Third Voyage, and on the title page styled himself "Surgeon to both the Vessels." Apparently he was promoted from surgeon's mate, as his name does not appear among the personnel, Anderson being surgeon on the *Resolution*, and John Law surgeon on the *Adventure*, four surgeon's mates being unnamed.

Unfortunately, at the present time Anderson's incomplete MSS. Journal is missing, but in the British Museum (Natural History) are preserved two MSS. notebooks which stamp Anderson as an original observer of the first class, and a very able ornithologist, and his untimely decease must be deplored by everyone interested in the study of birds. The first notebook is an account of the new birds met with on the Second Voyage, when Anderson was only surgeon's mate, and when J. R. Forster was acting as naturalist, assisted by A. Sparrman, with G. Forster to make paintings of the subjects. Anderson's first notebook is entitled

"Characteres breves Avium (in itinere nostro circum orbe visa) adhuc incognitarum annis 1772, 1773, 1774, 1775." In this notebook, twenty-seven genera are recognized, and then in an appendix two more are added, the number of species diagnosed being ninety-two. Amongst these genera *three* were introduced as new, one for Penguins, one for the Sheath Bill, and one for Honey Eaters. This last is most instructive, as Anderson's genus comprised eight species, three from New Zealand, three from New Caledonia, one from Tanna and one from Tongatabu. The association is quite a natural grouping, and thus Anderson was the first to recognize this series. It will be remembered that Forster monographed the Penguins and named the Sheath Bill generically, but Anderson's account is quite an independent one.

The "Zoologia nova seu Characteres et Historia Animalium hac tenus incognitarum qui in itinere nostro videbantur . . . 1776 in Linguis Latinis et Anglicis traditus," appears to be a running record of the novelties met with as the voyage proceeded. We thus find first the Kerguelen Land birds and fishes described, a new genus of fish being introduced, followed by a new genus of fish from Van Diemen's Land, the name suggesting the Flathead, another new fish, then three species of birds and a lizard; next to New Zealand, and so on, twenty-five subjects being included. This is succeeded by an appendix of fifteen species of doubtful value, including a "*Didelphis*" and a *Motacilla (minima)* from Van Diemen's Land. Latham, in his *Supplement to his General Synopsis of Birds*, mentioned Anderson some eight times—on pp. 66, 174, 181, 187, 188, 191, 197, and 217, recording the MSS. as being in the possession of Sir Joseph Banks. This refers to the MSS. above noted, now in the British Museum (Natural History). It may be that Anderson's Journal passed to the Admiralty and is still preserved.

Anderson's generic name for the Honeyeaters, *Anthophagus*, was apparently later accepted by Latham, as it appears in that curious little book entitled *Ornithologia; a Poem*, by Jennings, which has been noted by Mathews and Iredale (*Austral. Av. Rec.*, vol. IV, pp. 172-175, 1922), and Hull (*Aust. Zool.*, vol. IV, p. 36, 1925).

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