

## OBITUARY

JOHN DOUGLAS GIBSON

John Douglas Gibson passed away on May 21, 1984 after a long illness and Illawarra lost its premier ornithologist. He was 58.

Doug was a lifetime resident of Thirroul and spent his entire working life at the Port Kembla steelworks. He was a brilliant student at school and joined the Royal Australian Air Force towards the end of the Second World War whilst still a teenager.

A frustrated interest in astronomy after the war soon gave way to the more down to earth study of ornithology and Doug in time became the specialist ornithologist in a budding local group of natural history general practitioners.

The introduction of the CSIRO Australian Bird-banding Scheme in 1953 saw Doug Gibson banding the Five Islands Nature Reserve seabird populations by the thousands each visit. This in turn led to the albatross banding project in 1956 — the first successful attempt anywhere in the world to band pelagic birds remote from their natal islands. Arthur Mothersdill and I made up the original crew and although the work was strenuous those early experimental years were hilarious. The project is still on-going after 29 years and has received world-wide recognition and acclaim.

Doug was responsible for several additions to the New South Wales and Australian lists of avifauna. Most were seabirds collected on organised beach patrols over a long period of years. He was a capable taxidermist and many of these rarities were converted to excellent study skins and still repose in our private collection. These specimens have often been referenced by a variety of authors in Australian ornithological literature.

Doug Gibson presented papers to international ornithological congresses and accepted CSIRO invitations to visit Macquarie Island and the Bass Strait Muttonbird rookeries. He helped form and supervise the NSW Albatross Study Group and became a world authority on the Diomedidae.

He contributed to a variety of ornithological journals

and I am proud that we co-authored on 19 occasions, mostly in *The Emu*, the official organ of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. Illawarra Bird Observers Club members no doubt remember Doug Gibson best for his "Birds of the County of Camden" published by the New South Wales Field Ornithologists Club in *Australian Birds* during 1977.

Doug Gibson was a member of the RAOU for 35 years, and a valued member of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand and the Australian Bird Study Association. Closer to home, he belonged to the Bulli Pass Scenic Reserve Trust, the Five Islands Nature Reserve Committee of Management, the South Coast (NSW) Conservation Society and the RAOU Barren Grounds Bird Observatory Management Committee. Close associates acknowledged him as a talented painter, an accomplished pianist, and an outstanding photographer.

Doug and I were cousins and for decades travelled together to and from work at the Port Kembla Steelworks. I will forever remember him as a man of quick and subtle wit and the master of repartee and it was during these journeys we either listened to classical music or planned future excursions, beach patrols and banding forays.

During a series of ornithological lectures by Doug for the Workers Educational Association in Wollongong it was decided to form an Illawarra Bird Observers Club in 1977. He was honoured with life Membership in 1983 and I look upon this flourishing organisation as a fitting memorial to him.

Doug Gibson is survived by his wife Betty and daughters Jacqueline and Terrie. With our profound sympathy goes the fervent hope that they can take some consolation from the fact that their devoted husband and father made a major contribution to the science of ornithology, not only in the Illawarra district, but nationally and internationally.

Allan Sefton