

John Gould: An Appreciation

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For the past thirty years I have been engaged with the study of Australian birds, publishing an illustrated account after the manner of John Gould, whose work, *The Birds of Australia*, is an inimitable classic. Before I began I had a deep appreciation of the deeds of my great predecessor, but as I delved more and more into the study, my esteem increased. The publication of my work occupied so much of my time that I could only wonder however Gould had managed his business. For whereas I was working absolutely for my love of ornithology, without thought of any pecuniary reward, and was able to devote much time to it, Gould had brought out his work as a financial effort, and it was only *part* of his business. Whilst we may accept the fact that he had good assistants there can be no other conclusion than that it was the genius of Gould himself that carried the work through.

But even admitting that the publication was a financial proposition, the love of birds for their own sake stands out boldly throughout the work, and it must be recognized that Gould was a very excellent all-round ornithologist. His researches in the field in Australia fully show that he was an enthusiastic observer, although his chief mission was the collecting of all the novelties that he met with. As a collector he must be ranked alongside the great bird collectors of the world, and yet that was only one side of his work. He had begun life as a taxidermist. His workmanship in that art is well known, and thus his specimens were of the first order. All the time he was noting the habits of the birds he met with, and nearly one hundred years later we have to refer to his work for the only accounts of some of the rarer species. These are still, in many cases, being quoted.

At this distant date we can only gauge the enthusiasm of this great man by the results he achieved. We have the fact that when he left Australia he had created a body of enthusiastic workers who furnished him, as long as they lived, with accounts and specimens. Thus the name Gould became synonymous with Australian ornithology, so that whoever procured or received a strange bird in Australia immediately forwarded the specimens to Gould. It might be suggested that such correspondents were induced to do so by monetary reward, but when we note that these correspondents included men of the highest rank, we are compelled to recognize that Gould must have possessed an intense personality, a fact we might otherwise overlook.

The amount of ground that he covered during his comparatively short sojourn in Australia indicates the intense

energy of the man. Indeed, his greatest misfortune, the loss of his beloved wife, has been said to be due to his misunderstanding of her capability for work, through his own unceasing tirelessness: in other words she was a victim, absolutely unintentional, of overwork. Figures talk and also they can be arranged to tell tales, but in the case of Gould the numbers that can be cited in connection with Australian ornithology are such that they need no emendation or alteration. When Gould completed his work he left so little for his successors that it would be a shame to cite the figures.

In this centenary number I feel gratified for the opportunity of adding this note of appreciation of the work of probably the greatest worker that ornithological science will ever know. We know him as the father of Australian ornithology, but that was only part of his great efforts for ornithology as a whole. Yet as a worker in this field alone his results command admiration from every one who even casually interests himself in Australian bird life. The more one works at this study the more the admiration grows and the genius of Gould is apparent.

The Gould League of Bird Lovers

VICTORIA

Founded in 1909.

First President.—The Hon. Alfred Deakin, Prime Minister, Commonwealth of Australia.

First Secretary.—Mr. (later Dr.) J. A. Leach, Supervisor of Nature Study in State Schools, afterwards Assistant Chief Inspector of Schools.

Committee of leading ornithologists, educationists, and economists.

Aim.—The *voluntary* protection of native birds (Such repressive legislation as was in force was inadequate.)

Membership.—Children entitled to membership on signing the Bird Lovers' Pledge, and payment of one penny (later increased to 3d. to cover cost of the present coloured certificate.)

Pledge.—(a) I hereby promise that I will protect native birds and will not collect their eggs. (b) I also promise that I will endeavour to prevent others from injuring native birds and destroying their eggs.

Establishment.—With support of Mr. Frank Tate, then Director of Education, and co-operation of teachers it was most successfully launched in the State Schools. Teachers enrol members and remit fees to the Hon. Secretary. (All offices are honorary.)

Activities, etc.—Bird study (part of Nature Study course in schools); School Bird Clubs or branches of the League