

## Frederick Lawson Whitlock

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In June next Mr. Lawson Whitlock not only reaches the advanced age of 80 years, but also completes thirty-nine years of research in the bird-life of Australia. As a memento of his birthday, and in appreciation of the work he has done in Australian ornithology, it was decided to submit a portrait, accompanied by an account of his travels after birds, for publication in this present issue of *The Emu*. The writer is pleased at having been given the opportunity of writing this account of the activities of a valued personal friend of over eleven years' standing.

A detailed list of the many new forms of birds collected, or of the numerous occasions on which Mr. Whitlock was the first to find the then-unknown eggs of many species, would prove too great a task to come within the scope of this short biography. Not only were Mr. Whitlock's discoveries very numerous, but he has the gift of being able so to describe his field-work that the many records he has left in the pages of *The Emu* are not only literary efforts of a high standard, but are also word-pictures of the habits of the species with which he has come into contact. Gilbert, Carter, Rogers, Milligan, and Whitlock are all noteworthy figures in Western Australian ornithology, but none of the first four travelled so widely within the State as has Mr. Whitlock, and none has left for posterity such complete accounts of the habits of the birds they encountered.

Frederick Lawson Whitlock was born at Nottingham, England, on June 3, 1860, being the second son of Thomas Oliver Whitlock, of Loughborough, Leicestershire. After two years at a preparatory school, he entered Loughborough Grammar School and remained there for eight years, for a time being a contemporary at school of the late Richard Bowdler Sharpe, of the British Museum (Natural History Department).

Mr. Whitlock very early developed a taste for natural history and made a small collection of Leicestershire butterflies and moths under the guidance of a skilled entomological neighbour. He also developed a strong interest in birds, with a special interest in their migrations, and visited many parts of the north of England to observe their nesting habits, and also the coasts of Lincolnshire and Norfolk, to learn facts about migration. A small collection of eggs and skins was formed during the course of observational work in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Warwickshire.

After leaving school Mr. Whitlock entered the office of the Registrar of the Leicestershire County Court as an accountant, and later, after following for many years a

business combined with insurance, was compelled for reasons of health, to seek a more equable climate. Accompanied by his wife and an only daughter, he arrived in Western Australia in April, 1901. His only son remained in England, but has now for many years resided in Buenos Aires.

Mr. Whitlock, although twelve years the elder, had been at school with Mr. L. F. von Wiedt, who now resides near Brisbane, and together the two left Kalgoorlie about August, 1901, on a prospecting trip to the Blackhills, about fifteen miles south of Bulong. They were there about three weeks and then travelled to Boorara (Golden Ridge, twelve miles south-east of Kalgoorlie), and were there certainly at Christmas, 1901, as Mr. Whitlock remembers their having had their Christmas dinner together. Shortly afterwards Mr. von Wiedt left for Perth where he obtained an appointment at the Museum, of which the Director was then the late Bernard H. Woodward. The appointment is here mentioned as it was the means of Mr. Whitlock's getting into correspondence with the late A. W. Milligan, who was then honorary ornithologist to the Museum. Later, when in September, 1902, Mr. Whitlock moved up to Lake Austin on the Murchison Goldfield, Milligan persuaded the Museum Committee to make a grant to be devoted to ornithological collections to be made by Mr. Whitlock. Thus began, over thirty-seven years ago, that splendid work in Western Australian ornithology which was to have such wonderful results, and which—all Australian ornithologists will be glad to appreciate—still continues.

Early in August, 1903, Mr. Whitlock left Day Dawn for Wurarga, on the Yalgoo Goldfield, which is some 114 miles east of Geraldton, and remained there for two months, collecting on behalf of the Museum. It was then arranged that he should join Messrs. Milligan and Price Conigrave who intended to investigate the bird-life of the Wongan Hills, and he accordingly travelled, in October, to Mogumber, on the Moore River, and investigated the bird-life of that locality until the other two members of the party arrived. The party made direct to its destination beyond New Norcia and then returned slowly to Mogumber, collecting en route.

Mr. Whitlock remained at Mogumber for a period after the other two ornithologists had returned to Perth, and investigated the bird-life of the Moore River to a distance of twenty miles westward. He then paid a short visit to Rottnest Island and collected for the Museum.

In April, 1904, Mr. Whitlock went to Norseman and remained there till November, 1905. During that period he had considerable field experience with Mr. W. D. Campbell, of the Geological Survey, but did not have much spare time for ornithology. Some collecting was, however,

done and notes made. Thirty-two years later Mr. Whitlock wrote an account of the bird-life he had noted in the district. On return from Norseman a health-trip resulted in the family's settling near Wilson's Inlet, the house being within half-a-mile of the eastern end of the inlet, and within ten miles of the coast. Mr. Whitlock was at home there until July, 1907, when he was again engaged as field assistant to Mr. W. D. Campbell, the work starting at Arrino, two hundred miles north of Perth, and continuing to Clackline, *via* Lockyer and the Irwin Valley, and ending in March, 1908. Again there was little opportunity for collecting, but notes were kept and Mr. Whitlock added considerably to his field knowledge.

The late H. L. White being desirous of obtaining the services of a collector in Western Australia, Mr. Whitlock was recommended to him by the Museum authorities, and it was arranged that he should collect eggs for Mr. White, and skins for Gregory M. Mathews. It being his intention to join an old friend at Marble Bar and together undertake prospecting work, Mr. Whitlock landed at Port Hedland on May 5, 1908, and travelled to Marble Bar by camel train *via* Poondina, Strelly River, Depot Creek, Shaw River, Gorge Creek, Coongan Crossing, and Doolina Gorge.

Most of the collecting was done during August, September, and October. On September 25, Mr. Whitlock left Marble Bar for the de Grey River, putting in a few days near the mouth of the Talga River. The Talga flows into the Coongan River, and the spot where Mr. Whitlock camped is known as Equibah Pool. Mulyie Station, on the de Grey, was reached on October 4, where camp was pitched till October 10, when Mr. Whitlock travelled to Nannyup Claypan, on the road to Condon, where he remained till October 22. Condon was reached on October 24, and the mangroves were investigated until November 2. On the return journey to Fremantle Mr. Whitlock managed to put in nearly a week in the Rat Island Group of Houtman's Abrolhos.

Then commenced perhaps the most fruitful, in eggs and skins, of all the collecting trips undertaken by the subject of this biography—the visit to the Lake Way district on the Murchison River, during which 360 skins were collected, many of them being given sub-specific rank by Mathews. The trip was made on behalf of Mr. H. L. White, into whose collection all eggs and skins passed.

Mr. Whitlock left Wilson's Inlet on June 18, 1909, and arrived at Nannine by train five days later. Leaving Nannine by express wagon, he reached Wiluna in another week. Lake Way is, in reality, two shallow depressions, separated from one another by a tract of low-lying ground, six or seven miles in breadth. The northern portion is named Lake Violet on the Government maps. Most of the

work was done near Lake Violet, which contained a large volume of water. This locality was worked until July 29, when operations were transferred to the neighbourhood of Bore Well, about thirty miles west of Wiluna and contiguous to Spinifex Plain. After a fortnight's work there Mr. Whitlock returned on August 15, to work again at Lake Violet. On September 17 he set out for Milly Pool, a sheet of water twenty miles north-west of Wiluna, on the stock route from Peak Hill. There timber was large—york gums, flooded gums, and black-hearts, some of considerable dimensions. Mr. Whitlock remained there for six weeks seeking eggs and skins of the western form of the Spotted Bower-bird, and it was only the setting in of intense heat that eventually caused him to cease working and return to Wiluna on November 6.

In January, 1910, Mr. Whitlock paid a visit to Melbourne, travelling by sea from Albany to Adelaide, thence by train, and returning by the same route. While in Melbourne he took the opportunity of attending a meeting of the Bird Observers Club held on January 27.

Next came two trips to the Stirling Range. There had been exceptionally heavy rains and Mr. Whitlock left home on August 22, 1910, driving to the foot of Donelly Peak, which was reached on August 31. Unfortunately en route he met with an accident and injuries to his legs made it difficult for him to move easily over rough ground. He was driving two horses in a cart in tandem and was walking alongside the leader, a young horse, which knocked him over and a wheel of the cart went over his legs. Much of the country on the north side of the Stirling Range had just previously been burnt over and Mr. Whitlock believes that he was aided in his field-work by the enforced concentration of the more robust species in the tracts of scrub which had escaped the fires. Lake Balicup, Solomon's Well, Yettermirrup, and Lake Matilda, a sheet of water near Tenterden, where he encountered a fall of five inches of rain in forty-eight hours, were all camping spots. It had been intended to explore, on the way home, the various pools and swamps between Mount Barker and the coast, but a storm on the last day made exploration too difficult, and that area still remains ornithologically unknown.

The following winter was a very mild one, with a rainfall considerably below the average, and so the results of the second visit to the Stirling Range, made in August, 1911, were not as fruitful as would have been the case had the birds been encouraged to breed more freely.

The ensuing three years were spent at home at Wilson's Inlet, of which district Mr. Whitlock obtained a thorough knowledge, and many specimens collected by him passed into the "H. L. White" and "Mathews" collections. No

general account of his researches in that interesting district has been published, but papers have appeared in the pages of *The Emu* dealing with individual birds such as the Spotless Crake, Ground Parrot, Emu Wren and Bristle-bird. Sydney William Jackson, who has collected so many interesting birds on the opposite side of the continent, visited the Bon and Frankland Rivers and the Nornalup Inlet from August, 1912 to January, 1913, in an abortive search for the Noisy Scrub-bird, on behalf of Mr. H. L. White, and so an extremely interesting meeting between the two famous collectors occurred when Mr. Jackson and Mr. Whitlock met at the latter's home.

In 1914 Mr. Whitlock went to the Nullagine River on behalf of Mr. White, in an unsuccessful search for the nest—then unknown—of the Spinifex-bird (*Eremiornis carteri*), but drought conditions had made bird-life scarce. There is no printed record of the trip, nor is there any account extant of a further unsuccessful search for eggs of the Spinifex-bird on the Coongan River, near Marble Bar, in September, 1917. This latter search was, however, more successful than the previous one, as two nests of the Spinifex-bird were found, and specimens of both sexes of the bird were collected.

We have, however, an account of a fortnight's visit to Barrow Island, made from Cossack, in the following month, the main object of which was the collecting of skins and eggs of the Black-and-white Wren (*Malurus leucopterus*). Mr. Whitlock was, however, too late for eggs of both the Wren and the Spinifex-bird, which he found to be fairly common on the island. The skins collected on the above trips were reviewed by A. J. Campbell.

In July, 1918, Mr. Whitlock undertook a further trip to Barrow Island and Dirk Hartog Island, and this time was successful in obtaining eggs of both species of birds. He has himself given us an account of the visit to Barrow Island and the skins collected on the trip were again reported on by the late A. J. Campbell. A second visit to Dirk Hartog Island, and the neighbouring Peron Peninsula, was made in June, 1920, and Mr. Whitlock wrote an account of the trip for *The Emu*, whilst Mr. H. L. White described the eggs collected. Mr. Whitlock reached Perth just in time to attend the 1920 R.A.O.U. Congress, held in that city, and during the proceedings gave members an account of his visit to Dirk Hartog Island.

Now came the trip to the Nullarbor Plain on behalf of Mr. H. L. White. Mr. Whitlock arrived at Zanthus, 130 miles east of Kalgoorlie, in July, and, on August 1, 1921, he met Mr. White for half an hour. Mr. White was on his way by transcontinental train to meet a ship at Fremantle, and, after discussion of a species of Blue-bonnet Parrot

(*Psephotus*) which Mr. Whitlock had seen in a cage at Zanthus, and which had been taken from a nest at Naretha, 205 miles east of Kalgoorlie, it was decided that a search should be made there. When Mr. White passed through Naretha on his way back to "Belltrees," a week later, Mr. Whitlock was able to hand him three specimens of the Parrot. Mr. White showed the skins in Adelaide to Mr. S. A. White, and to Mr. A. J. Campbell in Melbourne, and it was decided to describe the bird as a new species—*Psephotus narethæ*.

After collecting at Naretha Mr. Whitlock moved 75 miles farther east, to Haig, and from there paid a visit to Loongana, which is about 116 miles west of the South Australian and Western Australian border. Perth was reached, on the conclusion of the trip, on November 4, after a very successful collecting expedition. Rains had been good and birds were found to be breeding freely. The trip was further noteworthy in that Mr. Whitlock obtained in the course of it the type female of the Nullarbor Quail-Thrush (*Cin-closoma alisteri*).

While at home resting after his Nullarbor trip Mr. Whitlock suffered another accident, a really serious one this time. Taking a two-wheeled cart to a nearby timber mill, he loaded up with sawn timber with which to build an out-house. Returning home by a bush track one wheel fell into an unseen hole, the cart turned over, Mr. Whitlock was pitched out and was hit on the back of the head by the falling timber. It was several hours before he was found lying unconscious, and it was many days before he was fit and well again.

Mr. Whitlock recovered sufficiently quickly, however, to enable him to leave Fremantle on July 16, 1922, for Point Samson, whence he proceeded by train to Roeburne. On July 25 he left by motor for Mill Stream Station, 85 miles away, on the Fortescue River. The season, however, was one in which the birds did not breed freely and so the results were not particularly noteworthy. One interesting result of the trip was, however, the establishment of the fact that a form of the Fantail Warbler (*Cisticola exilis*) occurs in Western Australia as far south as the Fortescue River. Collecting was also done at Tambery Station, 40 miles east of Mill Stream Station. On November 14 Mr. Whitlock started on his homeward journey.

Early in February, 1923, Mr. White asked him to go to Central Australia in a search for the Night Parrot. Leaving home on March 6, Mr. Whitlock reached Oodnadatta ten days later and left for the north on March 19—a journey of 300 miles by camel to Henbury Station on the Finke River. From Henbury Station the journey was continued to the Hermannsburg Mission Station, north of the James Range, some 65 miles up the Finke. Collecting was delayed

for some days owing to his being incapacitated by an attack of dysentery, but as soon as he had recovered sufficiently Mr. Whitlock left for Palm Valley, some ten miles south of the mission homestead, where he collected for some months. Returning to the homestead he used that centre as a base and made expeditions to all points of the compass. While at the mission Mr. Whitlock had the pleasure of meeting Sir Baldwin Spencer, who passed through the district in May. Mr. Whitlock reached home on November 24, after a most strenuous trip, which, although a skin of a Night Parrot was not obtained, produced material of a very valuable nature, and has added much to our knowledge of the bird forms of Central Australia.

Next followed the visit to the Fitzroy River in the Kimberleys, which lasted from June, 1924, to April, 1925. Mr. Whitlock fixed his headquarters at the place, just below the junction of the Margaret and Fitzroy Rivers, known as the "Crossing," where the telegraph line from Derby to Hall's Creek crosses the Fitzroy. He camped also in the Oscar Ranges some miles north of the "Crossing," and at Leopold Downs Station, forty miles to the north-west.

On the conclusion of the trip Mr. Whitlock took up residence in Perth and was thinking of more fields to conquer, only to be shocked by the news of the death, in May, 1927, of the man who had so successfully employed him in the enlargement of our knowledge of the ornithology of the western side of the continent of Australia, not to mention also the good results of the single trip to the central portion.

Thus ended Mr. Whitlock's travels, but present members of the R.A.O.U. know how successful he has been in the more sedentary occupation of the collection of those members of the Petrel family which have become victims of the gales which blow from time to time on our western coast. In this way the Kerguelen Petrel was added to the Australian list, and another member of the family—*Puffinus leptorhynchus*—is still the subject of much discussion.

While living in Perth Mr. Whitlock wrote many articles of a popular nature for local journals and also became a very much appreciated broadcaster on the bird-life of the State. Mr. Whitlock attended the 1927 R.A.O.U. Congress held in Perth and read a scholarly paper on "Some Peculiarities in the Distribution of Birds in W.A.," wherein is apparent the specialized knowledge of that subject which his travels have enabled him to acquire. At that Congress he was elected member of council for Western Australia,

which position he held till 1932, when he retired, at his own request, in favour of the writer. Finally, it is to be recorded that at the 1933 Congress Mr. Whitlock was elected an Honorary Member of the R.A.O.U. in recognition of the long and valuable services he has rendered to Australian ornithology.

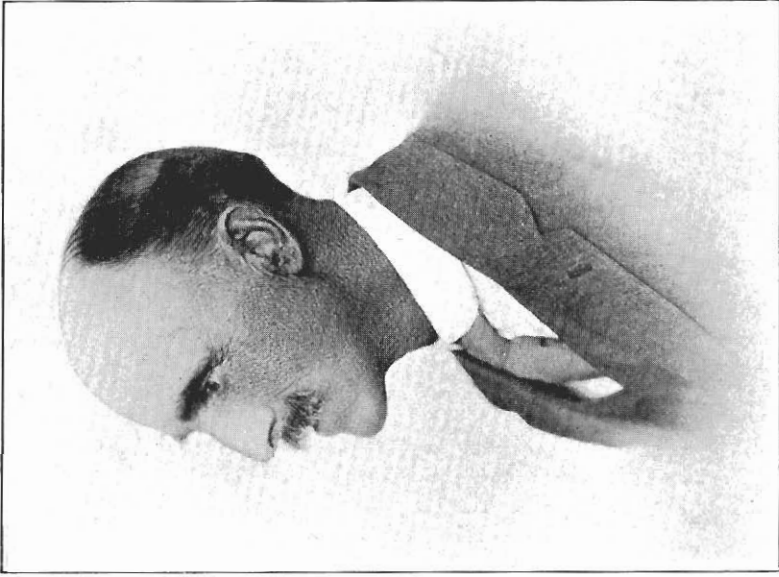
**Multiple Nest-building.**—During a visit to my brother's farm at Cranbourne, Vic., in November, 1939, the manager informed me that he had noticed two pairs of Swallows flying in and out of some new cow-bails, with nesting material. The bails had been erected about a fortnight and two nests were almost completed at the time of my visit. Eggs were laid by one pair of birds in due course.

The point of interest which struck me was the visible evidence of other nests that had been started and abandoned at various stages. Altogether there were eleven efforts ranging from a small daub of mud to the completed structure. My own observations regarding the number of pairs confirmed those of the manager, but whether one pair built only one nest, the other nests being started and not completed by a second pair, I am unable to say. It seems clear, however, that one or both pairs engaged in multiple nest-building.

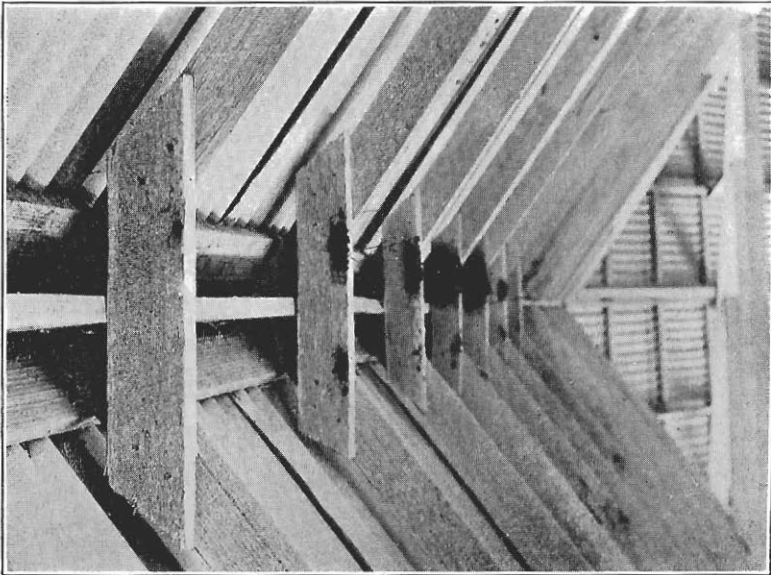
In *The Emu* (vol. XXXIX, p. 243) I recorded the building of eighteen nests in one season by a pair of Willie-Wagtails and also referred to some American records of this unusual nesting behaviour. Fisher, in *Birds As Animals*, mentions some English examples and attributes them to "direct (but unusual) environmental factors." "A Dipper observed by Rowan," he writes, "failed entirely to cope with the problem caused by a bridge which formed a number of identical pigeon-holes, each one equally suitable as a nesting site. The bird was apparently unable to choose between one hole and another and had nests at various stages in nearly every one." Other records include a Blackbird which built a series of nests between the rungs of a horizontal ladder hung against a wall, a Swallow which laid in two duplicate nests eight inches apart, and a Pied Wagtail which built six nests in ventilation holes in a wall. Jourdain states that this habit has been recorded of the Song-Thrush, Robin, Redstart, and Chaffinch.

The significant facts of multiple nest-building are that the nests are built in artificial sites provided by man and that these sites are contiguous and very similar in appearance. The explanation most generally favoured is that the birds are confused by the identical nature of the sites and learn only gradually to concentrate on and finish a particular nest. It will be noticed that two nests have been started on some cross-beams in the bails but they may be the work of two different birds. A very competent ornithologist





Mr. F. Lawson Whitlock.



Unfinished nests of Swallows, illustrating multiple nest-building.

Photo, by N. L. Roberts.