

## OBITUARIES

### ROY PERCY COOPER

Australia has lost one of its most efficient bird-photographers with the death of Roy P. Cooper, which occurred in Melbourne on 1 October 1976. He was, too, a man of status in several leading ornithological bodies from time to time, among them the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales, the RAOU and the Melbourne Bird Observers' Club. For the last-mentioned society he served as honorary editor of its notable publication, the *Australian Bird Watcher*, from the time of its inception in March 1959 until his death.

Cooper was born in Sydney on 21 December 1907 and it was there that he acquired his interest in birds. This led him to join the Royal Zoological Society of NSW, of which he became a member of the Council and served for two years as honorary treasurer. Meanwhile, in 1930 he had joined the RAOU and from 1936 to 1939 he acted as secretary for its branch in New South Wales.

By profession an accountant, Cooper early became an official of Imperial Chemical Industries of Australia and New Zealand and it was promotion in that enterprise that caused him, in 1950, to be transferred to Melbourne. In 1956 he became a Vice-President of the RAOU and in 1960-61 he filled the office of President. Moreover, because of his accountancy ability he served for a time as an unofficial treasurer of the Union and during 1960-62, following the death of Charles Bryant, he filled in as Editor of *The Emu*. Altogether, he was a member of the Council of the RAOU for thirty-four years.

In latter years his chief official interest was the *Australian Bird Watcher*. As its foundation editor and also its chief illustrator during eighteen years, he took seemingly pride in that publication and it was certainly a wrench for him to have to decide during his last illness that he would have to give up the editorship. Concurrently, his interest centred upon the Wilson Promontory National Park. He had become a member of the governing body of that reservation and latterly its Chairman and during many visits to the area he amassed an unrivalled knowledge of its bird-life. This material was spread over seven successive issues of the *Australian Bird Watcher* and has since been published in book form. It remains as his chief written contribution to ornithology,

though earlier he had produced *Birds of a Salt-Field*, a booklet of sixty-two pages (published by Imperial Chemical Industries), dealing with some 200 species of birds recorded from the ICI salt-fields, a sanctuary in South Australia.

Other writings by Cooper, dating from the 1930s and mainly published in popular journals, are fairly brief notes garnered on his numerous excursions. They are less significant than his photographic work, much of which takes high rank. It is this work, plus his lengthy and specialized service to natural history bodies and particularly to the RAOU and the BOC, that gives him a distinctive niche in Australian ornithology. It was also this record that earned him appointment as honorary ornithologist at Melbourne's National Museum; and at the same time representative of Victoria on the RAOU Committee dealing with the Vernacular Names of Australian birds.

Here it may be mentioned that he contributed to the *Memoirs* of the National Museum of Victoria in March 1955 (No. 19) a substantial and copiously illustrated article entitled 'Birds of the Macquarie Marshes, New South Wales'; this covers 136 species recorded by him, J. S. P. Ramsay and N. Chaffer during three weeks spent in the area in November 1948 and is presented as 'a foundation on which future observers can build'. The photographs feature three species of ibis, there are two snaps of the Pratincole and the notes include informative observations on three species of chats.

Because Roy Cooper was essentially sturdy and active, his friends were astonished to learn early in 1976 that he was faced with an operation entailing the removal of a lung and that he had (so he wrote to me) on surgical advice only a 'fifty-fifty chance' of survival. Later, when recuperating from the operation, the outlook he expressed in letters was distinctly optimistic and so it came as a shock to be informed on the first day of October that he had died suddenly early that morning.

Much sympathy has been extended to his wife and son and daughter, and, as well, to the organizations in which he was a leading figure.

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