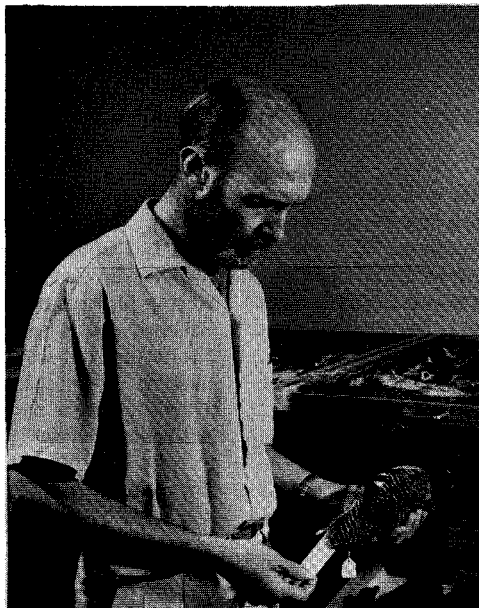


## OBITUARY

### WARREN BILLINGSLEY HITCHCOCK



Warren Billingsley Hitchcock, who died in his sleep from congestive heart failure in Auckland, NZ, on 16 March 1984, was born at Ashfield, NSW, on 18 December 1919. He was educated at Adelaide High School and attended the University of Adelaide, reading Zoology and Geology until the war interrupted his studies in 1940. He served in the CMF and AIF in the Northern Territory, New Guinea and New Britain and was discharged with the rank of Lieutenant in the LHQ Cipher Replacement Section on 20 November 1945. After discharge, he attended the University of Tasmania from 1946 to 1949 but did not graduate. While in Adelaide in 1938, he had been appointed as Scientific Cadet at the SA Museum under Herbert Womersley, the then Entomologist; there, he became friendly with, and was much influenced by, H.T. Condon, who had become Curator of Birds in 1938. He was also Temporary Assistant in Zoology at the Tasmanian Museum in 1945-46. On 28 March 1949 he was appointed Ornithologist at the National Museum of Victoria (now Museum of Victoria) and worked there till 31 October 1954. He then joined the Animal Industry Branch of the NT Administration as Field Biologist in Alice Springs. While driving alone in a Landrover on his way to Darwin on 6 July 1955, he suffered an appalling accident, when the vehicle overtuned, being very badly burned from the waist down. It was regarded as a miracle that

he recovered from such severe injuries, which kept him in hospital for about nine months with a further six months of convalescence, but his determination to fulfil his family responsibilities and his resilience towards weeks of dreadful pain and delirium carried him through. The effects of this accident were a handicap during the rest of his life and he often had to return to hospital for skin-grafts. In November 1957 he joined the Wildlife Survey Section of CSIRO in Canberra as Secretary of the Birdbanding Scheme, which he operated until the end of 1966 when he became Curator of the Division's ornithological collections, working in that capacity until he retired through ill health on 1 July 1970. After retirement he lived in Sydney and took little part in ornithological matters till December 1978 when he went to New Zealand for a visit of five weeks. As a result of this visit he enrolled in the Department of Anthropology at Auckland University under Prof. R. Bulmer, an old friend from his time spent in New Guinea. He again became active in ornithological circles in New Zealand but ill health dogged him and he was not able to graduate before his death.

Hitchcock joined the Union in 1940 and was Secretary in 1951-52. He was elected President for 1962-63 and Editor of *The Emu* at the same time, retaining the editorship until 1965. This was during the time when the

journal had lost its way after the long control by C. E. Bryant and when Hitchcock himself was heavily engaged with CSIRO expeditions to New Guinea and the Northern Territory. In the circumstances it is a wonder that he was able to keep up production of the journal and introduce improvements such as a better arrangement of papers and short notes, dates of receipt of papers, proper addresses for authors and the like. He played a large part in founding the Canberra Ornithologists Group in 1964.

Much of Hitchcock's working life was with museum activities, which entailed indoor work on collections and administration. While at the Museum of Victoria he built up the local and foreign collections greatly and was himself a good preparator. However, above all he was a field man as is shown by the many collecting trips that he made throughout Victoria and in New South Wales. Most important of these was his participation in the Museum's Snowy River Survey in the early 1950s, carried out in those days on foot and with packhorses. During this period he also collaborated with M. C. Downes in a pioneer banding study of Little Penguins with aluminium sheep-ear-tags but the material was too soft for adoption in a regular program of banding. With CSIRO he was instrumental in keeping the Australian Bird-banding Scheme on a sound efficient basis after taking it over from Robert Carrick and before handing it on to David Purchase. His determination and courage in the face of continual handicap resulting from his accident is nowhere better shown than in his expeditions to New Guinea and the Northern Territory for the Division.

Hitchcock published his first bird notes in the *South Australian Ornithologist* in 1936 when only 17 years old. In all, his bibliography covers about 50 notes, papers and reports, published in the *South Australian*

*Ornithologist*, *Emu*, *Australian Bird-bander* and CSIRO vehicles, often in collaboration with various colleagues and friends, as well as contributions to such books as *Birds in the Australian High Country* and the *Encyclopaedia of Papua and New Guinea*. One of his major interests was in terns, on which he published several papers, but a report on White Terns *Gygis alba* of Norfolk Island, the result of field work in 1976-77, remains unpublished in the library of the Division of Wildlife and Rangelands Research, CSIRO.

It would be difficult to find anyone more kind, friendly and generous than Warren Hitchcock. Personally I often recall with gratitude the trouble that he took to show me how to deal with the nuts and bolts of editing and his help and advice when the Nest Record Scheme was started, also his evident pleasure once when I took him out to the Brindabellas to see the nest of an Eastern Whipbird. Perhaps, though, his outstanding attributes were cheerfulness, endurance and courage. After his accident, his life can have been only a trial, to put it mildly, but he never complained of his fate nor fell into that deplorable temptation of humanity, self-pity. Indeed the little notes, letters and even telephones calls that every now and then came from him when he had moved to New Zealand were full of cheerfulness, hopes and plans for the future, without any complaints that often they were frustrated by ill health. Few people, crippled at an age of 35, would, would have faced the pain and problems of another 29 years with such fortitude and without complaint. I am indebted to Mrs J. Storey-MacIntosh of Sydney, to Mr J.H. Calaby of CSIRO and to Mr A.R. McEvey of Melbourne for biographical details that enabled me to outline Warren Hitchcock's life. Much sympathy is extended to his surviving family.

S Marchant