

THE EMU

VOL. 86

MARCH 1986

PART 1

EDITORIAL

If asked what changes I plan for The Emu I would reply, in the words of my predecessor, 'not very much'. This is not because of inertia but because policies applied by recent editors were sound and have been highly successful. From 1968 to 1984 member subscriptions to The Emu increased from about 475 to 1155 (up 140%), institutional subscriptions from 184 to 259 (up 40%) and exchanges from 21 to 70 (up 230%). Increases in circulation have occurred both within Australia and overseas (28% go overseas) and The Emu is now held by private and institutional libraries in many countries. A further measure of success, and an indicator of the audience of The Emu, is the number and distribution of reprint requests. I have received requests for papers published in this journal from all continents, eastern and western block states, and industrialized and third world countries. Numbers and distribution of requests for my papers in The Emu have exceeded those for papers published in other prominent Australian and overseas journals.

This is an impressive record, one of which the RAOU is proud, and a testimony to the endeavours of recent editors. However, I am aware that some people are unhappy because many papers are written by scientists and do not appeal to the non-professional reader. I have even heard claims that there has been an active editorial policy to exclude amateur authors.

Let me say, unequivocally, that submissions from non-professionals have always been encouraged. There has been a policy to upgrade the quality of papers but this has been applied evenly across all submissions, quite independently of the stature of the authors. With an increasing proportion of the population receiving tertiary education in science, it is inevitable that more professional scientists will publish in The Emu. However, there is definitely still a place for papers from amateurs and I urge this group to continue to submit their more important findings to The Emu.

Amateurs and professionals both can make valuable contributions to ornithology. Professionals are trained in research techniques, have access to sophisticated equipment and have technical and clerical support. But professionals often have to satisfy institutional guidelines on the research that they undertake and are expected to publish their findings at frequent intervals. Amateurs can choose a topic of their liking, pursue it in whatever direction they wish and for as long as they like. How amateurs can and do exploit these advantages was well demonstrated by their contributions to the 1985 RAOU Scientific Day. Papers given by amateurs at this Day showed the inspiration and dedication that this group can bring to ornithology.

So how can we maintain contributions from both groups and

fully exploit the differing but complementary talents of amateurs and professionals. Often this can be achieved by the two working together but, before this can happen, professionals need to recognize the potential of amateurs and, equally, amateurs need to realize that they need help from professionals. Assistance from professionals is often needed when writing up research, an aspect where the untrained person is at a considerable disadvantage. Assistance may come in the form of a highly critical referee's report — in such cases, as difficult as it may be to accept, the referee is actually trying to help.

A further comment I hear is that papers in The Emu are as dry as a salted cracker and somewhat less digestible. This is unfortunate but, because The Emu has become a journal of international stature, it has to conform to the conventions of formal scientific publications. Scientific papers and popular articles are both worthwhile intellectual pursuits but have differing objectives and audiences and, if we attempt to cater for both in the one journal, we will succeed at neither. The RAOU does recognize the need for alternatives to scientific papers. The Newsletter now publishes a few semi-scientific reports and for some time the RAOU has been exploring ways of producing high quality popular articles on birds.

Some readers regret the passing of Stray Feathers and the decline in Short Notes. Early issues of The Emu contained nostalgic articles on the journeys of early ornithologists. Before publication of the Atlas of Australian Birds, annotated species lists helped piece together the distributions and movements of our birds. In their day, all these types of papers were important and we still refer to them for much of our basic knowledge of Australian birds. However, with the increasing sophistication of science and an accumulation of a solid body of information on the basic biology of our birds, the need for such articles is receding.

I will endeavour to maintain the standards and directions established by my predecessors. There certainly will be a place for works by amateurs and these will be judged by the same standards as those applied to other papers. I hope that articles will be of interest to both professional and amateur readers: the writing will be kept as simple as possible within the confines of scientific rigour and precision.

I am making some changes to the format of papers. These changes are detailed on the inside back cover of this issue (Vol. 86, Part 1) and will be implemented in Vol. 87, Part 1. The new format is similar to other major Australian journals that publish ornithological papers. Would intending authors please read carefully the 'Advice to Contributors' and conform to these guidelines when preparing manuscripts.

EDMUND WYNNDHAM, *Department of Ecosystem Management,
University of New England, Armidale, N.S.W. 2350*

2 October 1985