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# Obituary

## NORMAN CHAFFER

A.O.M., F.R.Z.S., F.R.A.O.U. 1899–1992

Norman Chaffer, one of the great pioneers of Australian nature photography and conservation education, died on 23 November 1992 at the age of 93 years.

Born in 1899 at Willoughby, Sydney, his interest in nature found early expression in the adjacent bushlands of the North Shore, such that by 1919 he was already photographing native birds in their haunts. An early photograph was of a White-browed Scrub-wren, taken at the Wallace Lake Campout in 1922 (*Emu* 21, 220). It was to be followed by an additional 55 species over the next 40 years, a high proportion representing the first time that the species had been photographed. Most were accompanied by a short article that included original observations.

Early success with heavy sensitised glass plates and black-and-white led to pioneer experiments with nature colour photography. Norman, ever ready to introduce the latest ideas and techniques had, by the late 1940s and 1950, accumulated colour photographs of over 100 species. He then moved into 16 mm colour cinematography.

By now he was giving much time to conservation education through lecturing and the showing of films. His lectures were sell-outs. The exquisite quality of Norman's photography led to the winning of many awards. Articles appeared in the *National Geographic* magazine and his remarkable series of bower-bird pictures and observations formed the basis of his book *In Quest of Bower Birds* (Rigby 1984). Some of his film material resides in the National Film Archives in Canberra and he donated all his still photographs to the National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife at the Australian Museum.

At the time of his death, Norman Chaffer was a Life Member of the Australian Conservation Foundation, a

member of many wildlife preservation societies and bird associations, all of which benefitted greatly from his input, help and tireless support. He was President of the RAOU, 1954–55.

To every ornithologist, young and old, Norman was an inspiration. His enthusiasm was infectious. Having studied birds over much of Australia, he had an incredible background of information on all aspects of natural history. The writer, one of many whom Norman took under his wing as a young man, owes much to him. He was ever ready to take any visitor out in the field and to help a young ornithologist get started, Friday night get-togethers, following the monthly meeting of the Royal Zoological Society, when we sat for hours over coffee showing off each other's photography, and subsequent weekends photographing birds in the shale country at Doonside, west of Sydney, or at Middle Harbour, are among my greatest ornithological memories.

Norman's career as an ornithologist spanned the exciting period from early to modern ornithology, when workers graduated from publishing regional lists to individual avian life histories, from almost a non-existent to a nation-wide conservation ethic; and from primitive early plate photography to modern flash and high-speed colour photography. Norman exercised a basic influence in all these areas.

Professionally, Norman was a life-time director of W. Chaffer & Sons Pty. Ltd., a leather manufacturing enterprise founded by his father in 1887. He is survived by two sons and three daughters, and by his second wife, Marjorie; his first wife, Pearl, died in 1963.

Norman Chaffer's RAOU Fellowship Citation appeared, with a photograph, in *Emu* 91, 129.

Allen Keast