

Report of R.A.O.U. Committee Appointed to Consider Collecting

Arising from a resolution of the last Annual Meeting of the Union, the Council appointed a Committee to consider the matter of collecting of birds and eggs. The Committee consists of two non-collectors and two members who collect eggs by permission of the Victorian Government. In submitting its report the Committee desires to state at the outset that it has given much thought to the matter and has obtained expressions of opinion from every State.

The point that first emerges is that, although final decisions on collecting, either generally or individually, rest with the governmental authorities in the various States, a definite policy in the matter is desirable for the R.A.O.U. Had such a policy been tabulated years ago, and a working arrangement established with the Government of each State, it seems probable that unauthorized collecting would not have developed to any extent, either inside or outside Union circles. Accordingly, there would not have been the unpleasantness that arose recently, when large numbers of eggs were confiscated in New South Wales and Victoria. It is now necessary, in seeking a basis for the future, to bear in mind certain intentions stated by the New South Wales and Victorian authorities.

The Committee's first recommendation is that the Union should set itself definitely against the collecting of protected birds or eggs without official permit; it must recognize such collecting as a form of law-breaking, and in future must expel any member who so offends. That view is supported by letters from several States.

The questions that next arise are: Is any collecting necessary, and if so what should be its nature and extent? On these points there are differences of opinion among Union members. The Committee's view is that a certain amount of collecting is necessary, and it therefore supports the authorities in allowing collections which have been built up legally (under permit) to be continued, subject to certain conditions. On the other hand, the Committee is not prepared to recommend to either the New South Wales or Victorian authorities the restoration of any collection or portion of a collection of eggs that was acquired without governmental permission. Moreover, the Committee is of opinion that some effort should be made to turn to practical use those egg-collections in Victoria that have been partly broken up by official action, leaving in the collectors' possession many sets of eggs taken, apparently without permit, in other States.

The question of new collections is difficult. Some members of the Union hold that a continuance of general collecting is necessary, both in the cause of knowledge and in order to give students an objective. Some other members appear to be wholly opposed to further collecting. Others again think that collecting is justified now only for certain specific purposes. The members of the Committee are not unanimous on the point. A majority, however, fails to see sufficient cause to justify the starting of any new general private collections of either birds or eggs. It considers that, in at least four of the six States, the Collections held at Museums and those being built up privately are sufficient for all immediate needs, and that, in all probability, ornithology would not be materially furthered by the starting of any other general collections. It also considers that now, nearly one hundred years after the time of John Gould, the day of the individual general collector has passed, or is passing, in favour of that of the student of ecology, behaviour, etc. Moreover, it is considered unlikely that permits for any new general collections would be granted in some States.

Nevertheless, the force of the "objective" argument is admitted, it being realized that most persons with a hobby like to have "something to show" for their efforts. The mere gathering of material, however, is not sufficient in ornithology; the collector has an obliga-

tion to prove that he or she is adding to the sum of human knowledge. Some collectors, unfortunately, have neglected that obligation. They have been content merely to amass material, and have failed to supply any of their acquired knowledge to *The Emu* or other journals. Such men have only themselves to blame when a governmental authority says: "We cannot see any justification for granting you a permit." Having these points in mind, the Committee suggests that in future permits should be granted only to genuine students who desire special material to help them in the study of biological ornithology (economic aspects, bird behaviour, etc.), and to those who wish to specialize on particular phases or groups. It considers that better results are likely to accrue from specializing than from general collecting.

In emphasizing that a definite policy for the R.A.O.U. is desirable, the Committee begs to submit a number of recommendations as a working basis. It appeals to members, of all shades of opinion, to consider these carefully, in the best interests of the Union and of bird study, and it invites free expressions of views upon them.

The recommendations are:—

1. The R.A.O.U. declares itself to be strongly opposed to the collecting of skins or eggs of protected birds except under permit, and it resolves that in future any member proved guilty of so offending shall be expelled.

2. While approving of the continuance of existing permits (subject to reservations) the R.A.O.U. is not in favour of any further *general* collections, either of birds or eggs, being started at present.*

3. The only new permits to be recommended, until further notice, shall be for *specialized* study, such as the biological significance of particular groups, problems relating to the economic status of birds, etc.

4. Permits for collecting shall not cover sanctuaries, except when, in the opinion of a Government authority, it is thought probable that a definite public or scientific purpose will be served by the securing of certain specified birds or eggs in such an area.

5. All permits shall have their scope defined and limited, particularly in respect of species that are thought to be rare. It is desirable that this obtain also in respect of any temporary permit given in any State to a collector from another State.

6. All collections shall be accompanied by full data, and every collector shall be expected to furnish, at least once annually, to *The Emu* or other journal of natural history, a report or reports covering or arising from his activities.

7. No collector shall be permitted to sell any material acquired. He shall, however, be free to engage in exchange with other licensed collectors in Australia, and, subject to approval of the Government concerned and the R.A.O.U., he shall be permitted to engage help in securing necessary material, to a limited extent, in places out of his reach.

8. *Subject to the foregoing reservations*, there shall be no objection to collecting at camps of the R.A.O.U., provided that this is not carried out in the immediate vicinity of the camp or of houses, schools, etc. Collectors shall defer to the camp leader's judgment regarding distances.

9. In the case of any collector proved to be exceeding the limits of his permit, the revocation of such permit shall be recommended to the proper authority.

10. It is desirable that all collections shall ultimately be donated to the public through a Government.

11. It is recommended to each State authority that all holders of collections, now or in the future, shall be required to donate any "types" (first clutches) of eggs and/or type specimens of birds, in

* Mr. J. A. Ross reserves judgment on Clause 2.

their possession, to an Australian Museum, preferably that of the State in which the specimens were taken, within three months of the description thereof having been published.

12. The R.A.O.U. shall set up a small Board in each State to act in an advisory capacity to the Government concerned.

(Signed) A. H. CHISHOLM (Convener).

J. A. ROSS.

C. BRYANT.

F. E. HOWE.

The Council of the R.A.O.U. received the above report and ordered its publication. The Council invites members to express their views on the various proposals and to send their letters to the Hon. General Secretary.

Council Meetings of the R.A.O.U.

Following is a summary of the main items of business transacted by the Council of the R.A.O.U. recently:—

The Collecting Problem.—Acting on an instruction from the Annual Meeting, to “examine the whole question of collecting of bird skins and eggs by members of the Union and others with a view to placing the matter on a proper basis,” the Council appointed a committee, consisting of Messrs. A. H. Chisholm, C. E. Bryant, F. E. Howe, and J. A. Ross, to consider and report. Discussions by the Committee, which has been in communication with all States, have extended over several months. See foregoing report. The problem has been intensified by the fact that, while the Committee was sitting, large numbers of eggs, said to have been illegally taken, were confiscated by Governmental authorities in New South Wales and Victoria.

Controlling Vagrant Cats.—Difficulty has been found in getting a satisfactory basis for the attack of this problem. The Victorian Chief Secretary, on being approached by the Council, asked for practical suggestions. It was agreed to recommend that domestic cats gone wild be declared vermin under the Vermin and Noxious Weeds Act 1928, and that it be made illegal to “dump” unwanted cats. The Council awaits advice from State Secretaries, who were asked by the Annual Meeting to urge their respective Governments to grapple with the problem.

Sanctuaries, etc.—Satisfactory responses have been received from the controlling authorities of golf links throughout Australia in regard to the recommendation that all golf links should be sanctuaries for birds and that native trees should be planted as much as possible. In all instances Golf Associations approached have agreed to follow the Union's advice. A cordial reply was received also from the Mayor of Hobart in regard to the Union's suggestion that native trees should be planted along the main road from Hobart to Launceston. The Council has been in touch with Victorian authorities in the matter of preserving swamp areas for water-birds, and it has written the New South Wales Minister for Lands strongly supporting the movement of members in that State for the preservation of Lake Urana. Further, the Council is supporting a movement, initiated by Dr. Spencer Roberts (Qld.) and endorsed by Professor J. B. Cleland (S.A.), for the better protection of native birds, and offering assistance to the Standing Committee on Agriculture.

Transfer of Lyrebirds.—Although the Union was largely responsible for the transfer of a number of Lyrebirds from Victoria to Tasmania (and is interested in the welfare of those birds), the Council was not prepared to recommend, in reply to an inquiry from the Victorian authorities, that a number of Lyrebirds be captured in Gippsland and transferred to the Otway Ranges, south-west of Melbourne. The objections raised were that the Otways were not necessarily suitable