

the season and within three weeks of the young fledging the female parent may be brooding eggs in a new nest. This means that the female ceases to feed the young after they have been out of the nest about ten days; as the three or four fledgelings are still very dependent, help at this stage is of obvious advantage to their survival. Furthermore, these 'surplus' birds act as a reserve from which casualties amongst mated pairs may be replaced with minimum delay and the breeding rate maintained at a high level.

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Obituaries

J. A. ROSS

The death occurred at his residence in Malvern, Melbourne, on July 30, 1957, of John Alexander Ross, a noted Victorian oologist and a former president of the Union.

Mr. Ross was born at Castlemaine on April 18, 1868, and, as a boy, he attended the local State School and afterwards the Castlemaine High School where he passed the State Public Service examination. On November 10, 1886, he was appointed a junior clerk on probation in the Crown Solicitor's Office. Soon after taking up the duties of his new position he was engaged on conveyancing for various Government departments and remained on this work for thirty years. Over that long period he was gradually promoted from a fifth class clerk to a second class officer. At a late stage in life he took a law course at the Melbourne University and was admitted to practice as a barrister and solicitor, but continued in his clerical duties until July 1921 when he was promoted to the professional division as Examiner of Titles, a position which he held until April 30, 1930, when he resigned from the public service to accept the high position of Commissioner of Titles. In addition to that position he was also appointed Curator of Estates of Deceased Persons in Victoria. After carrying out the onerous duties of these two important positions for five years, Mr. Ross retired in 1935 when he had reached his sixty-seventh birthday. He then had an extended holiday in Western Australia and, on his return to Melbourne, commenced practice as a solicitor in Collins Street where he conducted his legal business until 1952 when he went into complete retirement. For a number of years Mr. Ross was engaged on writing an important legal work, *Conveyancing Precedents and Forms with Notes*, which was published in 1938.

Soon after taking up his residence in Melbourne, Mr. Ross, as a young man, joined the Volunteer Militia Forces where he was attached to C Battery, Field Artillery. In a short

while he became a non-commissioned officer. He had always been a first-rate rifle shot as a boy and he also showed himself to be a first-class marksman on the rifle range. He had become so efficient with the rifle by 1897 that he was selected, with twelve others, for the Victorian team to visit Bisley in England. On this occasion the team was successful in winning the Kolapore Cup. The full story of this trip is told by Mr. Phil Fargher in a small volume entitled *To Bisley and Back—With the Kolapore Cup*. In the following year Sergeant Ross was again selected in the team for Bisley. The Kolapore Cup might have been won again by the Victorian team but for the inaccurate shooting of one member. However, the most outstanding event of the team's visit to Bisley was yet to come when Sergeant Ross won the Daily Telegraph Cup, the most handsome trophy given for individual competition at Bisley that year. Ross kept a diary of this trip from the time he left Port Melbourne on May 10, 1898, until he returned there on September 20 of the same year. It is neatly written in ink and gives the daily incidents on ship-board and a places visited during his stay in England.

As a boy at Castlemaine Ross had formed a small collection consisting mostly of eggs of sparrows gathered from nests built in the buildings around the town, but this hobby had to be suspended when he came to live in Melbourne. However, he maintained his interest in the birds by reading the late A. J. Campbell's series of articles, 'Some Australian Birds' which were appearing almost weekly in the pages of *The Australasian* during the 'nineties. It was not, however, until 1905, when he had the good fortune to meet Messrs. A. H. Mattingley and C. F. Ladwig, both members of the R.A.O.U., on a shooting trip in the country, that he became a member of the Union. In the same year he also became a member of the Bird Observers Club. Finding companions with similar tastes, he soon became an ardent egg collector again and in the years that followed he formed one of the best collection of eggs in the State. His ability and qualifications were soon recognized by the leading members of the R.A.O.U. and in 1907 he was appointed Hon. Treasurer, a position which he held until 1910. On many occasions, and for long periods, he represented Victoria on the Council, and for nearly thirty years he was Curator of the R.A.O.U. Egg Collection. After a sensational election in 1924 he was elected President. His presidential address, 'Recollections of an Oologist', together with his photograph, appeared in *The Emu*, vol. 25, part 3.

Mr. Ross, like several other Melbourne oologists, was keenly interested in the birds of the Mallee and for many years he made annual trips to places along the railway line between Ouyen and Pinnaroo, South Australia.

It was on one of these trips (in 1932) that he, in company with the late Frank E. Howe, collected the type specimen, ♀, of a subspecies of the Western Whipbird, *Psophodes nigro-*

gularis, the nest and eggs of which they had discovered in 1920. He also made several trips to the swamps along the Murray River, and near Melbourne he was a regular visitor to the timbered plains at Parwan, the bush country around Ringwood and the humid gullics in the Dandenong Ranges. Mr. Ross was not a prolific writer. Most of his articles appeared in *The Emu* and a few may also be found in the *Oologists' Record* and the *Geelong Naturalist*. The full list of titles may be consulted in Whittell's major work, *The Literature of Australian Birds*.

Mr. Ross was most methodical in every thing he undertook and was highly respected by all ranks in the public service. He was possessed of high principles and would never be afraid to express a strong opinion on debatable matters under discussion at Council meetings, and his advice on all subjects commanded a great deal of respect. He left a widow, two married daughters, and a son who is a dentist in Western Australia.—D.J.D.

DR. W. R. B. OLIVER

Walter Reginald Brook Oliver was born in Tasmania in 1883. His parents went to New Zealand in 1896 and settled in Tauranga where he continued his education at the District High School, later entering the Customs Department and serving in succession at several New Zealand ports.

His early hobby interest in natural history appears to have crystallized about 1906 by association in Christchurch with kindred enthusiasts amongst whom was Tom Iredale. It was at this time that he commenced to record, in the first of a series of notebooks that grew to a vast orderly record in fifty years, his observations of almost everything that grew or moved, and descriptions of specimens collected. In 1908 Oliver and Iredale joined an enterprising party led by F. S. Oliver and W. Wallace in an expedition to Sunday Island in the Kermadec Group where they remained for ten months. This experience, more than anything else, gave direction and content to Reginald Oliver's development as a naturalist. It enabled him to produce with confidence not only papers describing new material, but valuable essays on the origins and relationships of the flora and fauna of several islands in the sub-tropical South Pacific.

He served overseas in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the war of 1914-18, but this was an interruption to his steady pursuit of knowledge of which he seldom spoke. I can remember hearing him give a lecture, shortly after demobilization in 1919, on the Kermadec Expedition, and he spoke as if he had just returned from it, and not from the battle-fields of France. He rejoined the Customs in a senior position with good prospects, but in 1920 applied for a vacancy in the Dominion Museum and was transferred. Fol-

Following the death of Dr. J. Allan Thomson he was appointed Director in 1928. During his first few years at the Museum he enrolled at Victoria University College and graduated M.Sc. with honours in botany. By 1930 he had published the first edition of *New Zealand Birds*, the standard and only comprehensive reference book on the subject until superseded by a second and revised edition in 1955.

The completion of this considerable work was only incidental to the performance of a host of other duties. Such was his methodical and disciplined sense of duty and of mission that he never refused the tedious and unrewarding obligation to serve on committees or to accept responsible office in the many societies of which he was a member. His service to the R.A.O.U. as New Zealand State Secretary for 40 years and President in 1944 can be matched by similar service in a dozen other fields of biological science and of conservation, including the Royal Society of New Zealand of which he was a Hector Medallist, a Fellow, and President 1952-4.

Dr. Oliver's contribution to ornithology was not confined to compendious works like *New Zealand Birds*. He produced a monographic work *The Moas of Australia and New Zealand* (1949) and a study of avian classification based on skull characters which was published as a presidential address (*Emu*, vol. 45). Ornithologists who know these works may find it hard to realize that they were the work of a man who at the same time was compiling and publishing just as much in the field of botany—his master's and doctorate theses were botanical and he edited a revised edition of Cheeseman's *New Zealand Flora*. He kept up with and made significant contributions to the study of mollusca and of whales.

He was methodical to an unusual degree and gave the impression of being tireless. Even in the field, where his slight physique and quiet manner did not suggest vigorous stamina, he had the reputation of outlasting younger and bigger men and by being quite unperturbed by discomfort or fatigue. His professional work at the Dominion Museum enhanced its scientific reputation, and he was responsible for the planning and lay-out of the present building. He bequeathed to it the private collections, mainly botanical, made over fifty years, and to these have been added the classified field notes and research records associated with them.

After retirement he continued his field trips, writing, and committee work until a few weeks before his death at his home at Seatoun, Wellington, on May 16, 1957.

W. R. B. Oliver will be remembered as typical of the generation of Australian and New Zealand naturalists who were conditioned by outdoor experience in fields rich in raw material of bewildering variety. He achieved the distinction of reducing much of it to intelligible order for the benefit of his fellows, and was himself sustained and completely recompensed by the joy of the quest.—R.A.F.