

OBITUARIES

ROBERT CUSHMAN MURPHY

Dr R. C. Murphy, for fifty years the leading American authority on the oceanic birds of the southern hemisphere, died at his home in Stony Brook, Long Island, on 19 March 1973, aged eighty-five years. Though his 'cradle, endlessly rocking', was on Brooklyn Heights, he was a fourth-generation Long Islander with a life time's dedication to conservation of Walt Whitman's island, where his naturalist's life began. He worked briefly in the Brooklyn Museum after graduation from Brown University in 1911, but devoted most of his years to the American Museum of Natural History where he became Curator of Oceanic Birds (1927), Chairman of the Department (1942) and Lamont Curator (1948).

In 1912, representing both museums, Murphy joined the New Bedford whaling brig *Daisy* for a voyage to South Georgia. He was assistant navigator and pulled stroke in the first mate's whaleboat. *Logbook for Grace* (1947) records this adventure as written for his wife, 'the well-spring of these experiences and of all the best that have followed.' Thereafter he combined studies of oceanic birds, especially the penguins, tubinares, shags and gannets, with a lasting interest in the sea and ships. His review (with Francis Harper) of the diving-petrels (1921) sprang from this voyage.

For many years Murphy's fieldwork took him to the coasts and offshore islets of South America, supplementing other American Museum collecting, especially Rollo Beck's work on the Brewster-Sanford Expedition. *Bird Islands of Peru* (1925), an account of the guano industry, resulted from one such expedition. When his greatest work, *Oceanic Birds of South America*, appeared in 1936 it enshrined his personal contribution to understanding the ecology of the oceans, emphasizing the dependence of seabird distributions on the oceanographic environment, notably the zones of surface water and their boundaries or convergences that had just been delineated by G. E. R. Deacon of the British 'Discovery' Expeditions. 'Only by such attempts', he wrote, 'to correlate life and its physical background can we hope to comprehend the place of the native seabird in the scheme of nature'. Murphy's concepts have influenced all subsequent marine ornithologists; the writer acknowledges a personal debt.

The results of the Whitney South Sea Expedition brought all the birds of the Southern Ocean under scrutiny, leading to definitive accounts or revisions (never, of course, 'the last word') on the *cauta* mollymawks, *Oceanites*, *Pelagodroma* and the 'Pealea' storm-petrels, the *Pterodroma cookii/leucoptera*

group, the larger *Pterodroma* species, *Puffinus pacificus*, *P. puffinus* (including *gavia*) and several other shearwaters on the Australian and New Zealand lists. A conservative taxonomist, RCM frequently differed from Mathews and from Iredale in his systematic treatment of the albatrosses and petrels, and had an advantage over other workers after 1932, when the American Museum acquired Mathews's specimens with the Rothschild Collection. Murphy travelled to Tring in England to supervise their trans-shipment, a task performed with all the necessary diplomatic charm. During retirement he continued work towards a monograph of petrels, but did not complete it.

Throughout his life Murphy contributed to the philosophy and practice of conservation, unstintingly addressing meetings and publishing articles on such diverse topics as the slaughter of whales and the electrocution of insects by light traps. *August on Fire Island Beach* (1933) is a classic plea for the Long Island environment. Published addresses to the Garden Clubs of America (1937-41) follow the wilderness aesthetic of Aldo Leopold. He chose his beloved Long Island as the subject of the 1962 Penrose Memorial Lecture (published as *Fish-shape Paumanok*, 1964). In his last publication (1970) he recognized 'a new interest in co-operating with nature, a new trend that in the long run may give us another chance'.

In 1947 Dr and Mrs Murphy visited New Zealand to join an expedition to the Snares Islands, in order to obtain material for an American Museum display, and in 1949 they returned to excavate moa skeletons, attend the Seventh Pacific Science Congress, and prepare an exhibit of forest birds at Lake Brunner. Through these visits they endeared themselves to New Zealand naturalists of all ages, identifying themselves with a young country's problems in a way that is not forgotten. Nor did they forget, returning in 1971 to meet old friends and refresh their memories.

Bob Murphy was a big man in every way, six foot three tall, with a fine physique, a superb ability to write good English with facility and a pleasantly robust speaking voice that served him well as a raconteur. He could recite yards of verse ranging from classical pentameters to Walt Whitman and New England folk jingles and he sang sea shanties with a whaling man's gusto. His brown eyes seemed to look through you almost coldly, until he spoke with the quiet warmth of generous friendship.

C.A.F.

ALAN HARDING LONDON

The death of Alan Harding London on 12 July 1973 at the age of sixty-nine came as a shock to his many ornithological friends throughout Australia and particularly to those of us in South Australia. For many years he had been a leading amateur ornithologist in South Australia and was well known overseas. His name will rank with the names of other great South Australian ornithologists of the past such as S. A. White, A. M. Morgan and J. N. McGilp.

He was born in Adelaide on 11 August 1903 and was educated at St Peter's College and the University of Adelaide. His interest in birds began in boyhood though he never collected eggs, the common practice and introduction to ornithology in those days. An account of his work could best be recorded by summarizing his activities in the five ornithological associations of which he was a member and of all of which he became President. It will demonstrate his wide interests in all aspects of ornithology.

In his youth his main hobby was aviculture. He was a life member of the Avicultural Society of South Australia which he joined in 1933. He became a committee-man in 1937. He was elected President in 1940 and held this position until 1949. He was elected a life member in 1951 and finally Patron for several years.

His interest throughout life was predominantly with the order Psittaciformes and he was awarded twelve Bronze Medals, official recognition for having bred a species in captivity for the first time. The first was the Northern Rosella in 1939. This was followed by the three Blue Bonnets, Port Lincoln and Cloncurry Parrots, the golden-mantled variety of Eastern Rosella, the blue-cheeked variety of the Pale-headed Rosella, the Red-capped and the Golden-shouldered Parrots and, finally, the Long-billed Corella in 1969. He wrote a book entitled *Australian Parrots in Captivity*, published by the London Aviculturist Society in 1951, and he contributed many articles to various avicultural journals. An article on the Long-billed Corella was published in the journal of the English Aviculturist Society.

The Royal Zoological Society of South Australia accepted him as a member in 1911 and he became a life member in 1921, was Councillor from 1935 to 1965 and President from 1947 to 1949. He was Vice-President from 1949 to 1965 and an Honorary life member from 1967. He published four papers in the Annual Report, the two most comprehensive recording all the parrots that had been exhibited and bred in the Zoological Gardens since its foundation. He was a very active member of Council and spent many hours on this work, particularly the ornitho-

logical section to which he presented birds from time to time.

In 1918 he joined the South Australian Ornithological Association as a junior member. He allowed his membership to lapse for a few years during his postgraduate study abroad and re-joined in 1938. He was elected President on two occasions, in 1940-41 and 1947-48. He published several papers in the *South Australian Ornithologist*, again mostly about parrots. Towards the end of the 1950s the interest of the Association became largely political so that Alan London invited some of his friends to form a club devoted entirely to the study of birds. In 1960 the Adelaide Ornithologists Club was inaugurated with the late J. N. McGilp as its first President. Mr London was the obvious President for the ensuing year and because of his enthusiasm he was elected President for a second term in 1970. This club, largely under his guidance, has developed along the lines that he wished and there is now a waiting list for membership which is limited to fifty-five. The first edition of its journal, *Bird Talk*, was published in November 1972 and included many of his records.

In 1948 he joined the RAOU, having had his first article published in EMU the year before. In 1963 he became a Vice-President and held this position until his election to the Presidency in 1966. His photograph together with his Presidential Address was published in EMU, Volume 68, Part 4. This Address dealt with vernacular names and those who care to re-read this paper will appreciate his sound commonsense.

Only a few references have been made to his bibliography but a complete list to 1950 occupies two pages in Whittell's *Literature of Australian Birds* (1954). One of his most recent papers dealt with birds of the Northern Territory and was published in the *Australian Bird Watcher*, Volumes 2 and 4.

His professional career as one of South Australia's most eminent surgeons will appear in his obituary in the appropriate journals. Suffice it to say here that he was a member of the Council of the University of Adelaide, a member of the Medical Board of South Australia, Director of Surgical Studies, Chairman of the Court of Examiners for the Royal Australian College of Surgeons and in 1966 he was elected a Senior Vice-President of the College, the second highest honour that can be bestowed on an Australasian surgeon. In 1940-46 he served with the A.A.M.C.

Alan London had many interests, was intensely interested in people and personally knew every member of the Adelaide Club of which he was Vice-President at the time of his death. He was an

accomplished bridge player. In his youth he played cricket, tennis and golf and in 1923 was awarded a University Blue for rifle shooting. In later years he forsook sport for the observation of birds in the wild. He loved the Northern Territory and after the RAOU Camp-out in 1967 he organized and led two parties of ornithologists to the Territory. He would have led a third but instead he took it to New South Wales and Queensland in another attempt, his third, to find the Paradise Parrot which he believed would be found again. He needed this species, and a few others, to complete his list of parrots studied in the wild. He was ready to leave at a moment's notice if, and when, his eldest son, Colin, also a keen ornithologist stationed at Alice Springs, had a clue as to the location of the Princess Parrot. He possessed a good memory and a ready wit and was invariably good company on expeditions into the bush. Field observations finally took preference over aviculture and in his later years he visited the I.C.I. Saltfields at St Kilda at every opportunity. He always found time to take interstate or overseas visiting ornithologists to this area, which is in close proximity to Adelaide and carries a wealth of bird life. In 1957 he reported the first record of the Common Tern in South Australia collected in this vicinity. In 1962 he collected the first specimen of the Ruff (a Reeve) recorded for Australia. Arising from

these visits he wrote 'Some unusual wader records', his last paper to be published in the *South Australian Ornithologist*.

He was not a dedicated conservationist but his views on this matter were sound and he played his part in this field. He was a member of the Fauna and Flora Board which managed Flinders Chase, the oldest and perhaps the best reserve in the state. He was Chairman of the Flora and Fauna Advisory Committee to the Minister of Agriculture when it was reconstituted in 1962 and occupied the chair until the Committee was disbanded at the time of the formation of the Ministry of Conservation. He was then given a seat on the new Advisory Committee to the Minister and was active here until his death.

Throughout his life his great avian love was the parrot family. In his later years and in spite of ill health he re-wrote the text of *Australian Parrots* (Cayley). His knowledge of this order was unsurpassed and although several books on parrots have been published in recent years it is likely that Alan Lendon's book will become the reference volume in the future. It is a tragedy that owing to delay by the publishers he did not survive to see the first edition.

To his wife, Margaret, his sons, Colin and Nigel, and his daughter, June (Mrs Peter Berry), the Union sends its deepest sympathy.

J.M.B.

ERNEST SILVERTON HANKS

Few members of the RAOU have served the Union so faithfully and with dedication as the late E. S. Hanks. He was a member of Council for 38 years. Born in Melbourne on 5 April 1892, his interest in natural history was soon apparent, particularly as regards ornithology. He joined the Union in 1929 and was Curator of Skins from 1930 to 1945. He was the Victorian Branch Secretary from 1945 to 1957 when he became President. He served as *ex-officio* member of Council from 1958 to 1968. During this period he rarely missed a Council meeting. Even during the war when the family foundry was working overtime he still found time to attend meetings. He was RAOU representative on the You Yangs Park Committee and again rarely missed a meeting although it involved a round trip of nearly 150 kilometres.

He was associated with the Bird Observers' Club

from 1927 and was a member of Committee for over thirty years. He was President 1939-40. He was made a Honorary Life Member of the BOC in 1970. He was most active in the early years of the Altona Survey Group and Survey Cassidix. He was associated with the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria and was a Life Member. He was also a Life Member of the Anthropological Society of Victoria, a member of the Henry Lawson Society, the Poetry Lovers, the Australian Literature Society and was an expert in Esperanto.

I knew Ernie Hanks for over thirty years; he was one of nature's gentlemen and a tremendous worker for conservation and the preservation of our natural resources. He died on 12 April 1973 a few days after his eighty-second birthday. Our sincere and deepest sympathy is extended to Mrs Hanks.

W.R.W.