

Private Collections, Etc.—A Rejoinder

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The R.A.O.U. Council has decided, owing to the limitations of space, that the discussion opened by my paper on the above subject at the Adelaide Congress, and published in the January number of *The Emu*, closes with my reply to letters in the April issue. I regret that those who agree in the main with my paper (and, judging by the communications that have reached me, they seem to be many) should not also be allowed to take part in the discussion. It is obvious that the opportunity for these to enter the discussion did not occur until some attempt had been made to controvert the opinions and facts set forth therein. I am sure that all will sympathise with the Editor and Council, in the necessity of restricting matter.

It had been my intention not to reply to the criticisms in the last *Emu*, but under the circumstances it seems necessary for me to do so. First I shall quote from some of the comments that have reached me from members. One says: "Unless a man handles skins of birds, he will not learn a great deal about them, and I regret I have not done more skinning and examining of skins."

Another writes: "An ornithologist must be a collector, or he must work on collections made by others. . . . The 'non-collecting ornithologist' approves of the museum collections (the reservoir, as it were), but he would dam the streams of private collections, which flow into it."

"It is a historic fact that the science of Ornithology has been built up by the collector, the cabinet worker and the systematist, not by the 'non-collecting ornithologist,' and the sentimentalist, who are merely patrons of the science. . . In demonstration of this I will instance that venerable institution, the British Museum. Its nucleus, or foundation, was the private collection of Sir Hans Sloane, then followed the additions of the Bullock and Montague, etc., collections."

"The immortal John Gould presented many rare specimens; B. H. Hodgson, of India, gave over 22,000 specimens; Dr. Alfred Wallace donated nearly 30,000 specimens, many new to science; Allan Hume, C.B., donated over 59,000 birds and 15,000 eggs; the Marquis Tweeddale (per his nephew, Col. Ramsay), Dr. Bowdler Sharpe, Eugene W. Oates, Dr. F. Ducane Godman, O. Salwin, all gave handsomely. Henry Seebohm, of iron manufacturing fame, donated 16,000 skins and skeletons, besides eggs; W. R. Saunders gave over 10,000 specimens, not to mention the names of 800 or 900 other private collectors, the history of whose gifts is contained in the 'History of the Collections' contained

in the Nat. His. Dept. of the Brit. Mus., pp. 295 to 515. One of our colonial citizens, the late Mr. A. J. North, made a donation of Australian Bird's Eggs. His biography occupies two pages, 432-4, in the same History. In this democratic country presidents usually represent the people. Record has it that all (eleven) of the past presidents of the R.A.O.U. were or had been collectors.

One of my correspondents closes with a reference to several important matters raised in my paper, in which Mr. Chisholm (I am glad to say) shows himself in agreement. Amongst these is my statement: "Lulled by a false issue (that our protective legislation protects) the real factor that counts is largely ignored, *viz.*, the provision of suitable breeding places and the protection of breeding haunts, is the only thing that really counts." Chisholm writes: 'I agree with the setting apart of sanctuaries.' My own comment is that my suggestion goes very much further than the providing of isolated bird sanctuaries.

Having now quoted from some of my correspondents, it remains for me to state that I recognise the truth that the men who made the collections in public institutions were almost entirely private collectors. Mr. Chisholm is not against the taking of bird life, but he wants it to be confined to those who do it for monetary consideration. Does not Mr. Chisholm yet know, that the best service is not to be bought? There is not a better evidence of this willing service to their fellows, than the accumulated private collections, now in the British Museum, as cited by one of my correspondents.

Mr. Chisholm's hypothetical picture commencing in second par., p. 312, may be good writing, but it is not a fact; it is not a true picture as far as I am concerned. My example as well as precept has always been, that bird life is so wonderful, and in that sense so valuable, that every native bird that is found dead, however common, should have its skin preserved, whatever the trouble entailed may be. The clause in my paper, at top of page 214, says: "The only restriction required, if it could be properly enforced, is to insist that every bird killed be made into a skin." This met with approval at the Congress in Adelaide. I ask all our member to think out what the implications are, of such an admission? They will find that it cuts the ground from under the "anti" writers, in the last issue.

I cannot help wondering whether more than one of those who adversely criticise my paper may, in the past, have been a collector, not of the "Belltrees" stamp, which Mr. Chisholm commends as "semi-national," but mere "collectors," with an aptitude for acquisitiveness that might be well satisfied with a collection of stamps. I would remind your readers that the "private collecting" I have advocated, is always of the "semi-national"

stamp; and although of necessity, without the financial backing of Mr. H. L. White, but as a partial make-up for that deficiency, a large amount of gratuitous hard work.

I look upon the collecting I advocate as an education to the individual, a contribution to the world's knowledge, and a gift to posterity. I would that our friends had started on such lines, and then surely they would not have written in the strain they have.

I have no desire to prove myself right and others wrong. I seek truth, whether it accords with my view or runs counter to it. I plead for a less parochial outlook, remembering that we are dealing with a more or less vast unpeopled continent.