



Obituary

Ronald Strahan, AM, DSc (Hon), MSc (UWA), FRZS, FAIBiol

DR. Ron Strahan died peacefully in the early morning of Saturday 3 July 2010 in Box Hill Hospital, Melbourne, aged 87.

He is survived by his wife Pamela Strahan Conder, whom he married after his first wife, Helen Burns, died. He is also survived by two of his three children from his first marriage (Alison and Fiona), two grandchildren, (Tara and Minette) and one great grandchild (Saffron) - and three cats, Huxley, Sybill and Chui. His son, Kingsley, died in 2005.

Born on 4 October 1922 in Guildford, WA, he was educated at Perth Boys High School, the University of Western Australia, and Oxford. He joined the 2nd AIF mobile Entomology Unit in 1943 serving under (Colonel) Francis Ratcliffe in Nth. Queensland, New Guinea and Borneo, working on malaria control and scrub typhus.. After the war he returned to complete his degree in Zoology at the University of Western Australia. He won a Hackett Studentship to Lincoln College, Oxford after receiving his MSc. and later proceeded to lecture in Zoology at the University of Hong Kong before returning to Australia as a Senior Lecturer in Zoology at the University of NSW in 1961.

Ron is better known as a former Director of Taronga Park Zoo, the position he took up at the behest of Prof. Heini Hediger in 1967 and held until 1974. He transformed this beloved Sydney zoo from a menagerie collection into a cultural-scientific institution and was able to implement his design policies in the creation of the Western Plains Zoo. The Taronga Koala exhibit which he designed is still considered a classic among zoo exhibits world wide. He subsequently moved to The Australian Museum as a Research Fellow where his roles included being the editor-in-chief of the National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife. It was at the museum that he made his most enduring contributions to Australian mammalogy.

His contribution to Australian Mammalogy ranged from his editorial skills which created the "Australian Museum Complete Book of Australian Mammals" and saw it through several editions, later as "The Mammals of Australia" before stepping into the role of co-editor with Steve Van Dyck and winner of the Royal Zoological Society's Whitley Award for Best Zoological Reference in 2008- to author of "A Dictionary of Australian Mammal Names". In this he set out to provide the framework for the taxonomy of Australian mammals, explain the derivations and provide the

pronunciations of the names of mammals to experts and novices alike. He was the author or editor of numerous books, covering an eclectic mix of subjects for children and adults, scientists and lay readers.

He championed the scientific cause and defended it vigorously throughout his life against the rising tide of Creationist Theory. In 1987, he was given life membership of the Australian Mammal Society of which he was a founding member and to which he introduced the delight of limericks at its annual dinners. He was awarded the title of a living treasure of the society in 2001. He served as President, Vice-President and Councillor of various professional societies and convened numerous scientific gatherings. Ron was an active member of the Royal Zoological Society (NSW) and served on its council for 32 years in addition to a stint as President. He was editor of *Search* (the Journal of ANZAAS) and the *Bulletin of Zoo Management* for many years. His writing ranged from the Biology of Myxine (Hagfish) (1963) to histories of the Australian Museum ("Rare and Curious Specimens", a Whitley Award winner in 1980), the Royal Zoological Society (NSW) (*Australian Zoologist* **28**: 6-10; **29**: 229-237), and Taronga Zoo ('Beauty and the Beast'). With Pamela, he co-authored "An Incomplete Book of Australian Mammals", a children's book of verse and pictures, winner of a Whitley Award in 1997 and the Wilderness Society's Environment Award for Children's Literature in 1998. His most recent contribution, the "Dictionary of Australian and New Guinea Mammals", also with Pamela, was published in 2007.

Ron was the consummate zoologist. Zoology was his passion. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society (NSW), as well as the Australian Institute of Biology, and was honoured by the award of member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1994 for his service to zoology. Ron received an honorary DSc from the University of NSW in 2000 (he would say, so that he didn't have to continually correct those who assumed he had a PhD).

If he had any doubt about his own legacy to humanity, Ron Strahan, need not have worried. His "immortality" in this world is in the legacy that this gentleman, as educationist, zoologist, linguist, historian, humanist, friend, father, and husband left behind. It is all around us, wherever we look in the Australian Literature, and in all the people he has been able to reach and those he has touched.

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