

had little in the way of bird-life and to remove the impression that, while a "Bird Day" was a good thing for eastern boys and girls, it was useless in the West. Interest in ornithology has been intensified, and it is probable that an annual Bird Day will be celebrated in the schools, and that a Gould League of Bird-Lovers of Western Australia will be established as the direct outcome of the visit of the R.A.O.U. to the western State.

Some members returned to the Eastern States by steamer, and utilized good opportunities for study of the flight of the numerous and interesting Albatrosses.\*

Other members made excursions to many parts of the huge State. Reports following give some of the results. This first visit serves also to indicate the best localities for future visits to the West.

#### PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

TO THE MEMBERS PRESENT AT THE 1920 ANNUAL MEETING.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—For the second time I have to express my regret at being unable to address you personally at the annual meeting. You have paid me the highest honour in electing me as your President for two years in succession, and I have been prevented by official duties from acknowledging my indebtedness to you or voicing the *non sum dignus* that I feel so deeply.

Our general honorary secretary has given you a *résumé* of the work of the past year—in which, unfortunately, I have taken but small share—and you will now be called upon to place the seal of your approval on the labours of the Council. Inevitably, in such an association as ours, the bulk of the work falls upon the shoulders of the few who have the opportunity of gathering together at stated intervals in the home of the Union. We who are situated so far from that centre can only sympathize and (I fear too often) criticise! For my own shortcomings I can only plead want of leisure and that stimulus to greater effort which arises from association with keener fellow-workers.

To the future, then, I will direct the remainder of my few remarks, lightly sketching the lines upon which much useful work remains to be done.

Notwithstanding the considerable amount of field work that has been accomplished during the past ten years, largely under the guiding hand of Mr. H. L. White, by Messrs. M'Lennan, Jackson, and Whitlock, together with the individual efforts of Captain White, Dr. Macgillivray, and others, there are many avenues still open to the earnest field ornithologist, and especially to him who has the leisure to devote to the sustained study of some problem. Let me instance one subject of investigation that

\*The photographs of flying Albatrosses were taken by Hugh Macknight, late A.I.F., from the troopship *Argyleshire*, on 6th September, 1919, about ten days before reaching Adelaide from Durban.

will require some years of attention during the months of September, October, and November. I refer to the movement of the Short-tailed and Wedge-tailed Petrels. Year after year the former species passes along the eastern coast of Australia in numbers that can safely be estimated in millions. Periodically countless thousands die and are cast up on the beaches. Examination shows that the birds have died from starvation. Why? That is only one of the many questions that require answering. Why do they go so far from their known breeding-places in Bass Strait and on the Victorian coast? Do they spread far and wide over the Australian seas from March to September and then gather together towards the latter end of the last-named month? If so, again, Why? On the 5th of this month (October, 1920) it was reported that dense flocks of "Mutton-Birds" passed Cape Byron on the border between New South Wales and Queensland, flying south, the stream taking three hours to pass a given point. Shortly we will hear of dead bodies being washed on shore, and the tale of successive years will be repeated. Sometimes the dead and dying Petrels coming ashore prove to be of the Wedge-tailed species. Emaciated bodies and empty stomachs tell the same story of starvation, but the numbers are never so great as in the case of the Short-tailed species. To fully elucidate this mystery will require undivided attention by a worker who can go out at call from any point between Gabo Island (on the south-east of the continent) and Broken Bay (farther north) to watch the movements of the birds and take specimens for examination; to visit the islands where they breed, or where they are trying to gain a footing; and he must, in addition, be prepared to study the migrations of the fish and the nature and sources of the food supply.

The Penguins will provide another field for investigation. My own limited researches point to there being a steady northward extension of their range. Twenty years ago the Little Penguin was unknown as far north as Sydney, but it now breeds all along the coast of New South Wales up to Port Stephens, and stragglers are reported from Moreton Bay. The Crested Penguins are undoubtedly making exploratory visits ever farther northward, and the reason for this extension is yet to be discovered. Stuart-Sutherland, in the last *Emu*, records, with expressions of wonder, the fact that the Thick-billed Penguin nests twice in the one year. My experience is that the Little Penguin breeds practically all the year round! Here is room for at least one year's close investigation, involving periodical visits to islands and headlands from Tasmania to Tweed Heads.

The Storm-Petrels, Prions, and Diving-Petrels will afford material for quite a band of workers. We know very little of their breeding-places and habits, excepting in the case of the White-faced Storm-Petrel. On a small rock—one of the Friars, off South Bruny Island—I found one of the Thin-billed Prions breeding nearly 35 years ago. The colony occupied a patch of

sloping rock, thinly overgrown with *Mesembryanthemum*, and in a space of barely a hundred square yards there were several dozens of these birds sitting on eggs or nestlings, the eggs being close to the water's edge, fresh or in progressive stages of incubation the higher the situation, until at the topmost ridge the young birds were almost fully fledged. Such densely-packed colonies may exist on many of the islets and rocks scattered through Bass Strait and along the coasts of the mainland. Numbers of these rocks are inaccessible unless under exceptionally fine weather conditions, and only a man of abundant leisure and means can hope to carry out the necessary prolonged investigations to clear up the existing uncertainty as to whether, and if so, where, these small Petrels that frequent our seas have their breeding-places on our islands.

Only one Albatross is known to breed in the Australian region. Who knows but that the Black-browed, Flat-billed, and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses have some isolated spot where a few dozen pairs annually rear their broods? It is by no means a far-fetched idea. To what extent have the islets of the Recherche and Nuyt's Archipelagoes been exhaustively searched?

These few suggestions as to fields for future endeavour are limited to the sea-birds. Are there no land-birds requiring further study and investigation? Glance over your "Check-list" and count up the species about which we know everything there is to know of their life-histories. Can you honestly exhaust the fingers of both hands in making the count?

In conclusion, let each seeker after truth take one genus, or even one species, and work it out thoroughly. Too many objectives tend to blurred results. Good luck to you all!

A. F. BASSET HULL,  
*Retiring President R.A.O.U.*

#### CHECK-LIST COMMITTEE'S REPORT.

THE convener, Dr. J. A. Leach, presented the report on behalf of the Check-list Committee. This showed that, except for a few cases of incomplete information and disputed status, finality and unanimity had been reached by the committee. Pleasure was expressed that the differences which were expected to be serious proved slight and easily removed. It was decided that the A.O.U. and B.O.U. names for birds found in those countries as well as in Australia be accepted: that in all cases where the evidence is complete the oldest valid name be used; and that in cases of doubt or incomplete evidence the name of the "Official Check-list" be not altered. The committee found that its generic standard approximated closely to that of the "Official Check-list"—indeed, it found the "Check-list" most helpful and its standards in the main satisfactory. Mr. Campbell and Dr. Leach were deputed to investigate the disputed points and to