

— THE —
South Australian Ornithologist.

VOL. I.]

JANUARY, 1914.

[PART I.

History of Ornithology in South Australia.

BY R. CROMPTON.

Before the year 1855, there were a few ornithologists and collectors of birds in this colony. These men knew our birds, studied their habits, noticed strangers, and some of them collected skins. But in that year an Act was passed incorporating the South Australian Institute and Museum. Mr. F. G. Waterhouse, C.M.Z.S., H.M.R.S., F.L.S., was appointed curator. Mr. Waterhouse did much good work in collecting type specimens of birds. Mr. Samuel White was another enthusiast; he found among other birds *Artamus melanops*, and *Malurus callainus* in the interior, and in many ways assisted Mr. John Gould in his book on Australian birds.

In 1861, Mr. Waterhouse accompanied John McDouall Stuart and his party on his memorable exploration trip across the continent, as naturalist, collecting much valuable material. On his return however, space at the old Institute soon became totally inadequate, and the specimens had to be packed away in the cellar where they got into a very bad state.

In 1882, Mr. Waterhouse retired and most of his birds were ordered to be burned by his successor, as they were said to be ruined by insufficient attention. On December 18th, 1884, the Public Library and Museum was opened and Mr. A. H. C. Zietz, F.L.S., C.M.Z.S., who had been appointed preparator about six months previously, enthusiastically set to work to gather together another reference collection. As the cabinets gradually became filled several ornithologists, notably Dr. A. M. Morgan, Captain S. A. White, who follows in his father's

footsteps, Messrs. J. W. Mellor, Edwin Ashby, and M. Symonds Clark began using the growing museum collection, they discussed ornithological matters with Mr. Zietz, and from time to time gave to, and exchanged specimens with him. About the year 1898, Mr. Zietz proposed the formation of a bird club in Adelaide and with this idea in view, spoke to several of his friends. The scheme was cordially supported and a meeting was held to consider the advisability of forming an association. It was at first suggested to form a branch of the Royal Society, but on second consideration this was thought to be inadvisable, as this science was of no interest to most of its members, and to be of any use the members must be trained systematic ornithologists.

The inaugural meeting was held at Dr. A. M. Morgan's residence, 27 Angas Street, Adelaide, on March 17th, 1899. Those present were Dr. Morgan, Messrs. A. H. C. Zietz, J. W. Mellor, F. R. Zietz, E. Ashby, M. S. Clark. Dr. Morgan was voted to the chair. It was resolved that a Society to be called the South Australian Ornithological Association be formed. It was also resolved that Dr. Morgan and Messrs. Zietz and Mellor act as a committee to frame and draft rules for this association.

The meeting was then adjourned till March 27th, when Dr. Morgan was elected the first President and Mr. J. W. Mellor, was elected Hon. Secretary and Treasurer, which office he continued to hold for 14 years with the exception of one year when he occupied the presidential chair.

The following rules were then adopted.

1. That this Association be called the "South Australian Ornithological Association."
2. The objects of this Association shall be the study, and recording of the habits, and economy, and identification and protection of Australian birds.
3. This Association shall be controlled by a Committee, called the Committee of Management, which shall consist of the President, Vice-President, and Secretary of the Association.
4. This Association shall meet on the first Friday of each alternate month.
5. The Committee of Management may arrange other meetings or excursions, due notice of which must be given to the members.

6. The election of officers shall take place at the annual general meeting to be held in March of each year.
*All nominations shall be in the hands of the Secretary at least ten days previous to such meeting, or adjourned meeting.
 7. New members may be proposed and seconded by two members of the Association at any meeting and must be balloted for at the next evening meeting; one black ball in five to exclude.
 8. The entrance fee shall be five shillings and the annual subscription two shillings and sixpence.
*The entrance fee shall be five shillings and the annual subscription fifteen shillings to begin from March, 1914.
 9. A record book shall be kept in charge of the Secretary, to which all members shall at convenient times have access, and in which they may record any ornithological observations of interest they may make.
 10. The business at general meetings shall be the election of officers and new members, the reading of papers, and the exhibition of specimens, and general discussion of ornithological matters.
 11. At general meetings three shall form a quorum, at committee meetings two shall form a quorum.
 12. These rules may not be altered, added to, or rescinded, except on a written motion presented and signed by two members at an evening meeting, and confirmed on the next subsequent evening meeting by a two-thirds majority of those present.
- * Subsequent additions to rules.

Some of the more important work done during the fourteen years' life of the South Australian Ornithological Association may not be without interest.

This Association has since its inception stood:—Firstly, for the protection of our native birds, a most important work, as many of them are insectivorous, making their principal if not their only food of pests, which, if not checked would seriously injure if not ruin our forests and greatly diminish our crops. Others are seed eaters and consume enormous quantities of the seeds of thistles and other weeds, thus preventing their spreading so rapidly. Others again are scavengers, eating dead animals, thereby arresting the spread of disease among our stock. Again others are the enemies of snakes, snails, etc., and lastly

the cormorants feed on the enemies of our fish although fishermen do not all recognize it.

We have watched the close season for our game birds, made suggestions for its improvement, encouraged and assisted the police in prosecutions against offenders taking or destroying these birds while breeding. We have noticed the export of cage birds, which is a large business. It is obvious that were it not for an enthusiastic body of men constantly watching over these matters, it would be very few years before there would be no game birds for our sportsmen and no finches or parrots available for export. This Association has also been a formidable enemy to the plume hunters, men who would shoot the *cyret* on her nest, exterminate our robins, wrens, and bee eaters for the decoration of women's hats, and when they find that public opinion is against them, roused by the work of bird protection associations, would try and dispose of their spoils as artificial.

Secondly the study of our avifauna. Much information has been gained regarding the habits, food, etc., of our birds, which without systematic endeavour would have been impossible, e.g. it was recorded by Mr. J. W. Mellor that under a tree at the Reedbeds, frequented by a pair of the delicate owl *strix delicatula*, were to be found large numbers of the quids ejected by these birds, on examination of which he had found them to contain a great number of sparrow, and mouse heads, also the remains of several rats. In all over 200 of these quids were examined and not one contained the remains of any native bird.

The first work of note the association engaged in was the protection of the birds on our forest reserves. These reserves were really waste land leased for grazing purposes, and no particular care was taken of the timber thereon. Anyone could come along, get a permit from the lessee, who was called caretaker, and for a nominal fee, cut any timber that suited his purpose. The birds were not protected, and as a rule these reserves formed happy hunting grounds for anybody who had a gun.

The forest reserves are now under the control of the conservator of forests, many hundred thousand trees have been planted, timber is cut systematically under the management of a permanent caretaker, and they have all been gazetted bird sanctuaries under The Birds Protection Act of 1900.

Then closely followed the Birds Protection Act of 1900. The members were not only largely instrumental in getting the

comprehensive list of birds put into the first schedule, but had to fight and fight hard for the inclusion of almost every species. The second schedule was still more difficult, quite a number of these birds are apt to damage crops at times when their natural food is scarce and members of Parliament representing country interests, saw only the harm they did, and could only be apprised of the good they do, by a body of ornithologists. Finally the section relating to bird sanctuaries was considered by a certain section of the House to be a copy of the British Game Laws which they hoped would never be introduced into Australia. However, the early members of the Association, much to their credit, got it passed.

At the meeting of this Association on September 11th, 1899, Mr. A. J. Campbell, F.L.S., was present as a visitor. A conference was held with this gentleman regarding the formation of an Australasian Ornithological Union to hold annual meetings in the capitals of the various colonies.

The idea was warmly supported, but the members thought it advisable that the local Associations should still continue their work, thereby keeping up local interest; and that these societies should appoint delegates to attend the inter-colonial congresses. Mr. Campbell thanked the South Australian Association for its suggestion, and congratulated South Australia on having such a society, more especially as it was the first of its kind in Australia.

The following year a representative of this Association went to Melbourne to attend the preliminary meeting, to consider the formation of this proposed inter-colonial union. At this meeting the "Australasian Ornithologists' Union," since rechristened "The Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union," by Royal command, was formed and a committee appointed to draw up rules, to be presented to the various colonies for approval.

At the annual meeting of the R.A.O.U. at Hobart in 1906, Mr. J. W. Mellor and Captain S. A. White advocated the introduction of the lyre bird into Tasmania and the mallee fowl into Kangaroo Island, as they felt that ere long the foxes would have depleted these beautiful birds, nearly if not quite, to extinction. It seemed to them that these birds were admirably suited to these localities; where they would be free from the ravages of this rapidly increasing pest. This suggestion was taken up by the South Australian Association as far as Kangaroo Island is concerned. The introduction of the lyre bird

into Tasmania unfortunately, so far, has been neglected. The first thing to be done was to get the lighthouse reserve at Cape Borda gazetted a bird sanctuary. This was successfully accomplished. (It has since been considerably enlarged). Then the more difficult task of securing the birds, taking them to the spot, and liberating them had to be faced. At the instigation of members several gentlemen willingly gave subscriptions, the society voted most of its surplus funds for the purpose and the Government gave £10. It was ascertained that Mr. Bellchambers of the Humbug Scrub, north-east of Adelaide, had been successful in trapping the mallee fowl during breeding season, a permit was secured to allow him to obtain some, and in the spring of 1910 he was able to trap six birds. These were bought by the Association and forwarded to Mr. Mellor, who kept them at the Reedbeds till the Marine Board was sending a steamer to the lighthouse at Cape Borda with stores, when the President kindly consented to allow them to be taken down free of charge, under the care of Mr. J. W. Mellor and liberated. The lighthouse keepers also interested themselves in the work, and gave every possible assistance. The following year Mr. Mellor heard that some farmers, Messrs. Perry Bros. of the Cleve Ranges, Eyre's Peninsula, had some mallee fowl so tame, that they regularly came to feed with their poultry; he immediately wrote to them asking if he might catch some to be liberated on Kangaroo Island, and joyfully received the reply that he might do so. He accordingly journeyed to the spot and succeeded in netting seven birds. These were brought to Adelaide, housed for a month at his home at the Reedbeds, and safely liberated near Cape Borda by him personally through the courtesy of the President of the Marine Board. It is very difficult to find out how these birds are taking to their new home, but fairly recently their tracks were observed about seven miles from where they were set free. In April 1910, Mr. A. G. Edquist, a member of the Association, and head of the nature study in State schools brought forward a scheme for training the children with a view to make them observant bird lovers. A league was formed called "The Gould League for the Protection of Birds," school clubs were formed (these clubs were optional among the scholars); and the Association gave a silver challenge cup for competition in essays on bird life. The cup to be held by the winning school for the ensuing twelve months. This league is doing incalculable good as the desire to kill birds and rob their nests is gradually becoming eliminated. This movement has already become an important fac-

tor for bird protection and as time goes on will become more so. There are now in the State 346 school clubs, with about 11,000 members.

In conclusion it may be interesting to give a list of the sanctuaries gazetted under the Birds Protection Act of 1900, although it may be incomplete.

These I think are all owing to recommendations from this Association.

All forest reserves, the principal of which are Wirrabara, Kuitpo, Narracoorte, Warunda, etc., Explosives magazine reserve, Dangerous Reef, Page's Islands off Kangaroo Island, Islands in the upper Coorong, Islands in Coffins, Mount Dutton, and Kellidie Bays, Cape Borda reserve, Waterfall Gully, Lake Bonney, Kensington Gardens.
