

Letter from Mr. H. H. Finlayson.

(Hon. Curator of Mammals, South Australian Museum).  
4th October, 1933.

Through the courtesy of the Hon. Secretary and Hon. Editors, space has been afforded me to bring before the readers of this Journal, and bird students generally, the urgent need which exists for building up the collections of indigenous mammals in the State Museum.

I feel that I need scarcely apologise for doing so in such a place, since ornithologists from very early times have made most generous and valuable contributions to the study of beasts, and in Australia particularly, the splendid example of Gould's simultaneous work on both groups is sufficient sanction for making such an appeal. In the whole body of naturalists, ornithologists are field workers par excellence, and their opportunities for observation and collecting are correspondingly rich, and in many cases at least, attention in the field can be extended to mammals, without detriment to their primary interest.

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In explanation for a failure to forward a specimen to the Museum, one frequently hears the remark from the donor-who-might-have-been, that:—

1. He "thought it was too common."
2. He "did not know how to preserve it."
3. He "could not be bothered."

The last will never emanate from an ornithologist, but in allusion to the other two it may be said at once, that no properly preserved and localised specimen of any Australian mammal is without value here, and that effective preservation of all small mammals may be assured by opening the belly with a small cut and covering the specimen literally with methylated spirit in a corked jar. Larger animals should either be sent in alive, or, if that is not possible, should be skinned completely, the skin dry salted, and forwarded promptly *with the skull*. It is necessary to stress that the skull in most cases is of greater importance than the skin, and if it is a question of sacrificing one or the other, the skull should always be kept. More detailed instructions will gladly be supplied to those who may have opportunities, and are willing, to collect larger mammals.

It is not feasible here, nor necessary, to enumerate the species which are most likely to be met with by bird students, but apart from those which are thoroughly well known like the opossum and water-rat, all bats, and all small rat and mouse-like animals should be promptly forwarded for examination.

In conclusion, I would remind readers that the South Australian Museum is a Public Institution, freely extending service to all who seek it, and conversely, depending to a considerable extent for its efficacy as a research centre, upon the cordial and voluntary co-operation of all sections of the public. But ornithologists, by reason of their enthusiasm and rigorous training in observation, are undoubtedly in a position to render especially valuable service in the way I have indicated.

Receipt of specimens will be promptly acknowledged, and the writer will be pleased to correspond with, and, if possible, meet personally, all who may be interested.