



JOHN SUTTON.
Born 25th March, 1866.
Died 22nd November, 1938.

Obituary and Bibliography
of
John Sutton (1866-1938).

John Sutton died at Fullarton, S.A., on November 22, 1938, in his seventy-third year, after a short illness. At the time of his death he was Honorary Curator of Ornithology to the South Australian Museum, having been actively associated with that institution for over fifteen years.

Mr. Sutton was born at Castlemaine, Victoria, on March 25, 1866, and his early years were spent at Bendigo. He was educated at the Castlemaine Grammar School, and eventually entered the National Bank in Victoria, as a junior. As a young man he was stationed at branches of the Bank in the western districts of Victoria, where he spent much of his leisure time in rambles through the bush. These early associations and experiences, especially with birds, left a lasting impression, and Mr. Sutton attributed his choice of the study of birds as a hobby in later life to this fact. At the age of fifty-two Mr. Sutton retired from the Bank, and in 1919 joined the South Australian Ornithological Association. At this time he "knew very little about birds," to quote a favourite expression of his, but during his comparatively short career as an ornithologist, it can be said that he became one of the leading figures in South Australian ornithology, and his knowledge and opinions were valued greatly by all with whom he came into contact.

In 1923, after the death of Mr. F. R. Zietz, Ornithologist at the Museum, the late Dr. A. M. Morgan became Honorary Curator of Ornithology, and Mr. Sutton joined him as Assistant Honorary Curator. During the eleven years they were associated in the ornithological department at the Museum, about 15,000 specimens of birds, both Australian and foreign, were sorted, identified, labelled, and catalogued, and it was due mainly to Mr. Sutton's organising ability and capacity for hard work that this task proceeded smoothly. As a result, any bird specimen can be produced on inquiry immediately, owing to the efficient system devised by Mr. Sutton. Pains-taking and diligent to a degree, he was also a gifted penman, and his labellings and records at the Museum will long remain as a model for others to follow as well as a monument to his thoroughness and zeal.

In the pursuit of his hobby he spared neither time nor energy, and until about two years ago spent at least one whole day every week throughout the year in the field. He also visited the Museum regularly each day in the week in the afternoon right up to a month before he died. His correspondents in all parts of Australia were numerous, and in this State he encouraged many to make reliable records of birds. Like his mentor, Dr. Morgan, he always stressed the necessity of accuracy in observation, and was most intolerant of people who wrote inaccurately on birds or any subject. Particularly was this so with regard to sight records of birds, and, metaphorically speaking, few who made an extravagant claim or statement survived to make another. Nothing was taken for granted, and the high standards set by Dr. Morgan were ably carried on by Mr. Sutton.

In 1922 Mr. Sutton became Honorary Secretary of the South Australian Ornithological Association, a position he held continuously for sixteen years, until he retired in March, 1938. In April, 1927, Mr. Sutton joined the Editorial Committee of the "South Australian Ornithologist," a position he held until his death.

Mr. Sutton was not a private collector of birds, but many specimens obtained by him are now in the Museum collection. Although handicapped by a lack of early scientific training, having been trained for a commercial career, he nevertheless possessed the true "scientific outlook," and his records of the habits, calls, and distribution of native birds are models of accuracy and completeness. Whenever opportunity arose he extended his researches into other parts of the Commonwealth, and several trips were made to Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria, and the habits of the birds observed there were recorded.

Probably his most valuable contribution to the ornithology of this State was a list of "The Birds of South Australia," first published in 1923, a second edition appearing in 1927. Previous to this no complete list of South Australian birds had ever been published, and what at first sight seemed to be a simple task proved to be a most troublesome undertaking, complicated by many errors and inaccuracies perpetrated by early workers.

Mr. Sutton published accounts of birds of the South-East of South Australia, Eyre Peninsula, the Coorong, the River Murray, the Mallee districts, and Kangaroo Island, and was very familiar with all these localities.

Mr. Sutton also paid regular visits to the National Park at Belair from 1919 to 1933, where he became thoroughly familiar with the birds of the Mt. Lofty Ranges. Early in his studies his interest was aroused in the Waders, and in order to become better acquainted with them he visited the tidal flats at the Outer Harbor, near Port Adelaide, once a week for about ten years (1926-1935). During this time several species previously unknown for this locality were recorded, and Mr. Sutton became the recognized authority on the group in this State. His interest in migratory birds also extended to other species and he kept full records of visitations of the Cuckoos, Swifts, Flame Robins, Songlarks, Trillers, and other species. He also had the happy knack of infusing others with his enthusiasm, and encouraged innumerable correspondents in all parts of the State to send him records of migratory or unusual birds for publication in the "South Australian Ornithologist."

Mr. Sutton was also keenly interested in the historical side of South Australian ornithology and discovered many new and interesting facts about such early ornithologists as Gould and F. W. Andrews, as well as interesting information about early attempts to acclimatize European birds in South Australia during last century.

In October, 1934, on the death of Dr. A. M. Morgan, Mr. Sutton succeeded him as Honorary Curator in Ornithology at the South Australian Museum, which position he held until his death. He was a member of several learned Societies, including the Royal Society of South Australia, the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, the Royal Geographical Society (S.A. Branch), the South Australian Ornithological Association, and the Field Naturalists' Section of the Royal Society of South Australia.

Regarded with sincere affection by all whom he knew intimately, his kindly nature was ordinarily hidden behind a dignified and impersonal manner. Nevertheless, the genuine student, however humble, always received every attention, and he spared no pains to help in every way all who asked assistance of him, while he never failed to command the admiration and respect of all with whom he came into contact. Physically a big man he was always an outstanding figure at any gathering in spite of his retiring nature and dislike of the "limelight."

By his death the South Australian Ornithological Association has lost a valued member of twenty years' standing and a tireless worker in the service of ornithology in this State.—H. T. CONDON.

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