

Editorial . . .

THE PURPOSE OF THIS JOURNAL

Is the main purpose of the journal to inform readers or to entertain them? Must it contain so many bird lists? Should it be published more often? The fact that such questions are asked shows that the purpose of the *S.A.O.* is not self-evident.

The objects of the South Australian Ornithological Association in its rules are "to promote the study and conservation of Australian birds" and "to record the results of research in regard to all aspects of bird life." The journal, an organ of the Association, exists to fulfil these objects, its scope being conventionally confined to South Australia and the Northern Territory. It follows that its contents should be written in a way that focuses attention on the contribution made to knowledge, rather than on the writer's personal experiences, or on the entertainment of readers. Most of the material in the journal is about distribution and status, or the related subjects of taxonomy and identification. This bias is not a result of editorial choice, but is no cause for regret either. Amateurs study birds for enjoyment, and distribution is the subject which they tend to enjoy most, and to which they can most easily contribute. Besides, the subject desperately needs studying. To appreciate this statement, try finding out what birds exist in such easily accessible areas as western Eyre Peninsula or even the southern Flinders Ranges; or see how much has been published on anywhere north of Marree. A major purpose of this journal is to remedy such ignorance. So long as this job is being done, it does not matter if the contents are weighted with bird lists, or dominated by relatively few contributors.

Entertainment is a desirable but not vital aim of the journal, and must not conflict with

the main one. Such conflict could easily occur — if for example mediocre material was used to fill up an issue, or if material was presented in a chatty style which obscured its point. It is worth stressing also that the Association has no absolute obligation to provide members with issues of predictable size at regular intervals. Predictability and regularity are only matters of convenience, and the obligation to publish anything at all depends on the availability of suitable material. The real duty of the Association is to encourage more good material to be written. Therefore to propose quarterly publication is to put the cart before the horse. The editor has in past years rarely received more than enough material — and often received less than enough — for six-monthly issues of a worth-while size. Curiously, the amount received has shown no clear tendency to increase since 1968, although membership of the Association has risen by 80 per cent. in this period, and although this editor has tried to stimulate production. Therefore the time when quarterly publication will be feasible is not yet in sight.

The function of providing members regularly with written entertainment is served by the quarterly newsletter. This provides an outlet for all kinds of Association news which should be circulated, but which, if included in the journal, would impair its scientific standing. This natural division of functions between twin publications is made by the counterparts of the *S.A.O.A.* in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, as well as by the *R.A.O.U.* Failure to recognise this division has caused much of the confusion that has existed about the purpose of the journal.