

**OBITUARY: JOAN B. PATON, AM  
1916–2000**

Joan Paton joined a pantheon of esteemed South Australian ornithologists on 28 April 2000—fittingly the day the SAOA launched its Centenary book *Birds, Birders and Birdwatching 1899–1999* (Collier *et al.* 2000) celebrating 100 years of the Association. She had served with distinction for exactly 33 of those years and she contributed an enlightening chapter to the book on the origins of the State Badge, the Piping Shrike.

Those who have gone before her in the past ten years include Mark Bonnin 1991, Shane Parker 1992, Allen Lashmar 1993, Erhard Boehm 1994 and Cecil Rix 1997.

Joan's service to the Association, including Vice-President 1974–79 and President 1979–82, was recognised by her election to Honorary Life Membership in May 1990. She was the Association's first woman President. We had worked very co-operatively together during my term as President and it gave me great satisfaction to see Joan take over the presidency.

Joan Burton Cleland was born in Sydney on 1 September 1916 and came to South Australia around 1920 when her father, the late Sir John Cleland, was appointed Professor of Pathology at the University of Adelaide. Some years later the family (Joan was the youngest of five children) moved to the family home at Dashwood Road, Beaumont, where Joan was to live for the rest of her long and productive life.

While a student at Presbyterian Girls College, now Seymour College, she began attending meetings of the Association with her father who was President on a number of occasions between 1922 and 1945. She helped him with skinning birds and displayed some of her specimens at a meeting in 1932.

In 1934 she began a science degree at the University of Adelaide, graduating B.Sc. in 1937, followed by B.Sc. Honours in Biochemistry in 1939, and M.Sc. in 1947. Her professional career in ornithology began in 1967 when she was appointed part-time tutor in ornithology at the Department of Continuing Education, University of Adelaide and also at the Workers Educational Association (WEA). The University appointment ended in 1983, but Joan continued with her WEA commitment and passion until

1999. During this period she also taught biochemistry, biology and nutrition.

During her long WEA career Joan taught and inspired literally hundreds of birdwatchers, many of whom subsequently became members of the Association. Some have written fond recollections of their experiences with Joan's classes in the Centenary history (Collier *et al.* 2000, e.g. Andrew Black and Margaret Cameron).

Besides teaching the WEA courses Joan led many expeditions in South Australia and interstate. For example, a glance through back-copies of the SAOA Newsletter shows that in 1996 in her 80th year she taught an 'Introduction to Bird Studies' in April and October, 'More Bird Studies—Hawks and Their Allies' in February, led a Bird Study weekend to Meningie in April, a Bird Study tour to Eyre Peninsula and the Head of Bight in August–September, and a Birds and Bird Studies weekend at Port Broughton in November. In 1998 she taught two courses on 'Little Brown Birds' in addition to the usual beginner's courses, and led an expedition to Lawn Hill National Park in outback Queensland.

Another significant WEA commitment was as



ornithologist at the annual Spring Schools held at country locations from 1967 until 1981, the first at Angorichina in the Flinders Ranges.

Joan joined the SAOA on 26 April 1967 and soon became involved in Association affairs, particularly in conservation issues. She attended the monthly SAOA meetings very regularly and could always be relied on to provide informed comment on bird behaviour, feeding habits, distribution and identification.

She contributed extensively to ornithological literature with a total of 65 papers and articles. The first, published in the *South Australian Ornithologist* in 1939 (Cleland 1939), was an account of birds seen on the Fleurieu Peninsula. Her last article in the *SAO* appears in this edition and discusses lek behaviour in the Musk Duck *Biziura lobata* (Paton 2000). Between these two dates she wrote another 25 papers in the *SAO* including a major report on the birds of the Gawler Ranges (Paton 1975).

Many of her articles were brief notes dealing with specific records of species' distribution, but one major collaborative paper dealt with the distribution of Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos*, Pacific Black Ducks *A. superciliosa* and their hybrids in 1987 in South Australia (Paton *et al.* 1992), a subject in which she maintained an interest, and which is being continued by her daughter-in-law, Penny Paton.

She was indomitable. After she was seriously injured in a car accident in Western Australia some 12 years ago in which her legs and an arm were broken, several members of the SAOA history sub-committee, including me, began discussing contingency plans should Joan be unable to continue her WEA classes. We need not have bothered—before the year was out Joan made a full recovery and resumed her career. While in hospital, she even set up an office in her room and continued working. In 1989 the history sub-committee was appointed to start collecting material for the proposed Centenary history of ornithology in South Australia. Joan joined the committee and began extracting items of interest from the *South Australian Ornithologist*. She also learned the skills of oral history interviewing and did one or two lengthy interviews for the history project. Sadly these were not used as the original format for the history was abandoned.

Joan was the recipient of many awards. Among others she was honoured with Member-

ship of the Order of Australia in 1996 for services to ornithology, education and the environment, honorary life membership of both the SAOA and the Adelaide Ornithologists Club, Fellow of the Royal Society of South Australia and Honorary Research Assistant South Australian Museum. She was also the Regional Representative of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union during 1973–77 and a Councillor during 1982–87. In 1994 she received the Nature Conservation Award from the Field Naturalists Society of South Australia.

Among her many community service contributions were membership of the National Parks Commission 1968–71, National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Committee 1973–78, Cleland Conservation Park Trust 1978–80, Mt Lofty Ranges Consultative Committee 1982–87, Sturt Consultative Committee 1987–2000, Burnside Environment Advisory Committee 1994–2000, and Chair, Fauna Management Co-ordinating Committee for the Department of Environment and Heritage 1980–98.

Joan was ahead of her times, successfully combining a career with the demands of motherhood, homemaking, community service and recreation.

However it was as a teacher that Joan will be long remembered by those whom she taught, enthused, encouraged and inspired. She was endlessly patient, tolerant, down to earth and even-handed—a wonderful example to all.

## REFERENCES

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Much of the information above was taken from the eulogy prepared by the Paton family and read by Ross Reid at Joan's funeral service.

BILL MATHESON