

OBITUARY: JOHN MAXWELL TRURAN
1940–2001

John was born and educated in Adelaide, and attended the University of Adelaide where he gained his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1961. He went to England at the end of 1964 and returned to Australia in 1969, teaching in Melbourne and in Tasmania. He worked mainly as a teacher of mathematics, but was actively involved in outdoor education, and ran the field studies electives at Melbourne Grammar School. He returned to Adelaide in 1976, and in December 1981 married Kath, a mathematics teacher from Melbourne. In 1986 he gained his Master's degree in Education from the University of Adelaide.

John developed his love of birding and the bush in his early years of teaching. He joined the SAOA in early 1963, after hearing about it from a university friend who worked with Dr Oliver Fuller (one of the Association's longest-standing members). John quickly became involved in the meetings, excursions and campouts, and learnt much about birding from the many helpful and friendly members. He remarked, 'The real attraction of the club was the people.'

After returning from England, John joined the RAOU in 1969. Perhaps his most significant contribution to the RAOU was as a member of the small sub-committee that drew up plans for the first Atlas of Australian Birds. He actively contributed bird observations to that atlas, and organised several atlassing excursions, including the June 1979 campout to Ketchowla Station in the Lower North of South Australia that was my introduction to the atlas. He also hosted atlas social days and write-ins at his home, the latter for transcribing thousands of bird observations onto atlas forms. One atlas trip led to the publication of a northern record of a Rose Robin (Truran, Mart and Bransbury 1980).

While overseas and interstate John continued his SAOA membership, and during visits to Adelaide frequently used the Association's library, then housed in the temporary lecture room behind the South Australian Museum. On returning to Adelaide John resumed activities with the Association, providing diverse contributions to South Australian ornithology. John

and Kath hosted many evenings at their home when a band of us collated and stapled the Association's newsletter. For a few years he and I were members of the library sub-committee when it became necessary to rationalise the library's holdings, largely because of a lack of space. In typical fashion John wrote up our findings in a competent and detailed report for the management committee. John and Kath made a two-year study of the behaviour and ecology of White-winged Choughs in the Para Wirra area; he intended to publish the results but unfortunately had no time to do so.

Probably John's most outstanding contribution was to the SAOA's centenary book (Truran 2000). His scholarly chapter gives a fascinating account

of the early years of the Association, and is rich in facts and interpretation. He did a huge amount of research for the chapter, even reading up on biological versus phylogenetic species concepts to understand better the thinking of ornithologists a century ago. Drawing on this work, John presented a paper at the RAOU Centenary Congress in November 2001 titled 'Birds in the bush, birds in the pot, and birds in the collections—creative tensions in South Australian ornithology around 1900'. He gave an insightful account of the influence of four founding members of the SAOA on several difficult issues facing ornithologists at the time.

On a more personal note, I will always be grateful for John's support of the Bird Section of the South Australian Museum. In May 2000 the section was threatened with closure, with its collections to be held in storage, inaccessible for research. Following a campaign aided by many people, this proposal was dismissed. John's contribution was particularly valuable as he wrote strong submissions to the relevant decision-

makers, meeting with some of them to discuss the matter further, and he gave positive suggestions for maintaining the Bird Section as well as sound reasons why it shouldn't be closed.

Since 1992 one of John's major life projects was his Ph.D. thesis. This two-volume work was accepted in late 2001 (Truran 2001), and John was to receive his degree from the University of Adelaide on 17 December, with a celebratory party to follow that evening. In a cruel twist of fate he died the day before, following a stroke six days earlier.

Two other great passions stand out in John's life. One was music, through which I first met him in 1979 when we were both singing in the Adelaide University Choral Society, John as a very competent tenor. The



very competent tenor. The other was his determination to see correct information archived appropriately, thus enabling detailed historical information to be gathered in the future. His thoroughness and veracity are reflected in the depth of his chapter in the centenary book. By nature he was forthright and a perfectionist, and therefore at times may have appeared to some as crusty and intolerant. But he was a humorous and convivial soul, and will be remembered with great warmth by many.

REFERENCES

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