

Obituary: Brian Glover

20 March 1927 to 20 August 2008

Biologist, Field Ornithologist, Bird Photographer, Conservationist

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Brian Glover was one of South Australian ornithology's quiet achievers. He grew up in the Adelaide suburb of Kingswood, took his secondary schooling at Unley High, and graduated in science at the University of Adelaide in 1945, at the remarkably young age of 18. Chemistry was a core subject and he was first employed as a chemist at Fauldings in Adelaide, where he met his future wife, Kathleen Ann. She was a staunch partner and support throughout his life. After their marriage in the late 1940s, they first lived with his parents in Kingswood, until they bought a house at the beginning of the 1950s in Kauri Road, Hawthorndene. Brian lived there until his death. Kauri road is in the peppermint gum belt in the Adelaide hills, and small parties of Black-chinned Honeyeaters were seen commonly in the trees there in the early years, along with yellow-rumped forms of the Spotted Pardalote. Records of all were entered assiduously in notebooks that he kept throughout his life.

His interest in ornithology was sparked by finding and watching his first Red-capped Plover's nest at Glanville on the Port Adelaide River in 1947 and by Joseph Hickey's *A Guide to Bird Watching* (Hickey 1943), one of the first manuals to outline procedures for bird watching. The blending of entrancing experience and a methodology for recording it were an irresistible combination for one with his scientific bent. And so he became an ardent and systematic bird watcher – more than the simple twitcher that he often called himself. It was an approach to the study of birds that he kept for the rest of his life, and is reflected in his early papers in *The South Australian Ornithologist* dealing with patterns of bird irruptions in

southeastern Australia in 1951-2 (Glover 1952, 1956a,b). Brian soon left Fauldings for a position as chemist, and later bacteriologist, and biologist at the Glenelg Treatment Works of the S.A. Government's then Engineering and Water Supply Department. It was work that took him regularly to all local reservoirs and even the Murray Mouth, and allowed him to keep regular records of the seasonal comings and goings of bird species on these waters, and their numbers. He also began banding Welcome Swallows at the Glenelg Treatment Works to track their movements, well before the official start of the Australian Bird Banding Scheme in the late 1950s. His bands were all "home-made".

In 1948, Brian joined the South Australian Ornithological Association and immersed himself in what activity there was. In those days, through to the beginning of the 1960s, the Association met on its traditional last Friday of the month at the Royal Society's Rooms on the corner of Kintore Avenue and North Terrace. Attendance was small, often of less than 20 members in the early 1950s; and agendas were long and rather boring, with readings of minutes and listings of library acquisitions, before the more interesting subjects of monthly bird records and the main evening address were reached. Best of all was the conversation among members at the end of the meeting, on the footpath outside, which often lasted for me until the last tram home, towards midnight. Apart from those regular gatherings, there was little formal activity: no newsletter, a desultory journal and few excursions. But those excursions that did happen, mostly to Buckland Park and Chauncey's Line, Brian invariably attended, often with his wife Kath. In

those days, the mallee stretched unbroken from Hartley to Murray Bridge in one direction and to Wellington in another.

That was how I met Brian, after I joined the Association in 1950 as a young student. He was just changing his mode of transport from bicycle to motor-bike, and had taken up bird photography with serious passion, developing and making his own prints. Our first trip together was to photograph a Banded Stilt at its nest that I had found at the West Beach Swamps, on the fan of the Sturt and Torrens Rivers and now beneath Adelaide Airport. The photograph was later used as the cover illustration on part 8 of volume 25 of *The South Australian Ornithologist* in March 1971. General bird listing trips on motorbike soon followed, most frequently to Buckland Park and Pelican Point (Outer Harbour) in summer, Chauncey's Line in spring months and "Bird Watchers' Hut" on Erhard F. Boehm's property at Sutherlands from autumn to early spring. In September 1953 we undertook what was then an epic bicycle trip through the southern Flinders Range as far north as Hawker, camping out at night, eating pre-dried food because of its light weight, finding a pair of Gibberbirds on the Willochra Plain near Quorn and discovering for ourselves the well-known pocket of Chirruping Wedgebills near Stirling North (Glover and Schodde 1954). Almost all the travelling was on dirt road.

About then, Brian bought an FJ Holden, and in it he, me and his wife Kath or other birding colleagues – Frank Chapman, Ron Gibbs and John Merry – travelled further afield, working through the South East and western Victoria on one summer holiday trip in January 1954 (Glover 1954a), and through the central Murray Mallee on another. The road from Murray Bridge through Karoonda and Alawoona to Loxton was unsealed then, and little of the mallee cleared: we recorded flock after flock of Black-eared Miners along the road and innocently rejoiced, without thought to their

future, at finding a "new" identifying field character: lack of a white tail tip. More locally, Wongulla on the mouth of the Marne River, and Waitpinga for Chestnut-rumped Heathwrens, were other destinations; and we continued to visit Erhard Boehm at Sutherlands (Schodde and Glover 1955; Schodde 1956). At Clarendon Ridge, on the road between Happy Valley and Clarendon, we regularly saw Spotted Quail-thrush, and around the dam at the southeast corner of Happy Valley Reservoir itself, Painted Snipe.

For Brian and the rest of us, these were golden years for bird exploration and birding experience. Wader recording was always one of his specialties (Glover 1954b), and Brian and I published the first Grey-tailed Tattler sightings for South Australia in *The Emu* in 1958 (Glover and Schodde 1958). The prejudiced rejection of the observations by H.T. Condon at the South Australian Museum offended Brian (Condon 1958; Glover and Schodde 1959), and he felt vindicated when it became known that Grey-tailed Tattlers migrate regularly to the South Australian gulfs and Murray mouth region in small numbers in most years. Nor was it by accident that he published nothing in *The South Australian Ornithologist* between 1958 and 1963 when Condon finally retired as editor. He saw as his greatest birding achievement, however, the discovery of the Mallee Whipbird on southern Yorke Peninsula in 1965 (Condon 1966), a finding that catalysed subsequent searches and discoveries in similar habitats on Kangaroo Island and the tip of Eyre Peninsula..

The scientist in Brian, and his concern for standards in bird study, soon led him to more serious contributions. Overall, he contributed 33 original papers, notes and bird reports to *The South Australian Ornithologist* between 1949 and 1976, and was one of the few South Australians outside the profession and universities to publish papers in the national journal, *The Emu* (Glover 1954b; Glover and Schodde 1958). He took over editing *The South Australian*

Ornithologist in 1963 and continued until 1970, maintaining the quality set by his predecessor, H.T. Condon, while improving regularity of production. Bird distribution and status remained his focus. He also largely compiled the South Australian Ornithological Association's Annual Bird Reports from 1965 to 1973, and later served as the Bird Record Secretary from 1981 to 1984. Such tasks were closer to his heart than other, more prominent and eminent offices: in strange contrast to his unbridled enthusiasm for birding, about which he could talk for hours, he was rather quiet and unassuming in manner. Even so, he was persuaded to serve as Vice-President of the Association in 1955-1956 and as President in 1956-1957. The death of his elder son, Jeff, in a motorbike accident in 1971 led to depression in later years and he withdrew more and more from social ornithological activity thereafter. In his day work, he had been moved to the larger Bolivar Treatment Works, well over an hour's drive across Adelaide from his home, and not surprisingly he retired in early 1982, at the age of 55. His last 25 years were spent largely out of the Association's – and ornithology's – limelight.

Yet to my mind, perhaps Brian's greatest contribution to the South Australian Ornithological Association was one of which he was largely unaware: the example set by the single-minded integrity of his bird recording work in the critical 1950s. In that one decade, the Association underwent a seismic shift in structure and outlook. It moved from the Morgan-Sutton-S.A. White era of collector-naturalists in a small "old boys" club, to a broader, more inclusive body of bird watchers, ecologists and conservationists. During that time there was a hiatus in leadership among the mature members of the Association. The reclusive H.T. Condon had drawn back, and what concern he still had for the Association was overshadowed by the virulent antipathy between himself and Dr. Alan H. Lendon, another eminent figure and expert in Australian parrots. At one committee that I attended in

1956, Lendon spent the entire time goading Condon to take a more active role in the running of the Association and to do more about publishing its journal – and this, as was apparent to all, had the very opposite effect. In the general hiatus, avicultural interests that supported the live bird trade began to infiltrate the Association. Brian and I got wind of this when, in 1955, the Association rejected a Glover-Schodde-sponsored move to push for the adding of a Rare Fauna schedule to The Animals and Birds Protection Act 1919-1938 of South Australia. Vested interests were at work. The issue was revived again in March 1959, with the ultimate result that the Association approved the proposal. The avicultural influence evaporated in the early 1980s.

Throughout this difficult period, which included his presidency, Brian, even though reluctant in confrontation and a peacemaker, held true to field ornithology and conservation. He was, in effect, an anchor legitimising the Association's standing in serious bird study and conservation, which in turn helped to lay the foundations for its future direction and development. On 28 April 1972, he was deservedly elected an Honorary Member of the Association. He is survived by his wife, son John and his daughter Julie.

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Brian Glover

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