

## Historical Series No. 84

### Dr Alexander Matheson (Mat) Morgan (1867-1934).

#### Part 4 by Penny Paton

Like so many of the early South Australian ornithologists, Morgan was an active conservationist. As we saw earlier in this piece, he decried the senseless shooting of seals on Althorpe Island, and he conducted inspections of the island sanctuaries in the Coorong with other SAOA members (Sutton 1933). He acted as an expert witness in a court case in 1901, when a man was charged with having sold two sandpipers, contrary to the *Bird Protection Act 1900* (Reid 1974). Morgan's identification of the birds, claimed to be snipe by the defendant's counsel and backed by the acting curator of the museum, as sandpipers protected under the Act, carried the day. Morgan also contributed articles on bird life and protection to a special section of the Education Gazette centred on Bird and Tree Day, to help foster interest in bird conservation amongst school children (Reid 1974).

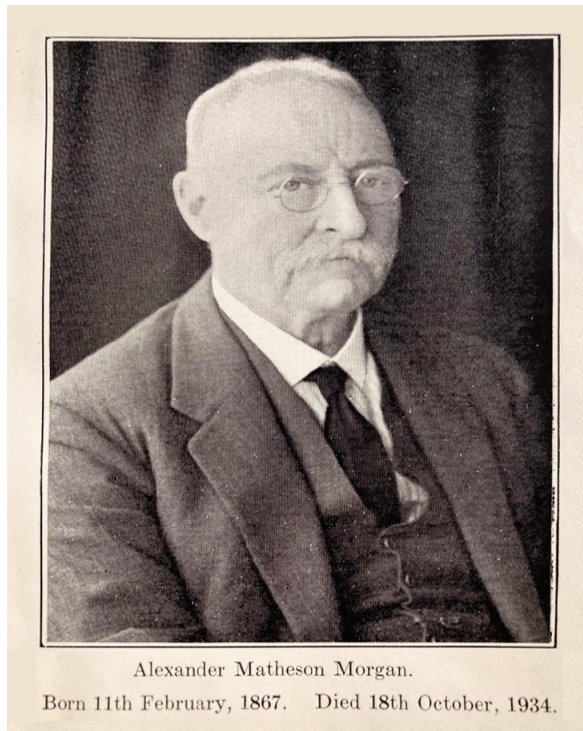
Whittell (1954) states that Morgan was a member of the Flora and Fauna Board (*viz.*) of South Australia. The Fauna and Flora Board of South Australia (FFBSA) was set up to administer the newly formed Flinders Chase reserve in 1919. An obituary in the Sydney Morning Herald corroborates that he was appointed to the FFBSA as Professor Wood Jones' successor (www 4). Wood Jones left Adelaide in about 1926 or 1927 so it is likely that Morgan succeeded him about then. Morgan did make several trips to Kangaroo Island (KI) and the paper he co-authored in *Emu* mentioned that bones of the extinct KI Emu were collected by the FFBSA at Kelly Hill Caves in 1926 (Morgan and Sutton 1928). This is further elaborated on in the pages of the *South Australian Ornithologist* (SAO) (Anon 1926), in which John Sutton recounted that bones of the extinct KI Emu had been found at Kelly Hill caves on a visit from 21-23 May 1926 by Professor Wood Jones, Dr Morgan, Mr Eldridge and Mr Burgess.

As described in Part 2, Morgan was a serious egg collector, starting as a child when attending Geelong Grammar School between 1880 and 1885 (Mason and Pfitzner 2020). He donated his extensive egg collection to the SA Museum in 1931 and 1934, but other clutches collected by Morgan came to SAMA via the Parsons and McGilp collections. Mason and Pfitzner (2020) were able to document 514 egg clutches collected by Morgan between 1880 and 1932, of which 502 are in SAMA.

Morgan was also instrumental in finding South Australian contributors for G. M. Mathews for his monumental publication on Australian birds. Morgan stayed with Mathews during his residence in England in 1908; we know this because Mathews wrote to S. A. White in April 1908 stating that Dr Morgan had suggested that White might help him by contributing notes to his *Birds of*

*Australia* (Howard 2017). In fact, South Australian ornithologists were major contributors to the 12 volume *magnum opus*, with White, Morgan, Mellor, Cleland and others sending many notes on bird distribution and habits to Mathews. Morgan also supplied A. J. North with many bird notes of his field experiences (Mason and Pfitzner 2020).

We have already noted that Morgan was integral to the success of the SAOA and, to a lesser extent, the RAOU, but he was also a corresponding fellow of the American Ornithologists Union (Mason and Pfitzner 2020). A little-known fact is that Morgan was interested in anthropology – he was a founding member of the Anthropological Society of South Australia and donated his collection of weapons and stone implements to SAMA (Mason and Pfitzner 2020).



**Figure 8.** Photo of A. M. Morgan with his Obituary in the *South Australian Ornithologist*, Volume 13 (1935).

As well as his ornithological prowess, Morgan was an esteemed medical practitioner. He served as President of the Ophthalmic section of the British Medical Association, and was a member of the American College of Surgeons and a founding member of the Australian College of Surgeons (www 4) and President of the South Australian branch of the Australian Medical Association 1908-09.

On rereading a Historical Series on Walter Cain (Bradley 2004), I came across a reference to Dr Morgan having suffered a heart attack on 1 March 1933. This explains the references to Morgan's non-appearance at the March 1933 AGM of the SAOA and expressions of sympathy on his illness at that time (Anon 1933b). After this heart attack, his ornithological endeavours were curtailed and he died the following year, on 18 October.

As always, I am indebted to Philippa Horton for casting her eye over earlier drafts of this piece and for providing information on Morgan specimens in SAMA, but all errors and omissions are mine alone.



**Figure 9.** An early photo of Laura (1886), where Morgan lived from 1893 to 1897 (SLSA SRG /14/12).

## References

*The author apologises that there are errors in the references – this has occurred due to the large number of references and the publication of four parts over a 12-month period.*

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www 3:

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**Figure 10.** Figure 10. Mail truck on the Birdsville Track stopped at Clifton Hills letter box, 1930. Morgan made an epic trip to Clifton Hills Station with the lessee in the winter of 1930 (SLSA B 69530/84).

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