

# SAOA Historical Series No.12

## Walter Cain (Cont)

In continuing with the correspondence between John Sutton (Secretary of the SAOA from 1922-1938) and Walter Cain, we begin with Letter 35 and the start of a new year.

### Letter 35 – 9 January 1934 – from JS (John Sutton) to WC (Walter Cain)

JS tells Walter that the remains of a Quail thrush sent to Walter by a Mr Barber have been identified by Dr Morgan and Mr McGilp as a Chestnut Quail Thrush. JS apologises for being behind with his correspondence, again, due to preparation of the next "S.A.O. part 5" (*South Australian Ornithologist* magazine).

John Sutton informs Walter that he has contacted a Mr H. Collins for a list of Nullarbor birds (a request of Walter's) and that this gentleman will be able to give Walter "first class particulars".

Regarding the eggs of the Winking Owl (*Barking Owl*) and Boobook, JS tells Walter that even though both Owls are in his area, they are difficult to distinguish as their eggs are very similar in size, shape and colouration.

JS mentions that they consider the "wild cats epidemic" as serious and that he "used to doubt all the tales about cats in the Far North & C.A. (*Central Australia*) at one time; but I don't do so now". He then mentions that during the travels of a Mr Finlayson, this gentleman met a tribe in the interior that had a native name for the cat. Mr Finlayson said it was "the only tribe he has met in his travels having a native word for it. This, they say, shows it (*the cat*) was most likely there before the natives came in contact with whites. All the other tribes call it something like 'pussy'".

JS informs Walter that the type of Rosella normally found up Walter's way is the "Yellow Rosella, *Platycercus flaveolus*" and that the birds get more yellow the further north you find them.

JS concludes his letter with information for Walter on collecting eggs in sanctuaries (see Letter 34, SAOA Historical Series No. 11) and assures him that according to the schedule of the Act, the island in Venus Bay is not a sanctuary. He tells Walter that he met a Mr Bruce, Chief Inspector of Fisheries & Game, about a permit for Walter to collect in sanctuaries, but, unfortunately, Mr Bruce was not "in a favourable mood" to grant permits. JS said that he would approach the matter at a later date after discussing with Mr McGilp the best course of action to pursue.

### Letter 36 – 18 January 1934 – from WC to JS

Walter thanks JS for clearing up the identification of the Quail Thrush and complains that the Cayley illustration of the same is of poor quality. He and Mr Pearce concur with the identification and colour details of the "Northern Rosella (*Yellow Rosella*) as it is known locally"; and remarks on the location of this species in their area. Walter also offers to procure skins of these Rosellas for JS should the museum require them.

Walter then tells JS that he is still "mindful of the promise of two years standing to get a skin of the mythical Hawk" for JS, and hopes, one day, to be able to get one as it "would be a fine thing to put another species on the RAOU list".

He then describes the location particulars of the 1/3 set of "*Malurius Callaenses*" [*Malurus callainus* – Splendid Wren] that he recently collected after a big rain in early December.

He mentions that Chris (*Walter's son, Chris Cain*) visited with the family for a fortnight before going back to the station and apologises to JS for not being able to get to the city over the Christmas holidays.

Walter admits relief to knowing that the eggs he took at Venus Bay were not from a sanctuary and says that his collection is still growing "When we scoop in what sets are on promise we should have 270 species".

Walter's final comments relate to: having a King Penguin 1/1 set with no official number and he queries why this is so; the weather being very hot all week with a top temperature of 112°F; and Yadlamalka swamp not filling with December rain, while Lake Salmon was OK but the creek at Kallioota was "still uncrossable to cars".

### Letter 37 – 20 February 1934 – from JS to WC

JS apologises to Walter for the delay in replying to his last letter and puts it

"down to the weather . . . and to delay in securing some persons personally with regard to some of your queries".

JS requests specimens of the Rosellas in Walters' district and tells Walter that the museum collection "is progressing splendidly".

He answers Walter's query regarding the King Penguin by saying that it is treated as "Accidental" in Australia so is marked with an \* and not a number".

JS tells Walter that he saw the Chief Inspector again, but, because the Chief Inspector has other applications before him for permits, is still unfavourable to issuing one for Walter. JS recommends biding their time on the issue for the moment. He says that he is enclosing information on the Act and Schedules for the collecting and keeping of protected birds and notes

that the fee charged for the permit varies "in accordance with the value (or rarity) of the species". I am relating the next part of the letter verbatim as it illustrates the issue of capture and retention of protected species of birds during this period of time. JS writes:

"Re: Mr Pearce's questions;

What is the position in regard to Scarlets or other protected birds taken by the Blacks and coming into his (*Mr Pearce*) possession?

Answer It seems to me that the Blacks can only take birds for food. If they sold or even gave the birds away they could be prosecuted.

Is a permit required in respect of Scarlets bred in captivity?

Answer There is nothing in the Act on this point. I don't consider it would be necessary.

How does he (*Chief Inspector*) stand in respect to the two pairs of Princess

Alexandras taken at Abminga?

Answer The person taking the birds would require a permit. I may add that the Chief Inspector in conversation told me he had heard about those parrots at Abminga.

These answers are my own deductions "as a bush lawyer", as I have mentioned no names in any of my enquiries. The danger after all to any person keeping and capturing a protected bird lies in the fact of being put away by a 'friend (?)' or 'an enemy' and the country of Australia is 'lousy' with such individuals."

JS then ends the letter by telling Walter that he would be pleased to send him an application form for such a permit and offers to clear up any further points that may arise. With this letter of correspondence, there is included a copy of JS' handwritten information on the Act (#1365) and pertinent Sections, thereof.

#### Letter 38 – 23 March 1934 – from WC to JS

Walter tells JS that both he and Mr Pearce are thankful for the useful information that JS has sent re "Aviary Birds' The 'Protected Birds' & 'Sanctuaries'". He tells JS that "as I view the position", there doesn't seem to be much difference in liability between taking and keeping a Red Rumped Parrot or a Scarlet-chested except for "Mr Bruce's dept come in for 'A Chop' from the latter whilst it would get nothing from the former".

Walter is sorry to hear that Mr McGilp was "laid up" and asks JS to thank Mr McGilp for identifying a "1/2 set Chris took as *Culam anthesis Issabillanus*" [this should read *Calamanthus* and is the old name for *C. campestris* – Rufous Fieldwren] remarking that it is "another good set for the Cabinet". He then thanks JS again for his direction and kind interest in their exploits. He says that "whenever I get a bit of the Blues I take your 'File' & read it over", and then promises to secure some Rosella skins for JS during the coming winter or nesting season.

Walter asks JS if he can provide him with the difference in identification between the Whistling and Little Eagles and explains what he has seen in the field regarding the 2 species of birds.

He then requests that JS send the *Ornithologist* addressed to Chris Cain at Walter's postal address so that he can pass it on to Chris after he (Walter) has read it. According to postal regulations at this time, Walter is not able to alter names on envelopes to redirect mail so this creates a problem in getting the magazine out to Chris.

Walter mentions reading of the "Blackwood bush fire" and says the "sympathy of all bird men will go out to Mr Ashby in the loss of his fine Home".

He then recommends that JS not hurry in reply to his letters as "any old time will do . . . I know what a lot of clerical work you have to do & it must get a bit monotonous at times."

From his letter, it appears that Walter has had a difficult summer as he concludes by saying that he had a "pretty rough spin here in the heat wave" and that he would like to go up to Lake Salmon at Easter but "my wife is not too good just now".

#### Letter 39 – 11 April 1934 – from JS to WC

This is an unusually short letter from John Sutton to Walter. JS encloses the descriptive information Walter requested on Little versus Whistling Eagles and adds some of his own observations on the subject.

JS tells Walter that the Glossy Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*) is only found on Kangaroo Island but the Gang-gang Cockatoo (*Callocephalon fimbriatum*) "was about 1850/60 in the Mt Lofty Ranges and in the sixties in the South East but they are not in S.A. now".

He also says that Mr McGilp is recovered and back at work though Walter's mention of it was the first time he had heard that Mr McGilp had taken ill.

#### Letter 40 – 28 April 1934 – from WC to JS

Walter thanks JS for the Eagle information and he notes, "Your sketch of L. Eagle is specialy good".

Walter mentions that he has some five sets of eggs from a Mr Bernard [more likely Barnard – a well-known ornithological family] of Queensland who was written up in that April's edition of the *Ornithologist*.

He also asks how measurements of birds are to be taken, "Length; is the measurement taken 'in repose' or is the bird held suspended (?)".

Walter then says that "Chris has opened the season well since the 80 points of rain" and describes the eggs that Chris has collected. He seems particularly pleased with Chris' haul as he says that conditions are very dry and "the rainfall for the year has (I think) not yet exceeded The Inch".

Walter is not happy about the number of Galahs about the place as "from past observations I associate their mustering with droughty conditions".

He then tells JS that Chris has made the acquaintance of the Birdsville mail driver who has promised Chris to get "the Innamincka Blacks to score him a set of BB Buzzards". Walter says he has sent an extra pound of tobacco for Chris to give the driver and the "Blk Brothers" and declares they shall have an extra corroborree if they score a set of "H Melanosterna". Apparently, the driver also knows about the Channel Billed Cuckoo in that country, telling Chris that there is "No hope" of securing any of these eggs until the "River comes down in flood again". The Cain collection now numbers 258 with 20 sets received from R. H. Archer. Walter credits Mr Archer with contributing nearly a third of the collection they now call the "Flinders Collection". He heaps praise on Mr Archer by calling him a good chap who "has ladled out generosity to us with the hands & a shovel". He also tells JS not to be "backward in coming forward" should he require a collector's box.

Walter asks JS if the Australian oologists have an association as he hasn't heard of one and would like to join if there is one. He concludes the letter with some curious comments about the "Wedgebill" – saying that they have been observed at Farina "in company with WB Babbler" and mentions that Chris observed the Wedgies crest going up whenever a mob of Babblers took up residence in the same tree. Before closing, he asks JS why the word "Crested" was deleted from the Wedgebill nomenclature but not taken from the Bellbird.

#### Letter 41 – 21 May 1934 – from CC to JS

This letter is from Chris Cain with a return address of Witchelina Station via Farina. In it, Chris tells John Sutton that he is enclosing some bird observations with a promise to forward more at a later date.

Chris confirms the dry status of the country, the poor rains, and subsequently little bird life.

He thanks JS for the *Ornithologist* and several other booklets that JS had forwarded to Chris for reference and sends his regards to Dr Morgan.

#### Letter 42 – 23 May 1934 – from JS to WC

JS tells Walter that his delay in response was due to the latest issue of the SAO (S.A. *Ornithologist*). He comments on the inclusion of Mr McGilp's article about Eagles and Hawks and the identification points between the Little Eagle and Whistling Eagle being so similar, especially underwing.

JS then describes to Walter how to accurately measure a bird, "the easiest way is to hold the body fast and stretch one wing making a mark on the paper on the table, then do the other wing similarly". He laments that he was "dragged up on feet and inches" and has difficulty visualising metric measures.

He then congratulates Walter and Chris on their collection and suggests a few clutches of "the Desert Chat (*Ashbyia lovensis*)" would be great for

exchanging if Chris could get some. He warns, however, of the difficulty in distinguishing their eggs from those of the Orange Chat and the Groundlark.

On the question of oological associations, JS tells Walter that there isn't one "on account of the opposition to collection by ornithological and oological 'wowers'". He suggests that oologists "prefer to be like Brother Rabbit – 'lie low and say nuffin'".

JS thanks Walter for the offer of a box but instead asks for a wooden inkstand – it will be the same one that we heard about in the précis of Walter's background provided by Mrs Prescott at the beginning of Historical Series No. 11. JS describes the type of stand preferred "so as not to be knocked over easily". He tells Walter that he uses different inks to draw maps of bird areas "but I am continually knocking a pot or so over". He encloses a rough design of the requested inkstand with the letter sent to Walter but from the copy of this letter that I am using, no drawing accompanies it.

JS tells Walter that the talk in Adelaide is "nothing but the want of rain and now that the restrictions are on the amateur gardeners are feeling the pinch". He notes that the weather is actually normal for May but very little rain fell over the past winter and realises that conditions must be much harsher where Walter resides.

#### Letter 43 – 8 June 1934 – from WC to JS

Walter thanks JS for his previous letter and says he has the inkstand in hand and hopes to complete it in time for Mr McGilp when he (*McGilp*) comes up for the "Race Week". He mentions that he is looking forward to showing the Flinders collection to Mr McGilp and feels "sure he will give our humble oological activities 'a cheer'".

Walter agrees with John Sutton's observations on the difficulty in identifying the Eagles and laments that the only "positive means of identity is the Gun – I don't like to use it", he says.

He is pleased with the method of measuring birds that JS has provided and looks forward to the next publication of the SAO.

The next part of the letter talks about the bad weather and the lack of the usual water birds. He says that "Things at Witchelina are serious & Mr Gorley must be having an anxious time".

Walter tells JS that he will be "pigeon holing" all of the drawers in the Cabinet as he didn't like how the eggs rolled around in Mr McGilp's Cabinet at the museum. He says, "Eggs are brittle & a minimum of movement should I think be a feature of a Well Ordered Cabinet".

Walter feels that he is letting Mr McGilp off lightly by "only" requesting a clutch of Western Bower Bird eggs when Mr McGilp goes to the Musgrave ranges. The next part of the letter is dated the following day 09 June 1934 and Walter tells JS that he received a

Currawong skin from a Mr Veitch that he is sending to JS. He then asks JS to help him identify Currawong eggs so that he can pass on the information to Mr Veitch. There is further discussion of other bird eggs being exchanged amongst the oologists and Walter says that Mr Veitch told him "seasonal conditions in W.A. are splendid". There is also discussion about an Oyster Catcher set that was procured and the differences between the Sooty and Pied Oyster Catchers. Walter is anxious to preserve their oological reputation in his district and tells JS that with Mr Veitch, he has "emphasised the importance of Identity pointing out that our reputation is at stake in exchanging with 'The Advanced Collectors' who form our clientele".

He asks John Sutton's opinion about the rarity of the "(S?) T. Bill" and its location on the Nullarbor before closing his letter with the usual polite ending of "Kind Regards" and "Yours Faithfully".

#### Letter 44 – 23 June 1934 – from JS to WC

JS sends Walter an article by a Mr Ashby on Currawongs with particulars about identifying the different species. The skin that Walter forwarded (Letter 43) is identified by JS as a Brown Currawong with confirmation by Dr Morgan and Mr F. E. Parsons. JS also confirms that eggs of that species are scarce in the collections.

He tells Walter that he agrees to reconfigure the egg boxes so that the eggs won't roll around and did nothing about it previously because "as 'true-blue' oologists had to do with them I said nothing and thought it must be the proper way".

JS tells Walter about the Songlark he has heard at Outer Harbour and encloses in a postscript his opinion on the commonality of "*Acanthiza morgani*". "Our birds are imperfectly known and as we consider it a rare species from the rarity of the observations... a man who stayed some time in a district may find it common".

#### Letter 45 – 23 June 1934 – from JS to CC

JS replies to Chris' letter (Letter 41) acknowledging receipt of Chris' bird observations (JS notes on his copy of this letter that they are from Chris' time at Myrtle Springs Station, not his current location of Witchelina). He alerts Chris to the fact that his bird list won't be published in the SAO in the near future due to the article on Eagles and Hawks by Mr McGilp which "covers some 60 of our pages and has thus to be divided".

JS asks Chris for additional information regarding his comment that the White-browed Wood Swallow is exceedingly common. In particular, JS asks if "the species is a resident all the year?". His reason for asking centres around the White-browed Wood Swallow being a migrant bird in Adelaide "or rather a nomad: largely in company with the Masked

Woodswallow." He closes the letter by thanking Chris again for the bird list.

#### Letter 46 – 8 July 1934 – from WC to JS

Walter thanks JS for his letter of 23 June and mentions his surprise at the identifying of the Currawong as a Brown Currawong. According to his friend, Jim Veitch, there are "plenty of 'them' down there" and he has high hopes of getting a few sets of eggs. He asks JS to post the skin back to Mr Veitch at Port Lincoln so that Mr Veitch can retain it as a reference.

Walter then relates with dismay his missed opportunity of catching up with Mr McGilp in Port Augusta. Rather cheekily, he tells JS that he "failed to locate him (.) in fact at the 'Pub' they said he hadn't been there to tea . . . of course you don't take Local Folk too serious . . . Race Week & some of them don't know if they are Coming or Going". Walter says that Mr McGilp left 3 wood specimens with the Butcher to forward to Walter and presumes they are from Mr McGilp's trip to the Musgraves.

Walter has completed the inkstand saying it was "all ready Packed for J.N. (McGilp) to lift & it will now have to await a 'favourable opportunity'". He also has a batch of egg boxes "for the 'Elusive' visitor". He sounds quite despondent over missing Mr McGilp as he continues; "I did so badly want Mr McGilp to have a 'Good Look' over the Collection".

Walter thanks JS for sending a publication by Mr Ashby on the "Crow Shrikes" and says that the dry conditions of the last 6 months have never been "so bad as they are". Apparently, there has been a little rain but he would really like "a Good rain".

He then tells JS that he saw a "mob of 20 Elegants this side of Depot Creek". He relates additional bird sightings made over the last few weeks and those birds that haven't turned up, yet. He mentions that he has some "chaps at Forrest & Rawlinna on the look out for Nullarbor Q.T. (*Quail Thrush*) . . . the permanent way men say they haven't seen the birds there for some years".

Walter describes the current crop of parrot breeding in his aviary and tells JS that he hasn't heard from Chris for several weeks as "things were very critical at Witchelina . . . they have lost a lot of sheep & most of the stock is in very low condition".

With regard to modifying the egg boxes by pigeon holing, Walter says:

I have pigeon holed five of the eight Cabinet drawers & the eggs look well – everything in proper place – the pigeon holing is somewhat perplexing when you legislate for Sections – for instance in the Honeyeaters I prepared . . . two or three egg clutches & then I came across a 'Stripey' with a set of four.

He concludes this letter by stating that he is "satisfied the extra work (*with the cabinet*) is warranted in this direction".

**Letter 48 – 5 August 1934 – from JS to WC**

In this rather short letter of John Sutton's, he thanks Walter for the received inkstand and requests information as to the types of wood he used to create it. He tells Walter that he is sending him a supply of the SAO in return.

JS tells Walter that some of the spring and summer birds have begun to appear in Adelaide but the only nests seen so far are those of the "White fronted Chat and Yellow-winged Honeyeater". He then mentions that he "noticed a White-backed Magpie last week diving at two little boys". Oh, the perils of nesting season.

**Letter 49 – 9 August 1934 – from WC to JS**

In this even shorter letter, Walter tells JS that he is sending along a Hawk skin for identification given to him by Mr Pearce and presumes it was taken at South Gap. Walter thinks the bird may be a "Sq Tailed Kite" but because Mr Pearce skinned it, he thinks it may be "spoilt as regards 'A Specimen'".

In a postscript, Walter thanks JS for the copies of the SAO and says that he is "specially pleased with them".

**Letter 50 – no date – from WC to JS**

Walter thanks JS for his previous two letters and tells JS that the woods in the inkstand are as follows:

Outer edging *Castanospermum Australe* (Moreton Bay Chestnut);

*Fusanus Acummatus* (Quandong); *Cedrales Australis* (Red Cedar); *Diospypos* (don't know the species) = Ebony – comes from Darwin and it is generally I think unknown that this tree grows in Australia.

He mentions that he has a collection of over 160 specimens of Australian trees and that "Mr McGilp's trip to the Ranges added another 3".

Walter again thanks JS for the issues of the SAO and says that the "last issue is a fine publication – by far the best I've read so far". He then discusses the particulars of the Hawk and Eagle article by Mr McGilp and his own observations on the subject matter.

Walter mentions that Mr Veitch went to Alice Springs and took along one of Walter's egg boxes but only managed to procure Red Wattle bird eggs. He tells JS that Mr Pearce is on holiday but he expects him to have something of interest when he returns.

He then relates that none of the usual winter birds have put in an appearance due to the bad local conditions but that he has two egg boxes in the hands of people on the Nullarbor "& hope springs eternal for the Q. Thrush of those parts".

Walter laments that:

The Collection is assuming large proportions 'success too brings its worries' When

I built the Cabinet I thought what a Mug I was to build so large a structure & now I find what a Mug I really was that I didn't add another room to the shack to house

the eggs instead of building a Cabinet at all.

He closes the letter by telling JS that Chris says things are very bad at Farina with the sheep "just bags of bones" and that Chris sent him a photo of his stock horse who looked very much in need of "a good feed".

**Letter 51 – 24 August 1934 – from JS to WC**

JS acknowledges receipt of Walter's 3 previous letters and replies to them in a numbered fashion. The first numbered reply discusses the identification particulars of the Little Eagle and that JS he had the assistance of Mr H. J. Condon [probably H.T. Condon] in drawing the details of the Whistling Eagle for Walter. He says he is also very interested in Walter's comments on the egg cabinet and requests 2 more cabinets to be made for bird skins.

The second numbered reply regards the Hawk skin (from Letter 49). JS tells Walter that he had a taxidermist coat the inside of the skin with "arsenical paste" as there were maggots inside. He tells Walter that "the skin is a beautiful one" and that, at first, he thought it might be a Swamp Hawk or Harrier. Dr Morgan and Mr McGilp's opinions centred on it being an immature Spotted Harrier and JS laments that they have not other specimens in the museum with which to compare. He asks Walter to obtain the location and date information from Mr Pearce and, regrettably, indicates that they can't use it as a display skin but will preserve it in "its present condition".

The final numbered reply refers to the exchange of Scarlet-breasted (*Scarlet-chested*) Parrots for breeding purposes (Letter 46 and earlier). JS tells Walter that he has finally contacted a Mr Simon Harvey who would "be pleased to exchange a female for a male".

**Letter 52 – 29 August 1934 – from WC to JS**

Walter thanks JS for his letter and notes the opinion of JS, Dr Morgan and Mr McGilp regarding the Hawk skin. However, "Having regard to the manner of this birds death – I cannot concur in your finding". Walter states that according to his observations of "C. Assimilis", he cannot "by any stretch of imagination place 'Carion Food' to its habitat". In addition, he argues that "In this district there has never been a single case of 'A Spotted H.' dying from poison to our knowledge", and that Mr Pearce "says the Bird under discussion has no link with 'Spotted H' in its manner of flight". Walter then softens the tone of his argument by telling JS that Mr Pearce will try to obtain a further specimen. He then admits to being glad that he has forwarded "at least something of interest" to the museum and trusts that "it has not unduly weakened your Shock Absorbers" as JS will need them "intact"

when he and Mr Pearce send them a specimen "Ring Neck".

Walter tells JS that he received a letter from Mr Harvey and that Mr Pearce despatched a bird to him by car that day as rail regulations prohibit the transport of birds by rail from Port Augusta.

He tells JS that he has received Wedge Tailed Eagle eggs from Chris but "both eggs smashed to pulp" and on top of that the Post Office complained that the egg residue damaged other mail. He is puzzled as to why they were sent by post unblown.

Walter lets JS know that he is aware of JS and Mr McGilp going to the "Mallee" in September and requests any specimens of "Eucalypts" classed as "Mallee". He then suggests that "grease or Fat smeared on the end of the specimens some-what counter-acts sharking or splitting of the wood".

Walter relates that the weather conditions are still very bad with little bird life and he still has had no luck from the Nullarbor regarding the Quail Thrush. Apparently, from the enquiries he has made of the men on the railway gangs, there have been no sightings of the specimen, "C. Alisteri" from Forrest to Haigh for over 2 years. From his source, he relates that the spear grass in the countryside around Haigh is "3 ft high with tussocks of enormous size" and should be a veritable paradise for the Quail Thrush.

Walter finishes the letter by wishing JS a successful outing to the Mallee and includes information details from Mr Pearce about the Hawk skin.

Interestingly, in the information from Mr Pearce, it is acknowledged that the Hawk, indeed, was poisoned when it took bites from the carcass of an emu that had been shot, killed and baited for foxes. Mr Pearce came upon the Hawk's body while it was still limp and warm.

Walter apologises to JS for his previous indignation regarding the poisoning of the Hawk and lays the blame on not having spoken to Mr Pearce personally before sending in the skin.

In the margin of the paper on which this information is written, JS has written in pencil that South Gap lies "43 miles N.W. of Port Augusta".

#### Letter 53 – 8 October 1934 – from WC to JS

In this letter, Walter tells JS that he is sending along 2 Hawk skins, one being a Whistling Eagle and the other a Brown Hawk. He says that the Whistling Eagle was taken at Warrikimbo Creek and had a nest with one egg lamenting the conditions for both the birds and their ability to breed. He tells JS of the eggs that he has received from others as well as what he has been able to collect and the nesting conditions of the different species.

Walter tells JS that "Mr Pearce was at South Gap but a 'finish shearing' party was on so bird study was 'off'". Walter concludes this letter with a note in the margin apologising for the uninteresting Hawk skins but says

he received from Forrest "a male specimen Pied Honeyeater".

#### Letter 54 – 21 October 1934 – from JS to WC

JS notifies Walter of his receipt of the letters and skins and says he is "much obliged for the particulars of the Harrier conundrum". JS regrets that Walter had poor luck in the Nullarbor this season but assures him that when conditions are good "you will probably score".

He then describes to Walter his travels of the last month starting at Lake Alexandrina and the Upper Coorong. He describes the birds seen, nesting conditions and the weather as "windy, cold and wet".

JS tells Walter that the bird Walter sent down (Letter 51) was "a trifle smelly but I am pleased to say that the taxidermist was able to make a skin of it". JS has written in pencil in the margin that the skin is that of a Pallid Cuckoo. He also tells Walter that the Eagle and Hawk sent down were also able to be made into "fine specimens".

JS describes his travels to the Mallee. These travels "lasted from 15<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> September inclusive" and included Messrs McGilp, Parsons, L. Chenery and Condon. The weather in the Mallee country was very windy and cold, to the extent that "there was ice in a cup". The party camped in the scrub south of Peebinga for 4 days, then near a house in Victoria that was "11 miles north of Panitya" for 3 days and for the last 6 days boarded at the farmhouse of a Mr Ribbons, located 7 miles north of Panitya. JS describes the country and the birds or nests seen as well as calls unheard. He describes Mr Ribbons as "a wonder at finding nests and walks at a great pace". JS tells Walter "there are thousands upon thousands of acres of virgin scrub in the district".

He asks Walter to contact Chris regarding the White-browed Woodswallow information he earlier requested from him (Letter 45) as Chris' bird list is due to be printed in the June edition of the SAO.

JS then conveys sad news to Walter about the death of Dr Morgan on 19 October. He says that when he last saw him on the 8<sup>th</sup>, he thought Dr Morgan "seemed particularly well" but, apparently, he had a bad turn a few days later. He says that Dr Morgan had been ill since 25 February with heart disease.

Then John Sutton makes a peculiar request of Walter. He asks Walter that when he next has the opportunity, to "kindly weigh a dead snake, old and young". Apparently, Dr Morgan was interested in finding out what weight the "laughing jackass" would be able to lift "to do what has been reported frequently – lift a snake off the ground and fly up some distance and drop it down to kill it!". He alludes to the fact that he and Dr Morgan very much doubted the above actually occurs with an adult snake.

JS concludes the letter by noting that some aviculturists are losing birds other than parrots and inquires after Mr Pearce's breeding parrots.

**Letter 55 – 5 November 1934 – from WC to JS**

Walter writes that he has received John Sutton's letter and thanks him for all of the news. He is very saddened by the loss of Dr Morgan and says "the 'Bulletin' gave a kindly word of his connection with the Museum in last week's 'Personal Items'". Walter also thanks JS for the copy of "Hawks of SA" that JS must have sent to him.

Walter advises JS that Chris wasn't at Myrtle Springs Station long enough to give a definitive answer on the White-Browed Woodswallow question and says "you have to be in a district over a reasonably long period to form an opinion".

He inquires as to whether the Dr Chenery that JS mentions being in the Mallee party was the same doctor that Port Augusta had "some years ago".

Walter tells JS that he has heard that Mr McGilp will be passing through again towards the middle of the month and hopes Mr McGilp will "look over the Flinder's (*collection*)" for him.

He then discusses the probabilities of dead versus live weightings of snakes and suggests that a live snake "thrushing & wriggling its body would intensify its weight probably Treble or more than that". He suggests that some big snakes are seen in his area occasionally but "(of recent years) I think this class of reptile is not nearly so plentiful as it used to be in the ranges".

He mentions receiving back a box of eggs from Rawlinna but that the eggs took an "awful belting about" and only 3 were intact.

Walter tells JS that the Scarlet parrots Mr Pearce is breeding are doing well and then asks for information on Silver Gulls from the West Coast.

He concludes the letter with "Whips of rain here – alas – too late for nesting".

**Letter 56 – 22 November 1934 – from JS to WC**

JS tells Walter that he has received his letter and has since seen Mr McGilp who informed him about his visit with Walter. He tells Walter "the inkstand you were good enough to give me has the place of honour on my desk at home and I take good care that no ink mark stains it".

JS confirms that Dr Chenery was the medico in Port Augusta and is now at Wentworth. JS calls him "a salamander – that is, (he) can work in the sun without a hat on the hottest day". He reports that Dr Chenery is an oologist who, he thinks, only collects what he has taken or seen taken and feels that this is a good way to go for an oologist but understands it somewhat limits the number of species in a collection.

Then, it's back onto the subject of snakes. JS seems to have become a bit determined to clear the air on this issue as he says, "There are too many myths about birds and there are many statements about the weight birds can lift (such as Kookaburra, Gulls and the Hawk tribes) that are absurd and should be exposed".

JS then discusses the egg collection issue and informs Walter of "a specimen remittance box at the Museum" in which an egg was sent to him. He describes it as "a small block of deal wood say 6 inches by 1 square, part of the centre is hollowed out . . . and a movable flap is fixed over the entrance". He says "the egg was packed in wool and came through the post in safety". He mentions that he has kept the box, as it was the first and only one he has seen.

JS congratulates Mr Pearce on his successful breeding of the Scarlet-breasted parrot and tells Walter that he is posting an extra copy of the Hawk book for him to forward to Mr Pearce.

The letter then concludes with details on Silver Gull nesting and the identification features of the same.

**Letter 57 – 9 December 1934 – from WC to JS**

Walter thanks JS for the book for Mr Pearce and then says that a "VOX" has "everything pretty well upside down" regarding bird observations. A further reference to "VOX" is made in the next letter (Letter 58).

Walter relates that Mr Veitch has given up on collecting sea bird eggs as he "nearly came to grief at Venus Bay". He says the incident "put the Puff up him – it would any-one – there is always a danger on that West Coast".

He declares that the egg season closed without anything very interesting and that locally "1934 will 'go down' as the Worst Ever".

Walter mentions that Chris has taken another \_ of Cinnamon Quail Thrush again but is busy stock handling so the egg collecting has gone on the backburner.

He also alerts JS to a possible "Bloomer" regarding some eggs that Mr McGilp saw of Mr Veitch's that were queried but says they will sort it out.

Walter then discusses Mr Pearce's breeding efforts and tells JS that he hopes to get to Bridgewater for the holidays and would like to spend an afternoon with him at the museum. He notes the egg box that JS described in his letter but feels it wouldn't be of much use if it only holds a single egg.

Walter concludes his final letter of the year with some comments on Terns at Venus Bay and wishes JS greetings of the season.

**Letter 58 – 18 December 1934 – from JS to WC**

In this, his final WC letter of the year, JS sympathises with Walter over the poor nesting season and regrets the bad experience of Mr Veitch at Venus Bay. His next comments enlighten us about "VOX":

I saw the report on Mr Pearce's aviaries by VOX. If a newspaper man knows nothing about any subject he is pretty sure to mess his article up and from such incorrect tales rather makes one suspect all newspaper tales.

JS tells Walter of his concern with aviculturists (including Mr Pearce) trying to crossbreed different parrot species, saying:

In nature each species keeps separate except in the cases of ducks, and no duck

'over 7 and under 70' seems safe with the male blue-winged shoveller!!

This letter concludes with JS telling Walter that he would be happy to see him when he comes down during the holidays and then, in pencil, at the bottom of the letter, JS writes, "How did you like Monday (17<sup>th</sup>). It was a roller here". Presumably, it was very hot.

JS closes his letter by reciprocating season's greetings to Walter, Chris and Mr Pearce.

This has been, by far, the greatest number of letters exchanged between these two correspondents for a given year and demonstrates the growing respect and affinity they have for each other. I hope that you, too, are gaining an affinity for our correspondents as there are still several more years to write about (2 more parts) before this story ends.

Until then, I thank the editors for their assistance and the committee for allowing this series of letters to unfold at a gradual pace.

**Sandy Bradley**