

SAOA Historical Series No. 17

H.H. Howard

Unfortunately we know few personal details of H.H. Howard (HH) and do not even discover his christian name from the six years of correspondence between Howard and John Sutton (JS) in the SAOA Archives. He appears to have been a farmer although does not state this outright in any of the 19 extant letters from the period from April 1931 to March 1937. We know that there are letters that the SAOA does not hold, as Sutton reports bird sightings from two letters of Howard's early in 1938 in Volume 14 of the *SA Ornithologist*. Moreover there is another letter in our Archives but not accessible to me; in the SAOA Correspondence file for 1930-32 is a hand-written letter from H.H. Howard dated 25/5/31 regarding a negative, prints and notes on a bird he saw in France during the War. So another tantalizing glimpse into Howard's life history – he appears to have been a soldier in the First World War and even then interested in birds.

In his letter of 4 July 1932, Howard responds to a query from Sutton about the Many-coloured parrot (now called Mulga Parrot) and states that they are 'more plentiful than ever observed before "24 years" & a rough estimate, 100 to 150 pairs are feeding daily on wheat & oats spilt by the mice.' From this I deduce that he has either lived in the district or can remember back at least 24 years, which takes us back to 1908. Presuming that he was old enough to be actively involved in the First World War, he must have been born at least by 1900 and probably earlier, so he would have been old enough to be observing birds in 1908. Thus during the time that he was corresponding with Sutton in the 1930s he was at least in his late 30s and possibly somewhat older.

All letters are written from Nargultie followed sometimes by what looks like LB, and at times via Streaky Bay, West Coast. On one occasion Nargultie is followed by what appears to be 'Letter Bay' but his writing is hard to decipher on occasions. Perusal of maps does not shed any

light on what this Bay might be. Nargultie does not appear in the Gazetteer of the 1:250,000 Map Series (1975) so may have been a property name. From the letter dated 29/1/38 we learn that Perlubie is due south of Nargultie and on the shores of Streaky Bay which puts Nargultie between the coast road and the Eyre Highway between Streaky and Smoky Bays on the Eyre Peninsula. Several other locations are mentioned in reference to birds and these include Eba Island, Point Brown and Flagstaff Landing.

References to farming are few and far between but in early December 1933 Howard refers to remarkable rains and weather and that some day they will commence harvest. The inference is that the weather has impeded the beginning of harvest and that he is involved in this either as the owner of a property or as a labourer. Nearly a year later in November 1934 he laments that grasshoppers have 'devastated the district' and sounds a pessimistic note about the future, followed by a more philosophical view; but again it is not absolutely clear that he is personally involved in the losses. There is little doubt though in his next letter of 20 March 1935 that the deplorable condition of the country is giving him cause to give it one more year before leaving, which he quaintly calls "migrating" – a play on words as he has been talking about birds.

It appears that Howard did not join the SAOA at any stage; he is not included in the list of members in the *SA Ornithologist* of 1935 nor does he mention sending subscriptions to John Sutton in his letters. Sutton did send him the *SA Ornithologist* on occasions (e.g. letter of 4/7/32 from Howard mentions Volume 11 being sent to him) and in 1935 Howard enclosed a postal note to cover the cost of a magazine forwarded to him by Sutton. So there may have been a gentleman's agreement that Sutton would send journals when he had spares and that Howard

would reimburse the cost, but without joining the association.

Sutton is ever the diligent correspondent; we have copies of 10 letters from him to Howard covering the period of their correspondence and there are references to others that we do not have. As was his wont, he usually wrote the date that he received a letter and the date that he replied at the top of an incoming letter and generally replied within a few days. Howard's first extant letter is addressed to Messrs Sutton and Morgan advising them that their 'list' had not yet come to hand but not through their fault – it was redirected to Howard but has not appeared. Subsequent letters are simply addressed to Mr Sutton and signed 'Yours faithfully, or Sincerely yours, H.H. Howard'.

The correspondence starts with references to a photo of an Osprey nest taken by his friend E.J. Jones in whose company the nest was found. Several weeks later another letter mentions enclosing the negative that he has acquired from Jones. JS wrote on the first letter in pencil: 'Harrington's printed photo 51' and he returns the negative and two prints with his letter of 18/5/31 (and these are undoubtedly the print and negatives mentioned earlier in the letter of 25/5/31 that we do not have access to).

JS appears to have asked for a complete list of the birds of the Nargultie district as HH sends him JS's list with annotations, divided into two categories - birds that he is reasonably certain of and those that are probable. JS's reply lists 12 species that would not occur in the district and indicates species that Dr Sullivan saw in his residence of several months at Denial Bay plus a few birds that Sullivan was uncertain of. HH's list is not included in the correspondence, but JS has written the numbers of the birds on scrap paper with notes in his hand by them.

We know from the archived folder of correspondence of 1927-29 and from articles in the *SA Ornithologist* that Dr Charles Sullivan was working as an assistant to Dr Hallett at the Denial Bay Hospital from April to October 1927. He appears to have been a knowledgeable bird observer and was certainly trusted by Sutton, who published his long reports in Volumes 9 and 10 of the journal. His article in Volume 9 from pages 164 to 169 is particularly

interesting as he gives a list of the birds he had observed in his residence at Denial Bay along with their aboriginal name (both Kukata and Weerung) where this was known to him. He also lists birds that he saw but could not identify to species, as well as birds that the aborigines named that he did not observe in his short stay.

Clearly JS does not regard HH as a completely reliable source as initially he does not print HH's bird records in the *SA Ornithologist*, as he does for most country correspondents. Also in this letter, he writes: 'Leach's little book on the birds of Australia, price now 7/6, is a very useful work for identifying our birds.' This is a lovely subtle way of inferring that HH could use some help in this regard. Sutton also hopes to hear from Howard from time to time and is happy to help with bird queries. In reply to Sutton's letter with the suggestion about acquiring Leach's book and a pair of field glasses, Howard indicates that he has a powerful pair of field glasses but still has trouble with some identifications.

Later in the same year, 1931, HH clearly replies to queries from Sutton about the parrot family. He hopes that Mr Jones' visit to JS will clear up the Swamp Parrot (which he hopes will turn out to be the Night Parrot); he also mentions the mallee parrot, which Mr Jones had in captivity. He remarks that their black cockatoo is the Glossy Black and that they were numerous 25 years ago and 'we had one for a pet'. This would doubtless be the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo and it is interesting that the species had declined noticeably as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. There is one further mention of black cockatoos – the letter of 19/11/33 says that they visited on October 18th but the species could not be identified.

HH's letters are often a mix of hearsay that often seems to be of dubious veracity and acute personal observation, as shown in his letter of 10 January 1932. He is obviously replying to queries from JS and states that he has been told that the hoary-headed grebes nest or have young birds on Lake Newland and that they are known as "musk duck". JS has pencilled 'no' in the margin against this one. HH goes on to talk about some of the birds that he has seen at Nargultie and in the Gawler Ranges, which he

appears to have visited in October. He gives a good description of the Crimson Chat and notes that tens of thousands of budgerigars watered at their tanks in the hot spell.

The correspondence continues through 1932 with questions from HH about two birds that were described to him by others. The first was a flock of 50 Purple-crowned Lorikeets that appeared in March and the second was a Bourke Parrot – the latter very timid. Neither of these two species had been noted before by an observer who had lived in the district for 70 years. In this letter Howard also tells JS that he has visited Point Brown again and measured the Osprey or Sea-eagle nest and gives the dimensions. He goes on to say that nearby he saw a Sea-eagle with the head portion of a large fish. JS is clearly a little frustrated by this and has pencilled ‘?which bird’ in the margin by the nest measurements. HH does not enlighten him but does report in a letter one year later that the osprey or sea eagle nest has been burnt by some vandal.

Howard appears to have taken up the suggestion of acquiring Leach’s bird book or perhaps he already had a copy, as his letter of 4th April 1932 mentions the Crested Pigeon, which Sutton had enquired about and that it is as described by Leach. This species ‘gave us a good visit this year ... First noted April 23rd last seen late May ... the bird was noted by a number of local farmers also’. Apparently this species was only a visitor to this part of Eyre Peninsula in the 1930s when it was making the move south following agriculture and permanent water.

Howard was obviously intrigued by swifts and he seems to have been spurred on by Sutton’s evident interest in this group, about which he wrote in the *Ornithologist* in 1928 (Volume 9). In the 1920s and 30s Fork-tailed Swifts were recorded widely by SAOA members but the few Spine-tailed Swift records were frowned upon due to the lack of specimen evidence and the difficulty of discriminating the two species often at great heights and speeds. Sutton even says in one letter that members are loath to accept sight records of Spine-tailed Swifts and that they have not been recorded in South Australia, only in Victoria close to the border

(9/12/33). Howard is adamant and several times tells Sutton that Mrs Howard had seen them as well. In 1935 Howard wrote to Sutton that Mr W H Brownrigg, their local Agricultural Instructor, who hailed from New South Wales and claimed to know swifts saw spine-tailed swifts at Bromfield [probably Bramfield] a few miles NE of Elliston. JS appears to have been worn down by HH and finally in 1938 published a spine-tailed swift record from Perlubie.

Late in 1932 Howard asks Sutton if he knows of any nature study books that could be used as a prize for a competition in the local school. He is thinking of a book with a value of about 5/-, as he has started an interest in birds through providing the school with a copy of Leach. Sutton cannot think of a book in that price range and can only offer Leach at 7/6 or Cayley at 12/6. Midway through the next year Sutton is thanked for his suggestions and for his information on what birds might reasonably be found in his district. Howard had taken the opportunity to speak to Mr Adey of the Education Department when he was over his way and he seemed sympathetic to the idea of ‘some special lectures over the air on the protection & enlightenment of nature.’

As time goes on Sutton seems to become more certain of Howard’s ability to recognize bird species as he begins to publish some of his reports in the *Ornithologist*. For example Volumes 13 and 14 summarize sightings from Nargultie by Howard of cockatiels, white-winged triller, scrub-robin, masked wood-swallow, sittella, diamond dove and swifts. In August 1937 Howard made his first definite sighting of Australian Dotterels, which became very friendly when he was with sheep and during February of the next year he recorded Rock Parrots as being plentiful on Eba Island.

As with most of the correspondence we have dealt with, the letters end abruptly about the time of Sutton’s death in 1938. Obviously without the regular replies and the trusting relationship built up over a number of years, the country correspondents were not encouraged to continue reporting their sightings in the same meticulous manner.

Penny Paton

The letters between Howard and Sutton are summarized below:

- Letter 1 from HHH to JS & AM 26/4/31
- Letter 2 from HHH to JS 10/5/31
- Letter 3 from HHH to JS 25/6/31
- Letter 4 from HHH to JS 20/7/31
- Letter 5 from HHH to JS 10/1/32
- Letter 6 from HH to JS 15/4/32
- Letter 7 from HH to JS 4/7/32
- Letter 8 from HH to JS 15/12/32
- Letter 9 from HH to JS 14/6/33
- Letter 10 from HH to JS 19/11/33
- Letter 11 from HH to JS 4/12/33
- Letter 12 from HH to JS 1/3/34
- Letter 13 from HH to JS 25/11/34
- Letter 14 from HH to JS 20/3/35
- Letter 15 from HH to JS 2/6/35
- Letter 16 from HH to JS 9/3/36
- Letter 17 from HH to JS 2/10/36
- Letter 18 from HH to JS 27/12/36
- Letter 19 from HH to JS 7/3/37

- Back of letter from HH to JS (25/6/31) –
handwritten reply from JS to HH of 12/7/31
- Carbon copy reply of JS to HH 22/1/32
- Carbon copy reply of JS to HH 15/7/32
- Carbon copy reply of JS to HH 5/1/33
- Carbon copy reply from JS to HH 25/7/33
- Carbon copy reply from JS to HH 5/3/34
- Carbon copy reply from JS to HH 6/12/34
- Carbon copy reply from JS to HH 22/4/35
- Carbon copy reply from JS to HH 16/6/35
- Carbon copy reply from JS to HH 11/11/36

Abridged references of H.H. Howard's contributions to the *SAOrnithologist*:

- 1935 *SA Orn* 13 (1): 22-23
- 1937 *SA Orn* 13 (6): 178
- 1937 *SA Orn* 14 (2): 54
- 1938 *SA Orn* 14 (6): 173-74

References

- Whittell, H.M. 1954. *The Literature of Australian Birds*. Paterson Brokensha Pty Ltd, Perth.

Addendum to SAOA Historical Series No 17

More information about H. H. Howard

The following information is reprinted from the August 2006 Birds SA Newsletter (No 199).

WHO WAS H H HOWARD?

In SAOA Historical Series No17 (Newsletter No 198, May 2006) Penny Paton expressed regret that she had been unable to discover much information about H H Howard (including his first names) despite reviewing 19 letters he wrote to John Sutton between 1931 and 1937. As an amateur genealogist I saw this deficiency as a challenge to fill in some of the gaps by accessing the appropriate resources available to the public.

Harold Hubert Howard was born at Glen Osmond on 6 May 1893 to Canon Walter Henry Howard and Henrietta Howard nee Wiles¹. Walter was a Church of England (Anglican) priest, a teacher and an Army chaplain².

6032 Private Harold Hubert Howard enlisted in the AIF in World War 1, was attached to the 27th Battalion and saw service on the Western Front where he was wounded several times. He returned to Australia on 13 July 1919³. This explains his reference to France.

Harold married Teresa Walker at St Augustine's Church of England, Streaky Bay, on 25 June 1925 when he was 32 and she was 21⁴. They lived on their farm at Nargultie, section 19 Hundred of Petina from where Harold wrote his letters to John Sutton. He died in Adelaide on 10 April 1986 aged 92 — only a month short of his 93rd birthday. He was buried at Streaky Bay. His son John who lives in retirement on the farm now run by Harold's grandson Tim, told me that Harold had maintained a lifelong interest in birds.

Footnote. Nargultie is the locality name for an area some 18 km west of Wirrulla on Upper Eyre Peninsula and some 60 km north of Streaky Bay. At Nargultie there was a water reserve, section 50 hundred of Petina with a hut, a well, a tank and a trough⁵. The reserve was adjacent to the eastern side of the Howard farm. A road running south from nearby Nunjikompita to the Eyre Highway is called

Nargultie Road⁶. Nargultie is not listed in Manning's *Place Names of South Australia* and the Geographical Names Board has no information on the derivation of the name. However it is assumed to be Aboriginal.

Bill Matheson

References

- 1 SA Births 1842-1906 SA Genealogy Society 1997.
- 2 Biographical Index of South Australians 1836-1885. SA Genealogy Society 1986.
- 3 www.awm.gov.au/databases.
- 4 SA Marriages 1917-1937 SA Genealogy Society 2001.
- 5 Hundred of Petina one inch to one mile map, Lands Department 1912.
- 6 Upper Eyre Peninsula and Far West Coast Regional Map. RAA 2000.

ADDENDUM TO HISTORICAL SERIES NO. 17

Several alert members emailed or rang me about Historical Series No. 17 on H.H. Howard. Thanks to Tom Bradley for finding out from the web that **Harold Hubert** Howard embarked for overseas service in November 1916 aged 33 years and his occupation was a farmer.

He also enlisted in the 2nd WW on 23 April 1942 (his age then would have been about 59) in the 5th Battalion Volunteer Defence Corps, was discharged on 17 July 1945 and held the rank of Sergeant. Both Tom and Bob Whatmough drew my attention to the online SA gazetteer (www.placenames.sagov.au), which lists all the place names mentioned in my article. Bob gives Perlubie as 32° 37' 16" 134° 20' 40".

Penny Paton