

OBITUARY: HERBERT THOMAS CONDON

The death of H. T. Condon on 12 January 1978 at the age of 65 took from Australian ornithology one of its most widely known taxonomists, and from the South Australian Ornithological Association a member of more than forty-four years.

Born in Melbourne on 27 February 1912, he moved with his family to Adelaide at an early age. Educated at Unley High School, he later undertook part-time studies at the University of Adelaide in biological, geological and physical sciences although he did not take a degree.

Herbert Condon joined the South Australian Museum in 1929 as a cadet a few weeks before his seventeenth birthday, and in 1933 was seconded to the Honorary Curators of Ornithology Dr A. M. Morgan and John Sutton. He became Assistant in Zoology in 1935. Then, in 1938 he was made Curator of Birds, a position he held until his retirement in September 1974, following several years of declining health.

It was in the Museum bird room soon after 1933 as a schoolboy visitor to John Sutton, that I first came to know Herb Condon. At that time, detailed published information about Australian birds was hard to come by, and Herb became an additional mentor.

Subsequent to these Museum visits I became an S.A.O.A. member, and I recall vividly the early Sunday mornings when he pillioned me on his 350cc Panther motorbike to Port Gawler, there to plod with him through the mangrove swamps to the "shaggy"—as Herb always called it—of Pied Cormorants, or to wade in the lignum and reed-covered margins of the nearby Buckland Park lake which in those days was usually teeming with water birds.

Herb Condon showed young people many kindnesses, and over a span of more than 40 years gently steered them towards the ideals of accurate observation and systematic recording, and to thoughts of future conservation. For this I personally remain indebted to him, as do many others. But it cannot be said that Herb was always tolerant and patient with older people! In fact, his sensitivity was such that the ease with which he could be offended was legend, the cause of the offence often remaining obscure to others.

Herb served the Association for many years. He joined in 1933 and was Hon. Secretary/Treasurer 1938-43; Member of the Editorial Committee 1946-52; Vice-President 1950-51; President 1951-52 and Editor of the *South*

Australian Ornithologist 1953-64. Thus the only interruption to 25 consecutive years of Committee service was for two years during World War II when he served in the meteorological section of the R.A.A.F.

In 1964 he was elected to Honorary Membership, but continued to actively contribute to the Association by revising and greatly enlarging his *Handlist of the Birds of South Australia*, first published in 1962 as Parts 6-8 of Vol. 23 of *The South Australian Ornithologist*. In 1968 the revision was published by the Association in book form as a second edition, closely followed in 1969 by a third edition incorporating minor corrections and additions. Although the latter two projects were correctly assessed beforehand by the Committee as also being very profitable to the S.A.O.A., he declined to enter into any arrangement which would benefit him financially.

Herb was not only a master of precise English but was also a competent artist both in line drawings and in water colours. The covers of the second and third editions of his *Handlist* bear a reproduction of one of his better known art works—a water colour of the type specimen of *Psephotus haematonotus caeruleus*, a subspecies of the Red-rumped Parrot described by him in 1941 (*Records of the South Australian Museum* 7:117-144).

Herb Condon was of course also active in the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union, becoming a member in 1937; South Australian Branch Secretary 1940-58; President 1961-62 and a Fellow of the Union in 1973—an honour shared by few and not lightly bestowed.

In 1941 he became a member of the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee. In 1952 he became the Committee's Secretary and Convener, and a number of amendments to the sadly obsolete 1926 Checklist were published. However, in 1967 the Committee was disbanded and Herb was appointed to compile a new Australian Checklist. The Non-Passerine section was completed in 1973 and published in 1975, and included short diagnoses for most races—in all a monumental task. The failing health which forced his retirement in 1974 prevented him from completing the second part of the Checklist.

The Association extends its sympathy to his widow, Mrs Rene Condon, and to his son, David.

R. F. BROWN