

OBITUARY: ERHARD BOEHM

8 April 1911 – 14 September 1994

Erhard Franz Boehm was born in Eudunda, South Australia, and grew up at Sutherlands, some 100 km north-east of Adelaide, on the farming and grazing property owned in turn by his grandfather and father, and which later became his. He was a self-made naturalist. His formal education ended with a Qualifying Certificate from Sutherlands Primary School in 1924; informally he remained a student in the best sense until the end of his life.

His childhood landscape, enriched by native vegetation that has now largely disappeared from the locality, stimulated a broad interest in the natural world, that matured into a desire to share his discoveries with others. Erhard contributed more than 100 plant specimens to the State Herbarium ("excellently selected and prepared," according to one grateful reply), as well as mammals, birds, reptiles, aboriginal implements, and australites to the South Australian Museum.

Erhard suffered no wanderlust, maintaining that there was always so much to see at home. Home for him was the Mount Mary Plains, and local birds formed the subject of his first publication in a scientific journal (Boehm 1928). This article, appearing when its author was only 17, initiated a series of 57 items for the *South Australian Ornithologist*, the latest of them in press at the time of his death. He later also became a frequent contributor to the *South Australian Naturalist* and *Emu*, among other journals. Topics to attract his attention included bird occurrence, distribution (past and present), anatomy, plumage, behaviour, and hybridisation (Boehm 1947, 1957, 1965, 1966, 1974, 1991 constitute a selection), as well as conservation issues (for example Boehm 1955), Aborigines formerly living in the Morgan district, local plants, bats, and other mammals.

In 1964, at an age when many a bird bander has opted for a more genteel life, Erhard took up his research tool, and by the time he laid aside his pliers 16 years later he had banded more than 7300 birds of more than 100 species. He was one of the earlier contributors to the *Australian Bird Bander* (now *Corella*), and over the years he published 11 papers in that journal.

On retirement in 1979, Erhard and his wife Doreen moved to Adelaide's north-eastern suburb of Valley View, from which it was a short drive to Anstey Hill, then an Open Space Reserve and now a Recreation

Park. His love of native animals and plants drew Erhard to these ridges and valleys time and again. Well into his seventies, he was clambering up and down slopes to attack olive trees. Not that the birds were neglected: over nine years he amassed records of 113 species. The friends of Anstey Hill elected him a life member and named one of the park's trails after him. Retirement for Erhard also meant talks to school and community audiences. The SAOA elected him an Honorary Member in 1980.

Erhard had a passion not only to see but to show, not only to record but to tell. During the fieldwork years for the RAOU Atlas, I used to visit the farm to collect his observations before transferring them to Atlas sheets. He would stand to read from his notebooks, and although we were alone in the room his style was declamatory. I never left without learning a lot about natural history. Years later, bedridden and in pain, his passion was undimmed. Only a few days before his death he was recalling ornithological observations in the same style, and I felt that if I turned round I should find the other member of the ward sitting up taking notes. We can count ourselves fortunate that he left us more than 150 notes and papers in the scientific literature, not only to remember him by, but to enlighten us for all time on the natural world both past and present.

Erhard is survived by his wife Doreen, one of their two daughters, Cynthia, and three grandchildren. To them all the Association extends its deepest sympathy.

JOHN SEYMOUR

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