

Obituary: Frank Richard Hewett Chapman

7 July 1937 to 8 February 2014

ANDREW BLACK

Frank was the only son and the oldest of three children of Frank Hewett Chapman and Nancy (née Richards) and a proud descendant of colonial pioneer Samuel Chapman who arrived aboard the *Cygnets* in 1836. He grew up in North Adelaide and Walkerville but moved to the 'family farm', a property of 330 hectares at Coromandel Valley, on the death of his grandfather (also Frank) in 1951. He loved the rural life as it was then, rode his own horse, kept all manner of pets and bred and trained sheep dogs, but his greatest early and lifelong passion was the study of birds in nature.

His father was a lawyer and staunch Liberal Party politician who kept a large aviary and joined the SAOA in May 1950, becoming President for one term in 1955. The younger Frank joined only 18 months after his father at the age of 14½. He attended Prince Alfred College and went on to Roseworthy as his grandfather had done, receiving his diploma with Honours in 1957 but within two years his father was dead and Frank had to assume the role of head of family and manager of its property.

Fortunately leadership (as well as politics) came naturally to Frank; he was President of the Mitcham Young Liberals from 1960 to 1962 and Secretary to the Mitcham branch of the Party from 1964 to 1967. In the same period he became Vice-President of the SAOA in 1960 and President in 1962. He thus became the youngest President of the Association and he took its leadership for eight successive years. During that period regular field excursions were established on a monthly basis and camp-outs were arranged annually from 1964. He participated strongly in



all Association activities and, while he published relatively little (Blaylock 2000), he had a very wide knowledge of our birds, giving at least nine presentations on different bird groups at general meetings between 1965 and 1972 (Chapman 1965-1972). He also produced a small SA Museum educational booklet on the identification of red robins (Chapman 1970).

The years leading up to and beyond 1962 were a crucial period for the Association (Schodde 2000), when strongly divergent views were held amongst members concerning conservation and the need for stronger legislative protection for wildlife. Frank's views were firm and he managed opposition from some members, many

a good deal his senior, with scrupulous honesty, efficiency and calmness, confident in his complete grasp of the rules for the conduct of meetings.

In the early 1960s his advocacy influenced government in several conservation-related policies; full year-round protection for pelicans on the Coorong (Chapman 1963); discontinuation of the issuing of licences to take birds from the wild for commercial purposes; and formal control over permits for collecting eggs and skins.

On 30 June 1961 Dick Schodde and Warren Hitchcock proposed that the Association sponsor a public meeting on the subject of nature conservation and Ron Gibbs and Frank were appointed as a subcommittee to make suitable arrangements. The meeting took place on 6 April 1962 and was chaired by SAOA President Basil Newland; papers were presented by the three named above and Dr Colin James. At the meeting a member of the audience put an unanticipated motion that a council of organisations and individuals be formed to promote action and change and, after some debate and opposition, it was carried by majority. Frank led a committee of nine to draw up rules and chaired a meeting of interested parties on 31 October 1962 at which the Conservation Coordinating Council of South Australia was proposed. He chaired further meetings until that body was dissolved, its role being assumed by the Conservation Council of South Australia from 1970. The initiative of this group of SAOA members (with Bob Brown and Ed Newman) also led to the formation of the Nature Conservation Society of South Australia. Moves towards its formation were well under way before the April 1962 meeting and Frank was one of at least 12 SAOA members among the 29 invited to its inaugural meeting on 6 June 1962.

A major priority of the Association in the 1960s was the protection of areas of suitable habitat and he was forever watchful for an opportunity to create new Reserves. With Bob Brown and other members he made careful initial assessments of several possible land parcels; subsequent

representation on behalf of the SAOA resulted in the dedication of Warrenben, Clement Gap and Cox Scrub Conservation Parks. His direction and focus during the 1960s inspired many future office-holders who joined the Association in that period.

In July 1963 Frank and Brian Glover addressed the Parliamentary Land Committee, advocating expansion of the existing reserve (now Mount Rescue Conservation Park) into un-allotted Crown Land to the north and east between Bordertown and Pinnaroo which was then being considered for agricultural expansion. After several years without resolution but with smaller reserves created in 1967, indications appeared in 1969 of imminent release of land for development. Frank and the Association became active in a very public campaign for the 'Tiger Country' that followed, leading at first to a proposed compromise with limited releases for agriculture, but ultimately to retention of the whole area and creation in 1979 of Ngarkat Conservation Park. Camp-outs that detected the presence of a number of birds of conservation significance had been held in the Crown Lands in 1967 and 1971. In the meantime he had responded publicly to landholder pressure for the partial resumption of existing reserves, to which the Government appeared likely to agree. A number of SAOA members participated during 1968 in one particularly important campaign to protect Hambidge Conservation Park, about 45% of which might have been lost otherwise.

While a passionate advocate for conservation Frank was also a keen and careful bird-observer. There is little doubt that his most exciting observations (and certainly the most significant) began on 9 October 1965 at the annual camp-out on southern Yorke Peninsula when he obtained several brief views of a skulking bird, whose loud and far carrying calls had first been reported by Brian Glover in January of that year but remained unidentified. Frank believed that the bird belonged to an unknown population of Western Whipbird which, at the time, had not been recorded anywhere in the State for nearly

thirty years. After examining skins in the South Australian Museum he overcame the Curator Herb Condon's scepticism and, with Condon and Max Waterman's mist-netting crew, returned to Pondalowie Bay on 30 October when his identification was thoroughly confirmed (Condon 1966).

In 1963 Frank joined the public service within the Department of Agriculture and in 1965 became Local Government Liaison Officer with State-wide responsibility for weed control. He left the Department in 1971 and began to modify production at Coromandel Valley, introducing potatoes and later strawberries. He developed the Coromandel Shopping Centre on family land in 1976.

Frank served a second term as SAOA Vice-President from 1976 to 1979 and continued to enjoy SAOA camp-outs with his family through that period, notably exploiting the capabilities of a canoe at Lake Merreti in 1976 (Vincent 2000), but we saw little of him thereafter. Unrecognised bipolar affective disorder began to have an increasing effect on him. He invested compulsively in speculative ventures and fell seriously into debt twice within a few years in the 1980s and was obliged to sell much of his property. Frank was a battler and engaged enthusiastically in heavy labouring work such as fencing until a serious back injury brought an end to it. Coronary heart disease presented next and was the cause of his demise. He is survived by his wife Catherine, two daughters and two sons, and five grandchildren.

Sources: son Frank, Brian Blaylock and conservation collaborators Bob Brown, Ron Gibbs, Dick Schodde and Anne and Peter Reeves.

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