

Obituary: Francis John (Frank) Badman

29 June 1943 to 26 September 2015

ANDREW BLACK AND PHILIPPA HORTON

Frank emigrated with his parents and three siblings from rural Dorset to New South Wales in 1960. The following year he began his working life in outback Australia, at first as a jackeroo and later as an overseer on properties in western Queensland. He moved to South Australia in 1972, working at first on station bores and, from 1976, resident in Marree as a trucking contractor with the Highways Department, maintaining the State's northern roads.

Frank married Evan in 1977 and their son Shane was born in 1980. They moved into their own house in Marree in 1983.

Frank was already a bird watcher before he first went to live in Marree but within two years he had become an authority on the birds of northern South Australia. His approach was simple. From merely keeping records of interesting bird observations, he began to take careful and accurate notes of every bird that he saw. Since his work took him to many places further north, some beyond Oodnadatta, the result was a comprehensive account of the birds of the region during the period January 1977 to July 1978. The paper (Badman 1979) occupied almost two issues of the *South Australian Ornithologist* and nothing like it had been published before. It had resulted from a fruitful relationship with Shane Parker, who was beginning to collate fully reliable information on South Australian ornithology.



Frank Badman at work at Roxby Downs in about 1990

Image S. Badman

Collaboration with Shane Parker, South Australian Museum

Shane Parker was appointed Curator of Birds at the South Australian Museum (SAMA) in January 1976 (Horton 1993) and soon became aware of Frank and his much-needed observations of arid-zone birds. Their correspondence is held in the SAMA Bird Section and begins with a letter from Frank dated 19 November 1977, although it is clear that they were already well acquainted. The letters mainly concern Frank's more noteworthy observations and the process of preparing all his observations for publication. He sent drafts of all his ornithological papers to Parker for comments. Parker also supplied him with reference material and, initially, provided the Latin names of plants; he may therefore have played a part in Frank's subsequent development as a botanist.

The collaboration greatly benefited the Museum. Parker organised permits for Frank who then collected the specimens needed to fill gaps in the collections, for example to show species and subspecies distributions, or seasonal occurrences, or simply to provide much-needed specimens of rarely-collected but moderately common species. Collecting also targeted Masked Lapwings, to determine the distribution of intermediate forms between the two subspecies, and wedgebills, to assess the identity of populations where the ranges of the two species approach. Parker intended to co-author publications on both groups, but never progressed beyond amassing records and preparing maps.

Many pages of Frank's observations on the two groups, either hand-written or typed by Evan, remain unpublished in any detail; they are still held in Parker's files in the SAMA Bird Section. Frank subsequently wrote that most Masked Lapwings seen in the middle and lower Cooper Creek area were of intermediate phenotype (Badman 1989), as are "a large percentage in the north of South Australia in general." (Read and Badman 1999).

In September 1978, June 1980 and June 1981 Frank was joined by Parker and other Museum staff (Terry Sim 1978 and 1980, Angela Gackle 1980, Peter Cockerham 1981), on field trips to various locations in northern South Australia. They collected further specimens of lapwings and wedgebills, as well as various common species such as Galah (for comparison with southern populations), the corvids (skins and eggs), waders (to document their presence in the arid zone), and more enigmatic groups such as Neophemas. Frank probably learnt how to skin birds on these trips as in a letter of July 1980 he asked for extra supplies for skinning.

Altogether Frank contributed 251 specimens to the Museum, collected by himself or with SAMA or NPWS staff, the first in December 1977, and the last a suite of Little Corellas from the Flinders Ranges in April 1988 from work he was conducting on their behavior with the NPWS. Notable among his collections are a Long-toed Stint from Cannuaukaninna Bore, December 1980 (first inland record for SA, jointly with two records from the first Atlas of Australian Birds), a Port Lincoln Parrot and a Yellow-plumed Honeyeater from north of Cook, August 1980 (first Great Victoria Desert specimens for SAMA), a Brown Honeyeater from Hamilton Station, June 1980 (the first SA specimen for the Museum), and, specifically requested by Parker, the first skeleton of a Black-breasted Buzzard for SAMA. Frank sent a manuscript on the Brown Honeyeater record for publication in *South Australian Ornithologist* but withdrew it when he heard of other observers' recent records; his notes were published instead by Matheson (1981).

Frank's letters wryly observe notable events from his field trips, such as getting vehicles bogged in sand or mud. Angela Gackle recalls humorous campfire tales of driving skills and what could go wrong, and the pitfalls of setting up camp in a really bad location (A. Gackle, pers. comm.). Frank's letter of 3 October 1978, written shortly after his first expedition with Museum staff, explained that he hadn't managed to collect

any more specimens after Shane left, as he had the bad luck to roll his Land Rover into Lees Hill Dam, south of Stuart Creek Homestead; he finally winched it out four hours later. He made no mention of himself but did note that though battered on top the vehicle still worked. Letters written in 1980, 1981 and 1984 do however give details of back trouble that he suffered for weeks at a time, the 1984 bout involving a flight on a stretcher with the Royal Flying Doctor Service to the Port Augusta Hospital. As he noted, this was not a good situation when self-employed. His achievements in the field are all the more creditable given the discomfort he must have endured.

Arid zone ornithologist 1972-1989

Frank's early residence in South Australia was at an opportune time, allowing him to experience the results of the record rains of 1973-1974. He witnessed the immense congregations of birds that remained on Lake Eyre until November 1977, as well as seeing where many dispersed after its salinity reached a critical concentration and their food supply failed. He showed the importance of that arid region to waterbirds as well as their extreme fluctuations. He followed the flush of bird life associated with a flood of Cooper Creek in June 1978. His notes included observations of habitat in more detail than many bird writers of the time, and incorporated the scientific names of many plant species.

AB collaborated with Frank during the Nature Conservation Society Great Victoria Desert Survey in August-September 1980 and was able to observe his work even more closely during April-May 1985 when invited to join him, Evan and Shane in a trip that took in the northern Rivers, Dalhousie Springs, the Simpson Desert, Warburton River and lower Cooper Creek. They had no GPS, satellite phone or back up vehicle, only a belief in Frank's total reliability. The black notebook and pen were placed above the sun shield close to Frank's forehead and were promptly retrieved whenever a bird was seen.

In addition to several smaller ornithological papers, Frank published two further major reviews of arid zone birds, each more comprehensive than his first, and published as monographs by the Nature Conservation Society. The first examined the role of bore drains as important wetland habitat, compensating for loss elsewhere from the degradation of waterholes and mound springs (Badman 1987b). The other documented the middle and lower sections of Cooper Creek in South Australia, whose birds he knew better than any other person (Badman 1989).

For much of two decades Frank recorded and published original information on the birds of the Lake Eyre Basin which provided a sound basis for all future research in the region (see also Read and Badman 1999). He then found that the vegetation of the area was in even greater need of reliable documentation and had the intellect and discipline to make a second ground breaking contribution.

Arid zone botanist 1989-2015

Frank had begun a study of the arid zone flora as early as 1978, when he submitted the first of over 12,000 plant collections to the State Herbarium of South Australia. In 1985 he ceased his road work and determined on a career in the biological sciences. After a short period as a Ranger at Mount Remarkable National Park, he obtained the position of botanist with the environmental team of Western Mining Corporation at Roxby Downs in 1989. Seeking a formal qualification, Frank's already considerable published scientific output meant that he was able comfortably to complete a Masters qualification in 1995 and proceed to achieve his PhD in 2002.

He was actively engaged in all aspects of northern South Australian environmental management and conservation. He served on several advisory committees and created herbaria for Olympic Dam, for three soil boards and for a number of pastoral properties, an

initiative that required him and Evan mounting 27,000 plant specimens. He established his own environmental consultancy in 1999.

Frank was a tall and formidable man, but on his visits to the Museum's Bird Section (where he would gently materialise as though still observing in the field) he was always enthusiastic and friendly. He was quiet and unruffled, confident in what he did, thorough and reliable. He wrote lucidly and seems not to have baulked at large tasks that he knew he could accomplish with effort and with Evan's help. He died in hospital after a short illness. Tributes followed from all parts of northern South Australia, as well as from the scientific and conservation communities. He had been a widely respected and productive scientist, a scholar of the Australian arid zone, who became a major contributor to its wellbeing.

Some details provided here are sourced from an obituary published by W. R. Barker and others in the Newsletter of the Australasian Systematic Botany Society of March 2016 (Barker *et al.* 2016).

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Andrew Black and Philippa Horton
South Australian Museum
North Terrace
Adelaide, South Australia 5000

abblack@bigpond.com

philippa.horton@samuseum.sa.gov.au