

SAOA Historical Series No.14

Jack Hood

Jack Hood is a well-known name in South Australian birding circles and inextricably linked to the South East of the State, where he lived for most of his life. I first met Jack in January 1972 when my family (Ross, Muriel, Nick, Julian Reid and me) camped on his property at Joanna on one of our many holiday birding trips. Our diary for the trip shows that Jack visited us on the afternoon of the 22nd after we had pitched our tent and been for a walk. We remained there for three nights, using Joanna as a base for exploring the surrounding countryside. The diary also states that we went to Bool Lagoon with Jack and that he came to dinner with us on the 23rd, but I have only a hazy memory of the dinner. My parents can remember that Jack had a stump at the campsite where Brown Treecreepers came for the cheese that he put out. Jack had a fabulous swamp on the property — Racecourse Swamp — where we heard Brown Bitterns. The bird list from the scrub where we camped was also a long one.

Kloot (1995) informs us that John B. (Jack) Hood died in Cornwall, England on a visit there on 11th May 1975 at the age of 60, and we know that he was born in 1914 at Bool Lagoon (Murdoch 1991). Whittell (1954) describes him as a pastoralist of Narracoorte [sic] and lists seven publications on birds, all in the *South Australian Ornithologist* (see end-of paper for complete list). Much information on Jack and the Hood family is contained in Murdoch's fascinating book, which is in the SAOA Library. The biographical information in the next seven paragraphs is taken from this source and from a paper delivered by Jack's son David at the unveiling of a plaque at Bool Lagoon in October 1991 to commemorate Jack's work there.

The Hood family had an interest in the environment from their arrival in South Australia in 1852; for example, the first bird skins were sent back to Scotland in the early 1860s. A letter, dated 19th February 1865, states that the possum skins have been made into a rug for the drawing room, parrot skins sent to be mounted in a glass case, and the aboriginal artefacts were to lay in the library.

To move closer in time to now, Jack Hood was one of three sons born to Bertram (Bert or "B.A." as he was usually known) and Lizzie (nee Mudge) Hood. Lizzie Mudge was the first baby born in the Bool Lagoon settlement, the seventh child of ten, and her reminiscences written in 1963 give a wonderful description of life in the district at the turn of the century. Her father, Albert, was the original Postmaster, starting in 1896 and his family was responsible for the mail for 45 years. Lizzie gives a graphic account of this onerous 5 mile journey to the

Struan rail siding and back, which was done by buggy, horseback or bicycle, in all weathers and on a very rough track. The Mudges also operated the phone service that was connected during the First World War. Bert had done various jobs before settling at Bool. He had been a farmer in the mallee, driven an Adelaide horse-tram, laid tram tracks and carted timber in the WA forests. He and Lizzie married in 1914, first living at Wanbi and then returning to the Bool area in 1921 when he bought the Wagner block. Later on other properties were bought on which he was able to settle his sons John and Lindsay (the third son Murray died in early manhood). B.A.'s brother John lived on a farm in the district as well.

The Hood family were prominent in all aspects of community life. For example, three generations of Hoods have served on the Naracoorte District Council — Bert, Lindsay and David (Jack's son). Doreen Hunt, who taught at the Bool Lagoon school for about 24 years had this to say:

"I remember with affection Mr. and Mrs. Bert Hood who although they had no children at school always supported us in all that we did and helped me personally in many ways" (p. 78). On page 155 Murdoch lists the Hood children who attended the school between 1888 and 1965 — Aileen, Joan, Murray, John and Mavis. In 1929 the school closed for 15 years through lack of numbers and the children either did correspondence lessons or went into Naracoorte. Lindsay describes the high jinks that he and a friend got up to on some of the trips into Naracoorte with Dolly and the gig (pp. 73-75). Presumably by this time Jack had left school. The community that Murdoch brings to life is one where people (including children) worked hard but also had lots of fun that they made themselves and where the sense of community was very strong. Lindsay again describes how he and Jack used to go rabbiting in the wet during the 1930s when rabbits were plentiful (p. 79). It was very profitable and the boys enjoyed the hunt with dogs, horses and the cart, but skinning a cartload of rabbits was obviously a long and arduous job. There is a lovely description of an eccentric local Eric Schinkel who loved cricket but had no wireless, so when the cricket was on he would wander into the Hood's kitchen, listen to the cricket, top up his pipe and leave coins to pay for the tobacco he had used. This was the era of no locked doors!

Jack obviously worked on the farm from an early age (see below), but also spent much time roaming the countryside and swamps in pursuit of birds, nest and eggs. More information on Jack the naturalist and ornithologist is given below when dealing with the correspondence with Sutton. When war broke out in

1939 Jack enlisted in the AIF at Mount Gambier. He served in the Motor Division, and later as a captain in the Military Police. A paper on birds and bushfires published in the *SAOrn* in 1941 during the war gives the author as Lieut. John B. Hood.

After the war Jack returned to farm his property but increasingly his interest in birds dominated his life, although as his son David points out, the two were inextricably linked. "The very nature of his occupation, family and their geographic spread had such an influence on him, his farm was not a farm but a habitat for all species, our woolshed not only served to shear sheep but was the most ingeniously used to trap and band swallows, dead lambs were used to trap and band crows, every trip around a paddock, to town, to the beach to Adelaide, by train, car horse, bike or walking served a secondary function."

His skills and concerns for conservation led to his gazettal by the SA Government as an Inspector of Game in 1954. He became a bird-bander with the Victorian Fisheries and Game Department and the CSIRO scheme in the mid 1950s, banding nearly 10,000 birds over the period 1954 to 1961. There are a few stories told in Murdoch's book of locals catching Jack's ringed birds and having to keep it from him or having a joke at his expense. In 1960 Jack was appointed the SA Co-ordinator of the Bird Banding Scheme and he held an annual campout at Beachport to promote professional attitudes to conservation and ornithology.

He was scathing about the lack of areas for conservation in the South East, feeling that South Australia was way behind Victoria in its efforts for conservation, particularly at Bool Lagoon and in the Coorong. During the 1960s several areas were set aside for conservation in the South East, including Fairview and Big Heath, partly at the instigation of Jack Hood. His passion for conservation led to his appointment in 1962 on the reconstructed Flora and Fauna Conservation Committee. He was a passionate advocate for the conservation of Bool Lagoon and its wildlife. Although a duck-shooter himself, he worked hard to have Bool Lagoon declared a sanctuary (in 1940 – unsuccessfully) and a Game Reserve (successful in 1967). There are two excellent chapters on these campaigns in Murdoch's book and the SAOA is castigated by one local councillor for not providing sufficient supporting evidence for a sanctuary in 1940. Jack did not neglect the education of the young, inviting local schools to visit his scrub and lecturing the children on birds and conservation.

Increasingly Jack's interests took him away from the South East. For example, he made trips to New Zealand and New Guinea in the 1960s and in 1965 joined the Australian National Antarctic Expedition to Macquarie Island. Three years later he was invited to

be part of a US study based at McMurdo Sound and in 1974 was honoured with the United States Antarctic Medal.

The SAOA holds a number of letters from Jack Hood to the Secretary of the day, from 1930 to 1964. In addition the RAOU Archives also contains 23 letters written by Jack to Dr D W Brummitt, July 1934 to May 1938, dealing with egg-collecting and sets of eggs held by J. B. Hood (Klout 1983). These were donated to the Archives by Dr Mark Bonnin some time between 1981 and 1983.

There are 22 letters from Jack Hood to John Sutton (JS; SAOA Secretary) from December 1930 to December 1936 and we have JS's replies to most of these. In 1930 Jack would have been at most 15 years old and the short letter of 22/12 is in a neat schoolboy's hand and is signed "Yours faithfully J. Hood." In it, he thanks Mr Sutton for sending him some articles and apologises for the delay in replying, as they have been busy with harvesting. He does mention a trip to Bool Lagoon, where he found two Royal Spoonbill nests with eggs, as well as many other species nesting. The next few letters deal with bird observations at Bool and Cisticolas (Golden-headed Fantail-warbler) and their nests, which Sutton had obviously expressed particular interest in. The letter of 23/12/33 shows that Jack was already an accomplished egg-collector and actively exchanging with others of like mind. It is addressed to Mr McGilp but the handwritten notes on the letter are Sutton's. He thanks Mr McGilp for the eggs and promises him a Brown Bittern set when he has more – the few that he has are for Mr Collins (a well-known egg collector from Edenhope), in exchange for eggs he has given Jack. Jack is full of praise for Mr McGilp's generous donation of his Origma collection to the Museum [a footnote on page 4 of *SAOrn* 12 (1) 1933 notes the presentation of this collection in February 1931 and that there are now 1,241 clutches.]

By this time several of Jack's notes from the Naracoorte area had been published in the *Ornithologist* and, as well as corresponding with other ornithologists, Jack was also taking opportunities to join others in the field. Dr Brummitt's article in Volume 12 of *SAOrn* on a trip to the South East mentions a day spent with Mr J B Hood in and around Bool Lagoon and the hospitality of Mr and Mrs Hood (presumably Jack's parents). John Sutton was his usual helpful self and in a letter of 14/12/33 to "Dear Jack" offers to send him some *SAOrns* from his duplicates, as well as asking for information on the Little Bittern and its eggs. Sutton had published a note in Volume 12 of the *SAOrn*, claiming the first record of the Little Bittern for SA from Buckland Park on 18/9/32. However Jack's letter of 11/12/33 mentioned his sighting of 3 birds at Bool Lagoon; on Sutton asking for particulars, he noted that he had first

sighted the birds in January 1930 and recorded their nests and eggs in 1931, thus giving him the first state record. A later letter indicates that Jack had sent a specimen of an immature Little Bittern to the Museum in the summer and JS, while thanking him, says that it was very smelly but a skin was made. In his kindly manner he requested that in future Jack record the colour of the soft parts and also sent skinning instructions, as Jack had pleaded ignorance about the technique.

Jack's letter of 8/4/34 answers queries that Sutton had made about two species on his bird list and he makes this observation:

'I have not anybody [sic], to whom I can show specimens of any new species to, in the district, so I am likely to make a mistake like the Pardalotes at any time.'

This was true of many of the country birdwatchers with whom John Sutton corresponded in the early 1930s and it is a tribute to him that he attempted to support them through letters, by sending them articles and identifying birds posted to the Museum. In return he asked for information that he was interested in; e.g. in Sutton's letter of 21/10/34 he asks Jack about the colour of the swamphen's legs and the lores etc of the Nankeen Night-Heron. He also asks how much snakes weigh - in reference to how much weight a Kookaburra could lift. This request kept Jack occupied for a considerable time - he reported in letters of 28/12/34 and 16/2/35 about four snakes that were between 29.5 and 40.25 inches long and weighed 8-20.25 ounces. He had seen about 12 snakes captured by Kookaburras and thought that they usually took smaller ones. Jack also tells JS that he has a 54 foot long rope ladder that he uses to get to hollows, particularly to the nests of White Cockatoos and corellas, but that some nest so high that he can't reach them even with this ladder!

From Jack's letters it appears that he spent a lot of time in the swamps and woodlands, looking at birds and egg collecting. His attention to detail is wonderful and an example is his description of the 'Baldcoot' (Purple Swamphen):

'Young Baldcoots leave the nest very shortly after hatching. They remain in the nest for a while and are probably fed there by parent birds. At this stage they will leave the nest, if it is approached by anything that is likely too [sic] to disturb them. They slip quietly from the nest and either take cover beneath it or swim away from it. They can be traced easily as they keep up a continuous squeaking. Young Baldcoots are well developed when they hatch from the shell... The colors [sic] were 2 chicks:- Black down, showing specks of white at the end on that which covered the head and wings. Bill, red at base, tip, horn colour. Legs, dark pink. The other 3 chicks were a little larger and the legs were also dark pink.

Perhaps "dark pink" does not describe the color [sic] too well, but it is as well as I can describe it. The legs are pink or a lighter color [sic] than human skin and appear to have black or dark blue intermixed.' (28/12/34)

Bool Lagoon has long been open for duck shooting and the concern shown by modern conservationists about the appropriateness of this activity at Bool was shared by Jack. He notes in his letter of 16th February 1935 that he found a dead spoonbill after the opening of the shoot - a not uncommon occurrence. Not many ducks were shot either, as many swamps around the district were dry. A later letter indicates that 1934 was a very dry year in the South East, which was not good for water birds, but that in May, 1935 was looking good so far. The correspondence of 1935 mainly deals with bird notes and JS's request for notes on nesting birds, which Jack complied with by writing a short paper for the *SAOrn*. Sutton's letter of 3/2/36 invites Jack to join the SAOA - he says that they badly need members, mainly due to deaths! Jack was quick to respond - on 14th March he sent 15/- as his subscription and on the bottom of this letter, JS pencilled - Proposed: J Sutton; Seconded: J Neil McGilp.

The last letter from the 1930s (23/9/36) deals with missing *SAOrns*, a promise to send JS notes on breeding ducks and notes that the RAOU Campout that was to have been in the South East has been moved to Kimba. Jack has been told by a relative near Kimba that it is very dry there, which may spoil the campout. The South East, by contrast, is wet and many low-lying areas are filling with water. JS replies that he looks forward to getting the duck article and that he has passed on Jack's comments about Kimba to Captain White, who is the State Secretary of the RAOU.

There is mention of Jack Hood in SAOA Correspondence from the 1940s and 50s, but no letters from Jack himself. In 1946 a letter from the Secretary, Mr Terrill, let Jack know of the SAOA's policy not to charge subscriptions for those on active service; a later letter (1/9/46) thanks Jack for paying the full amount of subscriptions during the war years and comments of a trip to Buckland Park to check boxes and barrels erected for ducks. Much later, on 3rd July 1955 Gordon Ragless wrote to Jack, giving details of the CSIRO bird-banding scheme. Jack duly joined the scheme and was heavily involved in bird-banding over the next decade or two.

Three more items from the 1964 Correspondence involve Jack. The first is a letter of 17th March to Secretary R F (Bob) Brown, in which Jack gives him names and addresses of locals who could receive a letter inviting them to join the SAOA. The next month he wrote to Bob again hoping that the list was useful

and giving information on the waterfowl species that he has managed to get to breed in nest boxes. The last item is a letter from Herman [?Bakker] of Lucindale of 14th December in which he mentions bird-banding with Jack and I am presuming this could only refer to Jack Hood.

Letters from Jack Hood to John Sutton (except for 23/12/33 which was addressed to J N McGilp). Most letters were headed Bool Lagoon:

22/12/30, 21/3/31, 7/11/31, 6/11/32, 23/12/33, 11/12/33, 18/12/33, 9/1/34, 3/3/34, 8/4/34, 13/8/34, 31/10/34, 28/12/34, 6/1/35, 16/2/35, 22/3/35, 14/5/35, 19/7/35, 23/9/35, 14/3/36, 23/9/36, 22/12/36

Abridged references of J. B. Hood contributions to *SAOrn*:

1932 *SAOrn* 11 (5):140-41
 1934 *SAOrn* 12 (5):177-78
 1934 *SAOrn* 12 (6):207-11
 1935 *SAOrn* 13 (1):18-19
 1935 *SAOrn* 13 (4):107-119
 1936 *SAOrn* 13 (6):175
 1939 *SAOrn* 15 (3): 47-48
 1941 *SAOrn* 15 (8): 125-127
 1958 *SAOrn* 22 (5&6):58
 1966 *SAOrn* 24 (5):96

References

- Kloot, Tess. 1983. RAOU Archives. *RAOU Newsletter* No. 58:10.
 Kloot, Tess. 1995. *Whittell (1618-1950) Supplemented*. Report No. 6, Bird Observers Club of Australia. p. 54.
 Murdoch, Judy. 1991. *Bool Lagoon. A Changing Balance*. Bool Lagoon Hall Committee, Naracoorte.
 Whittell, H.M. 1954. *The Literature of Australian Birds*. Paterson Brokensha Pty Ltd, Perth.

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