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CLUB ACTIVITIES DURING 1965

THE 1965 annual report of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists' Club — the 61st — will be presented to the Club's annual meeting, to be held at the Tasmanian Museum, Hobart, at 8 p. m. on Thursday, February 17, 1966. An advance copy of the report reads:-

Membership: There have been eleven new members elected during the year. The Committee feels that the influx of new members is far from satisfactory and it would urge members to induce others to join in order to make more effective the Club's power to widen the knowledge of Tasmanian natural history and at the same time provide a united front for action in the urgent cause of conservation in Tasmania.

It gave the Committee great pleasure to bestow life membership upon Mr. Alan Brownell, who has given sterling service to the Club over many years.

Meetings: The average number at meetings during the year was 34. We have been fortunate in having on our Committee this year Mrs. J. Greenhill, who undertook to arrange talks for the evening meetings. Following is a brief resume of meetings:-

Feb. 18, 1965, Annual meeting, report and balance sheet, election officers, Presidential address - Mathematics in Nature. March 18, Lecture by Mr. M. Sharland and Mr. L. Wall on egrets in Australia and Tasmania, followed by an interesting film in beautiful colour on egrets. April 22, Open discussion on future form of Easter camps. May 20, Review of Easter Camp at Douglas River; this was reported in three parts, Mr. Sharland on geological aspects, Mr. Milledge on birdlife, and Mr. Wall on camp activities. June 17, Mr. Norman Sanders, an American Fullbright Scholar in the Geography Department of the University of Tasmania gave an interesting illustrated account of America's 49th State — Alaska. July 15, Mrs. J. Greenhill gave an illustrated lecture on ants and their habits.

In August the meeting was suspended for that month to allow members to attend an ANZAAS conference public lecture on conservation by Professor Turner at the Hobart Town Hall. It was pleasing to see our Club well represented at this meeting. Sept. 16, Dr. M. Gilbert gave a most informative illustrated talk on Eucalypts. Oct. 21, Miss J. Richardson gave an illustrated talk on alpine flowers in Norway and Tasmania. Nov. 11, Mr. Spencer gave an illustrated talk on Gallipoli and the Mediterranean which he had re-visited recently.

Field Outings: The following excursions were held during the year:- Feb. 20, Conningham (Mr. R. Hewer leader). March 20, Wellington Falls (Mr. Hurburgh). May 22, Gunners Quoin (Mr. A. Hewer). June 19, Dredging trip D'Entrecasteaux Channel (Dr. Guiler). July 24, Hastings area (Mr. Wall). Sept. 19, Mt. Wellington (Dr. Gilbert). Oct. 23, Table Mt. (Mr. Wall). Nov. 20, Hope Beach (Mr. Hurburgh). Easter Camp, April 16 - 20.

Camp at Douglas River: As mentioned fully in "The Tasmanian Naturalist", the camp this year was held at the Douglas River on Tasmania's East Coast. Including children, there were 40 people present. Each party catered and cooked for itself.

This method of camping is likely to continue until some members feel the urge to accept the duty of organising and establishing the former kind of camps when most who attended had everything done for them and cooks were engaged. Under this new system members are able to use the Club's equipment at low cost. They make their own arrangements for transport and fix their own tents. Improvements in the system of each party looking after itself will be introduced in the light of experience and practicability.

Committee meetings: Five meetings were held during the year. The Club's representatives gave full support during the year to the following organisations: - South-West Committee, Mr. M. Sharland; Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee, Mr. A. Hewer; Federation of Field Naturalist Clubs of Tasmania, Mr. L. E. Wall and Mr. Hurburgh; Mt. Field National Park Board, Mr. Hurburgh. All in all the Club has had a successful year, but much progress can still be made to make the Club stronger if plans proposed by the Committee can be brought to fruition. Grateful thanks are expressed by the President to all who so ably helped during the year, especially those members of the Committee who took upon themselves acting secretarial duties during the illness of our Secretary, to whom we wish a speedy recovery.

M. HURBURGH (President), Hobart. Tas.

CLUB OFFICERS FOR 1966

AT the annual meeting in February officers for the ensuing twelve months will be appointed. In some positions there are likely to be vacancies and members should think about nominating their choice. The Club's present officers, are :- President, Mr. M. Hurburgh; vice-presidents, Messrs. M. Sharland and A. Hewer; Hon. Treasurer, Mr. F. Angel; Hon. Secretary, Miss Vera Jones; assistant Hon. Secretary, Miss R. Forsyth; general committee, Mesdames Thorpe and J. Greenhill, Miss E. Aves, Messrs. L. E. Wall, D. Thomas, R. Hewer; Talks Organiser, Mrs. Greenhill; unofficial Hon. Editor, Michael Sharland.

Information Needed: Two West Australian ornithologists, Eric Lindgren and Peter Slater, are preparing a field guide to Australian birds and have noted many gaps in the present state of even elementary knowledge. To make the guide as complete as possible the authors appeal to any person interested to supply information about the following: 1, Nesting data, e. g. incubation and fledging times; 2, migration, arrival and departure dates of any regular migrants; 3, distribution records of any unusual species or birds out of their normal range. Any data so received will be acknowledged in the book. Information about even the most common species is welcome, no matter how small or insignificant it seems. Contact Mr. Eric Lindgren, Zoology Department, University of W. A., Nedlands, Western Australia.

Botanists wanted: Are there no amateur botanists these days? Botany once was a strong subject in the Club. But so rarely do we have a talk from members that it seems to have faded out. We should encourage more to take an interest in it. The need is for botanists as members, who can talk, and lead us on outings. If you know of any up-and-coming botanist, rope him in. Someone might happen to catch one in a mist-net. Don't let him get away!

Thylacine: From the back country reports continue to filter in about the supposed occurrence of the Tasmanian marsupial "tiger", (Thylacine). By some this marsupial predator, an endemic Tasmanian animal, is believed extinct, having been "lost" for a matter of thirty years or so. It resembles a wolf more than a true tiger, its name coming from the vertical stripes over back, flanks and tail. Some recent reports from the West Coast have been accepted by game authorities as indicating that in this wild region the Thylacine is still living. We hope this is really the case.

"RE-CHRISTENING" OUR BIRDS

QUITE a number of Australian birds have been the subjects of "re-christening" in recent years.

In the cases of generic and specific names this has been brought about, mainly, by the discovery of terms having priority over those latterly used, and/or by the transfer of a particular bird from one genus or species to another. Such considerations are weighty, no doubt, but for many bird-students (and especially those who have "lost" certain names soon after learning them), the changes are nothing more than "a dashed nuisance".

Personally, I am disposed to share that feeling at the moment, having just laboured over numerous amendments to both generic and specific names for a third (forthcoming) edition of "What Bird Is That?" - - this only seven years after the appearance of the heavily revised second edition. From a public viewpoint, however, it is not the "Sunday" names of birds that matter most, but the popular ones, the vernaculars. Appreciation of this fact as a youth caused me to write, in 1915, an article entitled "Birds and their Names" in the "Education Gazette" of Victoria, and I have been hammering at the same subject, from time to time, ever since.

It may seem, perhaps, a pretty poor record for a journalist, with publishing mediums at command in various States (plus membership of the Vernaculars Committee of the R. A. O. U. Checklist, 1926, and the chairmanship of a similar and more recent committee), to have labored at such a subject for fifty years without reaching an end. In fact, though, it is no easy matter to hit upon simple and appropriate names for all the birds of any large country (the Australian roll-call is approximately 700 species), and, further, there is the consideration that many useful changes were made in the 1926 Checklist and others have been introduced since then.

It used to be said by conservative oldtimers that changes in vernaculars would never catch on. That was nonsense. No one thinks now of referring to Whistlers as "thickheads". Nor, to cite just a few individual examples, does anyone yearn to refer to the Regent Honeyeater as "warty-faced", or to re-apply the label "fasciated" to the Mangrove Honeyeater, or to go back to "warbling grass-parakeet" instead of Budgerigar?

Similarly, if we could discard certain other names that still disfigure our avian nomenclature, they never would be missed.

The need, obviously, is to substitute - - whenever possible - - engaging and descriptive terms for any that are indefinite, derogatory, or cumbersome. One or more of these objections prevail in the cases of wrens, so-called, (grass, ground, field, scrub, etc., mean little or nothing), and also with some members of the numerous group of honeyeaters. Moreover, "quadruplet" names such as black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Golden-headed Fantail-warbler (for the little tailor-bird), and Narrow-billed Bronze-cuckoo are unduly cumbersome.

Yet another label that should be scrapped is Noisy Scrub-bird, as applied to a Western Australian species possessing a voice as flexible as that of a Nightingale - - the term, like so many others, was slapped on in haphazard fashion in the days of discovery and has, for lack of anything better, remained "stuck".

It should scarcely be necessary to add that we also need Commonwealth-wide uniformity in the use of popular bird-names. In my view, Tasmania's use of "Black Magpie" and "Black Jay" for two currawongs is regrettable, and, in greater measure, so is Western Australia's parochial use of "King Parrot" (a name pre-occupied in the east) for the Red-capped Parrot, and the applying of the trivial term "squeaker" to the Grey Currawong.

Pray let us have, too, uniformity in the writing of names. Compound words such as butcher-bird, wood-swallow, and tree-creeper should be either hyphenated or made one word (e. g. treecreeper). The tendency overseas is to close up all such words, for example, Hummingbird. The same tendency is extending to adjectival names, so that "narrow-billed" and the like become one word (without the hyphen).

Should we follow suit in this "closing-up" process? Perhaps so. Still, a hyphen can be very handy at times. I miss it sadly in one of the Aboriginal names for a certain dotterel, "Billyjoolbullaglandi"!

MACQUARIE IS. — A SOUTHERN SANCTUARY

IT is not generally known that Tasmania's political boundaries embrace Macquarie Island, some 900 miles south-easterly in sub-Antarctic seas, lat. 54. 37S, long. 158. 54E. In fact it is part of the Tasmanian municipal district of Esperance, though it has no municipal services, nor does it yield any revenue rates. The site of meteorological and physiological observation stations, its permanent residents are seabirds, albatrosses, petrels, penguins, as well as different kinds of fur seals. It is an important breeding ground for southern birds and oceanic mammals, and, indeed, is the only one in a vast expanse of water. The fact that the island is being visited to an increasing extent by scientific parties serves as a reminder that it is being brought much closer to Tasmania in a zoological sense and that our Club must accordingly remain alert to anything that might adversely affect its unique faunal pattern as a natural sanctuary for animal life in sub-Antarctic waters. At present the introduced Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) is well established and eating out natural vegetation, having no normal predators. This problem is now being studied by the Tasmanian Animals and Birds Protection Board, which has jurisdiction over the island. As yet there is no complete list of the birds and mammals of Macquarie Island; so far as the birds are concerned, the island being within Australian territory, the inclusion of these in the next Official Australian Checklist, in the course of preparation, is merited.

It will be recalled that, through pressure from naturalists in several countries, sparked off by our Club, the Tasmanian Government some little time ago was persuaded not to proceed with the issue of a sealing lease which may well have led to the opening of the island to commercial exploitation.

MICHAEL SHARLAND, Hobart, Tasmania

ASCENT OF TABLE MOUNTAIN

ONE of the Club's recent excursions was to Table Mt., an outstanding landmark on the south-eastern edge of the Central Plateau and just south of Lakes Sorell and Crescent. We travelled from Hobart to Bothwell and then took the Interlaken road through open savannah woodland, climbing gradually to an altitude of about 2, 500 ft. Here we noticed a Blue-winged Parrot, Green Rosellas, Pallid Cuckoos, Dusky Wood-swallows and a Native Hen.

Turning off this road we followed an old timber-mill track which enabled us to take our cars to within about a mile of the summit at the western end of the plateau. On the lower slopes there was fairly heavy eucalypt forest with occasional patches of tea-tree and other scrub in damp situations, in one of which the unmistakable call of the Olive Whistler was heard. Birds of the forest included the Clinking Currawong, Grey Thrush, Brown Thornbill, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Blue Wren, Flame Robin, Yellow-tipped (Striated) Pardalote, Black-headed Honeyeater and Crescent Honeyeater.

The final ascent was up a very steep slope, now denuded of trees by bushfires but well clothed with native grasses, and then a scramble up a "chimney" between tall dolerite columns. The summit is only a few yards from this cliff, and its altitude is 3, 582 ft.

The plateau slopes very gradually to the east and supports a forest of *Eucalyptus coccifera* (Snow Gum) and *E. gunnii* with a good understorey of shrubs - Mountain Berry (*Cyathodes parvifolia*), a hakea, a leucopogon and *Richea procera*, which I was surprised to find. One small *Casuarina* was the only other tree seen on this part of the plateau. About half a mile eastward from the summit is a marshy area with patches of Woolly Tea-Tree (*Leptospermum lanigerum*) and large areas of a Cushion Plant, one of Tasmania's unique alpiners, which forms dense firm mats of moss-like foliage. Only three birds were seen in the higher parts. Before the summit was reached a Peregrine Falcon flew overhead, and on the plateau were many Yellow-throated Honeyeaters and a few Crescent Honeyeaters, both to be expected in these conditions.

L. E. WALL, Hobart, Tas.

Subscriptions: Subscriptions for 1966 are now due. Your Bulletin may emphasise the point. And donations would be welcomed, too, to keep your journal going. All subscriptions are up this year to the extent of 20 cents (2/-), and to subscriber-members future price of the "Naturalist" will be 40 cents a year, for four issues.