

OBITUARY — JAMES PRICKETT

The news of the death of James Prickett in January, 1962, will have brought a sense of real personal loss to a wide circle of fellow naturalists. "Jim" came to New Zealand as a boy in 1907 from Westmorland where the birds of the fells had already begun to arouse his interest. During a long and active life he served in the Australian forces in World War I and later became a successful and highly regarded business man in Auckland.

He was an intrepid motorist; and such was his love of the countryside that during his week-ends he explored nearly every lane and side-road that led to the bush or coast for many miles north and south of Auckland. After an interest in botany had taken him into many quiet corners, he turned more and more in his later years to the study of birds, especially with a set of powerful cameras; and while he continued to work at his business, his lunch was often eaten with a friend on the old Puketutu causeway among the waders or on the northern motorway in search of White Herons. Here on one occasion he took with him a well-known New Zealand cricketer, a fast bowler who, by throwing stones with nicely judged accuracy, forced Kotuku to fly from its roosting tree. Jim had his telephoto lined up and obtained two supremely beautiful flight photographs.

If a rare bird was reported, especially a large one, distance was no object. He was particularly active in the winter of 1957, when there was an irruption of large Australian birds. He obtained colour pictures, sometimes under dismal conditions, of White and Glossy Ibises, Little Egret; and ultimately he had the unique distinction of having photographed Royal Spoonbills in colour in four localities; Manawatu estuary, Manukau, Kaipara and Parengarenga. Among other rarities which fell to his camera were Fairy Terns at Te Arai, Black-fronted Terns on a derelict jetty in Kaipara, Curlews in the rain at Miranda; a Banded Rail in colour-movie, gesticulating near its nest at Middlemore Hospital; three Asiatic Black-tailed Godwits with a White-winged Black Tern overhead against a background of autumn tints in the Firth of Thames. But like all true bird photographers he was happy to sit in a hide, patiently enduring the heat and constriction. It was from Don Urquhart's hide at Karaka that some of his best pictures were taken, really superb studies of Godwits.

A most generous and helpful member of the Auckland team of bird-watchers, he was the obvious choice to be called upon to act as host to transient ornithologists, who had just a few hours to see some New Zealand birds. Without his jolly Pickwickian presence Field Study week-ends will not be quite the same. On his many excursions in search of birds and plants both in New Zealand and Australia he was ably and devotedly supported by Mrs. Prickett, to whom the Society offers its sympathy.

— R.B.S.