

## OBITUARY

ARTHUR THOMAS PYCROFT whose death occurred in Auckland on 26 November 1971 at the age of ninety-six years identified himself with the history and natural history of the country between Auckland and the Bay of Islands to a degree not equalled by any contemporary, and not as yet accorded an appropriate rating in the annals of amateur naturalists in New Zealand. His professional life was spent in the service of the Railways Department and his first posting was Opuia at the end of the branch line which brought coal from Hikurangi and Kawa Kawa and timber from elsewhere to the then busy little port. It was here that he forged firm links with the Maori and colonial history of the north based on personal contact with many surviving participants. His interest in natural history seems to have been a spontaneous growth. Indicative of his powers of observation is the letter which he sent to Sir Walter Buller in 1896 describing and forwarding specimens of what turned out to be the Little Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*), then a new record. As quoted by Buller, the letter (*Transactions of the N.Z. Institute* XXIX: 197) is notable for the clear presentation of the data in an easy, scholarly, but modest style. Birds were only part of his wide-ranging interest in nature, which was enhanced greatly by the similar interests shared by his wife Minna (nee Harris), who was an accomplished artist with an exquisite touch and an intimate knowledge of native plants.

On transfer to metropolitan Auckland the Pycrofts named their first Parnell home "Okaiato" as a firm Bay of Islands link. It was notable for its warm hospitality to those of kindred interests and the nucleus of a library of New Zealand books which later became one of the best-known private collections in New Zealand. To devote himself more fully to his many interests Arthur Pycroft negotiated an early retirement from the N.Z. Railways, entering in a sense a new lease of life which spanned another forty years. Inevitably he associated himself with the Auckland Institute and Museum, and gave notable service as a Councillor, and eventually as President. It would be hard to say whether his books, his garden, or natural history field trips gave him the most satisfaction. He certainly appreciated the improved access to outlying islands provided by the seagoing launches of his friends Bert Deeming and Bernard Sladden. On one such trip he suggested a visit to Hen Island to find out if Cook's Petrel really bred there as Reischek had suggested. When the bird so masquerading was found it turned out to be undescribed and can now appropriately be known as Pycroft's Petrel.

Pycroft had no ambition to be an author of papers and after his first was published in 1898 (*Transactions of the N.Z. Institute* XXXI: 141-146) seldom appeared in print, except as the writer of a weekly column "Ways of the Wild" in the *Auckland Star*. These articles contain much of reference value, and have quite lately been quoted in papers in *Notornis* for their pertinent data of a 1929 expedition to the Kermadec Islands. To his younger contemporaries, now themselves contemplating some kind of retirement, Arthur Pycroft always gave unselfish encouragement, and will be remembered for his gentle courtesy and the enthusiasms which seemed to keep him eternally young.

R.A.F.