

OBITUARY

G. M. TURNER

New Zealand owes much to the many Englishmen who brought to the home of their adoption an appreciation of nature and trained habits of observation. Some like T. H. Potts left unpublished records which have increased in value with the years. Others from modesty or other reasons were content to share their enthusiasms and their insights with contemporaries of like-mind, and are not likely to be remembered beyond their own period and generation. It would be a pity if the contribution of George M. Turner was not accorded some record in more detail than was possible in several newspapers at the time of his death in Nelson on 21 October 1973 at the age of 80.

George Middleton Turner was born in Birmingham and as a young man was commissioned in the British Territorial Army of 1914. Severely wounded in France, he underwent extensive surgical treatment for head injuries and a long period of convalescence. Feeling at last able to think of a career, he decided on sheepfarming in New Zealand, and prepared himself by taking a wool-classing course in Bradford. When he came to New Zealand in the early nineteen-twenties he made a leisurely journey to look the country over. What he saw, aided perhaps by a re-appraisal of his own state of health, changed his plans. He fell in love with Stewart Island, bought a comfortable cottage in Half Moon Bay, and settled down to what was to be a residence of about thirty years. Accompanied often by Roy Traill he explored every part of Paterson Inlet and trekked into the regions beyond. Still further afield he accompanied local fishermen and muttonbirders. An outstanding photographic record, both still and 16 mm motion picture, was one result, for George Turner was a skilled photographer, meticulous in the care of his equipment, as he was with his launch *Pearl* and his island home "Raroa." But his interests were not self-centred or eccentric, and he identified himself with community life serving variously as churchwarden and county councillor, for one period, 1937-39, as chairman. His home was a centre of hospitality and he was always willing to give illustrated talks to any local gathering.

When his reputation as a lecturer spread beyond Stewart Island, audiences throughout New Zealand were privileged to hear him and see his remarkable nature films on visits which he undertook entirely at his own expense. Particularly he was interested in sponsoring or joining expeditions to out of the way places. He voyaged on the Government Steamer *Tutanekai* on the last complete round trip to close castaway depots on the subantarctic islands in 1927. An ambition to go back prompted him to offer a substantial sum as a subsidy for a scientific expedition in 1934 but the Marine Department was unable or unwilling to respond, and it was another thirty years and near the

end of his life before Turner was able to re-visit the Auckland Islands in a small fishing boat which was prospecting for crayfish and spider crabs. He took an active and helpful part in scientific expeditions to the Three Kings in 1934 and Codfish Island in 1949. He married late, and his wife Kathleen, by whom he was pre-deceased, was a loyal partner in the later Stewart Island years and in their retirement home in Nelson.

Apart from articles on muttonbirding contributed to *Wanderlust* magazine and a few others to newspapers, Turner confined his recording to photography. His still photographs have been widely used by many authors. His silent films, less widely known of course, have not only historic value in such topics as past methods of muttonbirding, but also permanent value as a natural history record. One sequence showing the movements of a compact autumn flock of Red-breasted Dotterel in Paterson Inlet depicts more birds in a single flock than have been recorded by any other observer of this species. Negatives and original film footage have been acquired by the New Zealand Forest Service and are held by the Southland Conservancy.

R. A. F.

[An obituary of Captain Turner appeared under the heading "Had close links with Stewart Island" in the *Nelson Evening Mail* of 24 October 1973. — Ed.]



ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

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JOHN COOPER is a Research Assistant of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, South Africa. He received his undergraduate training at the University of Rhodesia. During 1971/1972 he was employed by the South African National Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) under a grant from the South African Nature Foundation to study the Jackass Penguin, *Spheniscus demersus*. The penguin is threatened by oiling and the fishing industry.

Present interests centre on physiological/ecological investigations into growth, diet, guano production, metabolic rates and thermoregulatory behaviours of South African seabirds. Species studied to date include the Jackass Penguin, the Cape Gannet (*Sula capensis*) and the Dominican Gull (*Larus dominicanus*).

Other interests include the distribution of pelagic seabirds in South African waters, ringing and censusing migrant waders and the conservation of bird habitats.