

**OBITUARY**  
**BETH BROWN**  
**1924-1993**



Beth Brown was a talented Hawkes Bay girl who loved country life. Her father kept his launch at an anchorage which the Napier earthquake of 1931 turned into drying land. Family holidays introduced Beth to Lake Taupo.

In 1946 she married John Brown after his return from service with the R.N.Z.A.F. Coastal Command in Britain. They began married life on a sheep farm which was part of the famous Guthrie-Smith estate at Tutira. In 1953 when John switched to horticulture they moved north to Papakura. They also built a holiday batch on the south shore of the Manukau Harbour. There they became curious about the variations in the plumage of stilts and also about seasonal fluctuations in their number.

In 1963 Beth joined O.S.N.Z. and came under the influence of H.R. McKenzie, who was later to describe her as his best disciple. Ten years later his mantle fell on her when she succeeded him as Regional Representative for South Auckland. In 1978 Beth was elected to the council of the O.S.N.Z. and in 1983 she was the first woman to become President. In 1987 she was re-elected for a second term but in 1988 failing health forced her to resign.

For quarter of a century Beth was a very active member playing a responsible part in surveys and study courses in both North and South Islands.

In the field Beth was thorough and seemingly tireless. She loved watching shorebirds and her diligence was rewarded by her sharing in the finding of

such New Zealand rarities as Dunlin, Lesser Yellowlegs, Grey Phalararope and Asiatic Dowitcher.

In her own region her gentle powers of persuasion helped to maintain in all weathers the tradition of summer and winter censuses of shorebirds in two large and important inlets. At the end of the exercise when the day's bird counting was over, laughter was never far away as long as Beth was present and on the job. She may rightly be called the Founding Mother of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

The Society recognised the value of her services and of her contribution to the field study of New Zealand birds when, in 1991 she was the recipient of the Robert Falla Memorial Award.

In pursuit of her hobby with its many activities and duties, Beth had the full support of John to whom the Society offers its sympathy with thanks.

R.B. Sibson

Beth brought a special quality to any birding occasion, whether a meeting, a field trip or a camping expedition. Intensely perceptive, she always respected the personal privacy of those taking part, while encouraging their participation to the full. She always made new members feel welcome and never stinted in passing on her great fund of knowledge.

Though unfailingly loyal to South Auckland throughout her years with the Society she always sought involvement with other regions and had the welfare of the Society as a whole very much at heart.

Beginning in 1970 she and John organized four camping trips to different areas of Fiji which added to the sparse knowledge of the local birds. In these John's practical skills and gift for liaising with local people played an important part. A fifth trip to Western Samoa was also planned but for family reasons Beth was unable to take part. She also visited the Cook Islands, including Mangaia, and then shortly before she became ill she took part in one of the Australasian Wader Study Group expeditions to North-West Australia.

In spite of being an acknowledged wader expert, Beth also found great pleasure in bush birds and was extremely interested in the falling population of Kokako in the Hunua ranges, while her November trips to Little Barrier were legendary and enjoyed by members from all over the country.

Above all she had a delight in life and all living things—from tiny flowers, insects, fungi to birds, animals, friends and family. Not appreciated were any lack of delicacy or crudeness of behaviour or speech. She had a great talent for, and pleasure in, sounds and words and not suprisingly she wrote poetry.

Beth was always exploring the possibility of the moment, and even during her years as a semi-invalid she was able from their beautiful home to watch the behaviour of the kereru in the bushy valley below and ponder over the destinations of birds passing overhead. Beth was one of the outstanding women of the Society and leaves a gap that will not easily be filled. Our sympathy is with John and her family whose loss is even greater.

Anthea Goodwin