

Obituary — Ronald Mathias Lockley (1903-2000)

In his 97th year, Ronald Lockley died on 12 April 2000 at the Country Lodge, Te Puke, where he had spent the final years of his life near to the home of his daughter Ann Mark and her family. Eminent as a naturalist, a writer, and a pioneering advocate for conservation projects, Ronald Lockley had migrated from his native Wales to the Auckland suburb of Glendowie in 1970. From that base he remained an active member of the international community for 25 further years. He also took a valuable part in local ornithology, particularly with Sylvia Reed during her 13 years as Regional Representative, and through Miranda Naturalists' Trust of which he was a founding Council Member.

Ronald Lockley offered generous support to many environmental groups besides Miranda Trust, notably Forest & Bird as Auckland Branch Chairman. His influence was crucial in securing several new reserves for habitat protection and his book *The house above the sea* marks a dedication to such efforts. Its title refers to his home adjacent to the Tamaki Estuary with its important wader roosts of which he was a staunch guardian, founding the Tahuna Torea Nature Reserve in 1975. Establishing wildlife reserves was second nature to Ronald!

Few have lived fuller lives than Ronald Lockley. As a young man he dwelt on the Pembrokeshire island of Skokholm where he established one of the first bird observatories in the world. During the Second World War period he farmed in South West England as an essential occupation. In the 1950s when myxomatosis was rampant in Britain he investigated the behaviour of wild rabbits on behalf of the Nature Conservancy. However birds were his first love and ornithological studies were the subject of many reports during his years in the British Isles. He continued these activities in New Zealand as a sage contributor to OSNZ meetings and

surveys; an instance being the visit by 17 members to Savai'i, Western Samoa, in 1979, reported in *Notornis* 27: 151-159. There, Ronald led mist-netting and banding operations; the oldest member of our party and among the most active – on the dance floor at the village feast, as well as in the field.

As obituaries in *The Times* and elsewhere have testified, Ronald Lockley was one of the 20th Century's foremost nature writers with more than 50 books to his credit. Among these are his important monographs on shearwaters and puffins, *Dream Island*, and other accounts of his life on Skokholm, and various guides and travel books to Wales and elsewhere, usually with a strong element of natural history. Works with southern themes include the pictorial volume *New Zealand's birds* (with Geoff Moon's photographs) and several books with a clear conservation message of which *Man against Nature* and *New Zealand endangered species* (with Noel Cusa's paintings) are good examples.

Readers who enjoy autobiography can turn with pleasure to a series of books by Ronald Lockley, especially *The way to an island*, *Myself when young - The making of a naturalist*, and *Orielton*. The research conducted at the Welsh manor Orielton became *The private life of the rabbit*, used later by Richard Adams to provide details for *Watership Down*. This claim to fame aside, Lockley's book is a gem of scientific data for the non-specialist audience. Echoing the words of Eric Hosking, "It would be difficult to discover a more dedicated naturalist than Ronald Lockley." Earlier, Ronald had written a biography of Gilbert White, author of *The natural history of Selborne*. The link is apt; their approach epitomises inquiry for the love of the subject which lies at the heart of ornithology.

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Errata

(1) The following Short Note was omitted from the list of Contents of Volume 48, number 1
Keeley, B.R. 2001. Foot-trembling in the spur-winged plover (*Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*). *Notornis* 48(1): 59-60.

(2) In the South Island Classified Notes for 1996-997 *Notornis* 48(2): 86, the record under black-backed gull (*Larus dominicanus*) of immature birds acting like skimmers at the Ashley Estuary reported by Tony Crocker, actually referred to black-billed gulls (*Larus bulleri*).