

After retirement in 1981, John continued long-term work on a sparse population of rabbits in the Orongorongo Valley. He also started bird counts in the bush fringing his Lower Hutt garden, publishing the results of those 25 years of observations in *Notornis* in 2001, his last paper.

He was not a prolific writer, but the quality is ample compensation; and despite ill-health he

managed to print practically all his material- a favourite joke was that publication deadlines become literal as one gets older. New Zealand ornithologists have lost a friend and champion many were unaware they had. We extend our sympathy to all his family.

John E. C. Flux

## Obituary

### Kaj Ejvind Westerskov

1919 - 2003



The modern study of ornithology in New Zealand has benefited greatly from the intellectual contributions and techniques of those professional practitioners who migrated here. Kaj Westerskov was, with F.C. Kinsky and K.A. Wodzicki, one of three European

ornithologists and ecologists arriving in the 1940s and early 1950s who were to have a lasting influence in their adopted home.

Born in Vejle, Denmark, Kaj was attracted to the outdoors at an early age, starting to keep a bird diary at the age of 12 and publishing his first paper on observations of the Great Ringed Plover in 1936. He went on to watch, research, teach and write about birds throughout a career where birds of the feathered variety were work, hobby and life. His early ornithological expertise and research on black grouse provided a cover for his gathering information (as a member of the resistance) about airstrips being built by German occupation forces. Caught cycling down a runway without lights he was able to convince one of his German captors (a hunter in peacetime) that he was checking the "booming" calls of grouse, and was duly released. Together with Kirsten Dons (later his wife), he was apprehended boating near a bridge to check if it was wired with explosives, and again a "bird study" explanation came to their rescue. His book on black grouse, published in 1943 during wartime when aged 23, is still regarded as one of the best of its kind.

After the war he obtained a Diploma in Forestry at the Danish Forestry School, before graduating

MSc in wildlife biology from Ohio State University and returning to a post as biologist at the Danish Game Research Station. Here his major research interest was in the ecology of game birds. The decision to migrate and settle in New Zealand during 1952 was a major transition in the lives of the family (three children each born in a different country), but was to cement a pattern of regular migratory worldwide travel throughout a many faceted life.

Appointed as a research scientist with the Wildlife Service, Department of Internal Affairs, he was quickly involved in research on pheasant populations which led, in 1956, to a PhD from Victoria University of Wellington and the publication of an important monograph. His first place of work was at Turangi – in living quarters for two years with no running water or electricity! Moving to Wellington there were regular weekend visits to the game farm at Bulls in the Manawatu to monitor the breeding of grey partridge that were introduced to New Zealand under his mentoring.

From game birds Kaj traversed to large birds – especially albatrosses – when he participated in the Denver Museum of Natural History Expedition to remote Campbell Island in early 1958. He was responsible for the collection of many of the specimens making up the spectacular diorama in that Museum today, while his own studies led to a number of publications on the birds of Campbell Island, and particularly of the royal albatrosses. This interest was continued in some of the studies at the Taiaroa Head albatross colony in Dunedin after Lance Richdale retired and while Stan Sharpe was still the ranger.

He was head of the research section of the Wildlife Service from 1960-1964. During his time with the Wildlife Service he published widely on a range of other topics, in a number of languages, and not confined only to birds resident in New Zealand e.g., bird counts in Matamata, pheasants (a wide range of issues here and overseas), bird pox in New Zealand pipit, taxonomic status of the redpoll in New Zealand, spread of the magpie, bobwhite quail, the Danish partridge as a game bird (a wide range of issues here and overseas); training for

the wildlife profession; the preservation of island avifaunas of New Zealand; and conservation in New Zealand. In 1961, he was awarded a Canadian National Research Council Fellowship and spent a year at the University of Alberta where he successfully extended his research on partridge commenced in Ohio in the 1940s.

The importance of managing wildlife had clearly been deeply ingrained throughout this period and, in 1964, he shifted south to Dunedin to commence a Readership in Animal Ecology at the Zoology Department, Otago University. The following year he introduced the one-year post-graduate Diploma in Wildlife Management – a first for Australasia. Until his retirement from Otago in 1985 as Assistant Professor of Zoology, his course was a practical expression of the appreciation of applied wildlife studies. He supervised 69 post-graduate research students during this time and his influences survive today in the field of conservation and game management in New Zealand. He was remembered for his broad-minded and practical approach – appreciating the deer and bird both in the wild and on the table. Even dissection of a chicken in the laboratory served both an academic and culinary purpose, with instructions for the breasts of the chicken to be removed with care and with the addition of vegetables in a pressure cooker, to be served once the class ended. Even Kirsten's culinary expertise was of assistance, with many ornithological field trips finishing with fine Danish pastries at the professorial home.

A keen outdoorsman, deerstalker, duck shooter and fisherman Kaj was always keen to talk, to educate and to write. During his university career his writings continued to cover a broad international spectrum – on Australian brolga, marsh crake; grebes and the southern crested grebe, pheasants and partridges, New Zealand parrots, chukar, pukeko, white-capped noddy; on historic figures e.g., Professor Erwin Stresemann, Johannes Carl Andersen and Reischek's observations of kokako, kakapo, and his ornithological collecting in New Zealand; and on general topics such as

principles of wildlife management and the effects of man and introduced mammals on the fauna of New Zealand. He also published his popular book *Know your New Zealand birds*.

For one so widely travelled it was appropriate that he should be honoured by various international awards, as Fellow of The Explorers Club (New York) in 1979, Honorary Membership of The Wildlife Society (1980), Fellow of the Linnean Society (1986) and as a member of the International Ornithological Committee. He was active within the University, being at various times acting Head of Department, President of the Lecturers Association, while outside activities included the executive of the Otago Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand. In the field of conservation he served both as president of the Otago Branch and also on the national executive of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society. As a Rotarian he took the rare occupational classification of ornithologist and was on one occasion with a visiting Rotary colleague of the same classification charitably fined for conducting a serious academic discussion of the classification of albatrosses at the dinner table. During Team New Zealand's first defence of the America's Cup, and watching a race on the TV with the same colleague, the viewing rapidly evolved into a discussion of the mechanics and patterns of albatross flight demonstrated by the peak of modern sailing techniques.

Like all good educators Kaj touched the lives of many individuals. His final monumental work – a dictionary of New Zealand ornithology that was almost complete at the time of his death – may yet prove to be his most important contribution to his adopted country. He lived an active and varied life, firm in his belief that good science should support the principles of good wildlife management and of the necessity to use New Zealand's natural resources wisely. Kirsten and his three children, Kim, Laila and Tui, who all contributed to and participated in his endeavours, survive him.

C.J.R. Robertson