

## OBITUARY

### HELEN OLIVER 1904-1985

Helen Oliver died on 8 November 1985 at the age of 81. Younger members will not realise how much the Society owed to her. During the period of rapid expansion she acted as Assistant Treasurer in 1951 and 1952, as well as taking part in banding activities.

Born on 12 March 1904 of a well-respected Wairarapa farming family, Helen Laing, as she was, attended Solway College in Masterton, being Dux in 1920. After an office career she attended the Library School for a year in 1950 and became a librarian in the Masterton Public Library. She spent some years overseas: in the U.K. in 1937 and 1969, and in 1955 tracing family history: in the Himalayas (1945), and during the war with the Ministry of Supply, the Middle East, of which she used to recount many lurid tales. In 1956 she married Dr W.R.B. Oliver, Director of the Dominion Museum, and further cemented her interest in ornithology. After he died in 1957 she joined the Wildlife Division of Internal Affairs and was again involved in library work.

Her greatest contribution to ornithology was the compilation of the *Annotated Index to Some Early New Zealand Bird Literature* (1968, Wildlife Pub. No. 106, Dept. Int. Aff.). I am not aware that this has ever been reviewed but it is a 222 page (plus x) bibliography of important ornithological literature from 1843 to 1900. Every mention of species is indexed (with a precis of the information) from ten works, including G.R. Gray's *List of Birds . . . with their Synonyms* (IN Dieffenbach 1843, *Travels in New Zealand*); *Catalogue of the Birds of New Zealand* (Hutton 1871); and the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* (Vol. 1-33, 1868-1900). The latter in particular contain much information not known about or ignored by many modern ornithologists, who would be well advised to study these references. The *Annotated Index* is in four sections: Systematic, Geographic Distribution, Subject and Author. There is also a Glossary of the meanings of the scientific names. The work may be regarded as extremely accurate as every entry was checked by Sir Charles Fleming or the late Sir Robert Falla (and the Glossary by R.B. Sibson).

Helen Oliver was an active member of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and members of the Wellington group of the Ornithological Society will remember her participating in many of their field outings and evening meetings.

J.M.C.