



Helen Oliver (1904-1985) compiled her 1968 opus, *Annotated index to some early New Zealand bird literature* as a labour of love during her time as Librarian of the Department of Internal Affairs library when located in Bowen State Building, Wellington. She had, as adjacent company, staff of the Wildlife Service, and for whom Helen was quite the most obliging and meticulous researcher and information provider. Her obituary (*Notornis* 33(1): 68) and Sir Charles Fleming's forward to the *Index* given voice to the scale of her work and its inestimable value to students, scholars and researchers alike, especially during the pre-digital era.

Easily overlooked is the immensity of her effort and the diligence that it required. Every entry in the *Index* started life as a hand-written entry on an edge-notched card – the data management technology of the time¹. Hand-written because there were no photocopiers then either. Helen would stay on in the library after hours, two-three nights each week, to work her way through each volume of the journals and books she had access to. Text on each card was double-checked against the original. Hundreds of cards were assembled, and then the task of their sorting. The edge notches were clipped according to species and descriptive content, and then, by the insertion of a long rod into a hole specific to the information of interest, cards were shaken to separate them from all others.

If the pages of the *Index* show a typeface unfamiliar today, it is because it arose from a lever-action typewriter. Although electric typewriters with golf-ball print heads had only just been introduced, only the Department's typing pool was a recipient of the new technology, not Helen's library. The entire *Index* was typed by Helen on her old lever-action typewriter with its scant ability for correction of any inadvertent "typo". A careful and meticulous proof-reading stage followed; doubtless many pages of the *Index* were typed multiple times before a clean copy emerged.

Publication of the *Index* as Wildlife Publication No. 106 provided a mechanism by which the Department of Internal Affairs could distribute it widely to every civic, university, and research library and ensure it would be stored forever in the National Library collection. For the first two decades after its publication, the *Index* was a well-known and extensively consulted study resource, consulted although rarely referenced. However, time and the widespread digitisation of contemporary, and much historic, avian literature has resulted in the *Index* disappearing from many library collections and its enduring value increasingly overlooked. Birds New Zealand's digitisation of Helen Oliver's *Index* seeks to re-introduce it to contemporary ornithologists and ensure lasting recognition of its significant contribution to the study and awareness of New Zealand's avifauna.

Many of the sources in this Index are given as TNZI (Transactions and Proceedings of the NZ Institute). The original material can be accessed via the following links:

- Biodiversity Heritage Library biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/48984 - contains all 55 volumes from 1868 to 1923.
- Papers Past paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/transactions-and-proceedings-of-the-royal-society-of-new-zealand - covers volumes up to 1961.
- Checklist of the Birds of NZ References birdsnz.org.nz/society-publications/checklist/references - contains many hyperlinks to TNZI papers and to other publications listed in Oliver (1968).

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edge-notched_card