

NOTORNIS

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EDITORIAL

‘What do you read, my lord?’

‘Words, words, words.’

W. Shakespeare, ‘Hamlet,’ Act II, Scene II.

Polonius might well have been asking the question of the editor of *Notornis*, or of any other editor for that matter. Words are an editor's life blood but he likes neither too few nor too many of them. It is comforting to have sufficient in hand for the next issue, but as Jeremy Bentham pointed out some 200 years ago: “The more words there are the more doubts may be entertained about them.” A change of editor is an excuse for an editorial which, at least, lets me say a few words about words right at the beginning.

What sort of journal is *Notornis*? Should it be semi-popular or semi-scientific? Or might it be said to be quasi-scientific or even pseudo-scientific? Need it be one thing or the other? I believe that *Notornis*, the journal of a society of over 1,200 members from every walk of life and of every age group, should reflect the interests and activities of that society without restricting itself to either a broadly amateur or narrowly professional approach to ornithology. This, after all, is what brings us together as members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. *Notornis* is, therefore, both a journal of ornithology and the journal of an ornithological society. It is a myth that the leading ornithological journals of the world, such as *The Ibis* and *The Auk*, are exclusively scientific; science and quality are not necessarily synonyms. The membership of the BOU and the AOU is perhaps just as varied as our own. It is, in fact, quite fair and not at all immodest to say that through the efforts of my predecessors, Mr R. H. D. Stidolph (10 years as editor) and Mr R. B. Sibson (15 years), *Notornis* has reached an enviable position amongst the world's bird journals, taking its place, in due proportion, with those of Europe and North America which we know and enjoy. The balance of amateur and professional work which characterises New Zealand ornithology at the present time will be maintained in the pages of *Notornis* and no reader or contributor need fear a change. My first experience as an editor was with a university capping magazine and, as well may be imagined, I quickly learned that it was impossible to please everyone. I do not expect to be any more successful with

Notornis in this respect, but every reader should feel that there will be something of interest for him in each issue. Some papers will appear superficial or inconsequential to certain readers; if they serve to stimulate or encourage more profound work, such contributions will earn their place. Other papers, because of their more technical nature, will appeal only to a limited group of readers. I hope, however, that whatever subject matter appears in *Notornis* will be there for sufficient reason. We are, in fact, in our own hands. Contribute the sort of thing you like to read and the balance will be kept.

What is an editor's job? Surely not to rewrite an author's contribution and yet this is what very often happens even if such was not the intention. There are, it is true, editors who seem to pride themselves that they have a better vocabulary than the author and prefer their words to his. This is an unnecessary demonstration of an editor's talents, destroying not only the author's style, but often his spirit as well. The editor's job, as I see it, is to know the features of a good manuscript and to transform, with the help of both author and printer, whatever is offered to him into an acceptable printed paper worthy of the journal and its readers. This he does by following well-established rules of editorial procedure in assessing it for accuracy, conciseness, clarity, consistency and logic. Because he is neither omniscient nor infallible, he will most often seek advice and criticism from one or more confidential referees. Such referees often go to great trouble to assist both the editor and the author and, contrary to some beliefs, are on the author's side. The Society must be very indebted to them. Referees are not always specialists in the subject of the contribution but may be chosen as intelligent readers able to assess the worth and logic of a contribution, giving a fair judgement on the facts presented and the argument or theory developed from them. Certainly any contribution that is "scientific," that is, one translating an observation into a hypothesis, deserves to be criticised scientifically and rendered intelligible and appealing to the greatest number of its readers. An inflexible system of refereeing, without favour or regard for rank, eminence or age, provides both the author and the journal with what has been called "control by anticipation" of the standards expected of both.

What, then, is the author's job? Primarily, it is to present his contribution in such a way as to make life as easy as possible for the editor, the referee, and the printer. This means, in effect, following the 'Instructions for Authors' carefully and submitting the manuscript in a condition that requires the minimum amount of work to turn it into the printed page. Regrettably, contributions are sometimes received in such a state as to cause much extra work for all who subsequently must handle them. Few of us realise, for instance, how much the Society owes to its printers, Te Rau Press Ltd, Gisborne, who, as was very evident to me on my first visit there, have our interests so much at heart that they have never spared themselves, within the technical resources at their disposal, to help the OSNZ achieve and maintain a fine standard of publication. They are not, however, mind readers, any more than is the editor, and they cannot be expected to achieve perfection unless the best is offered to them.

A detailed 'Instructions for Authors' is given in the final pages of this issue and a shortened version will appear inside the back cover in the future. Please study it carefully and follow it when preparing your next contribution!

Readers of *Notornis* will see some changes in the form and arrangement of this issue and if any of these offend I beg for toleration. Most of the changes have been made for technical reasons, making the printers' task easier and thereby reducing costs for the OSNZ. Other changes bring *Notornis* into line with standard practice for similar publications as given in the "Code of Recommended Practice for the Form and Presentation of Periodicals of Permanent Value" issued by the Standards Association of New Zealand. And who would deny that *Notornis* is a "periodical of permanent value"? Further changes must be anticipated, in particular a complete change over to the use of metric or SI units for all those Imperial measures so familiar to us. Publishers have been asked to go metric during 1972 and surveys and mapping will change officially early in 1973. This may be a confusing time for many of us but contributors are asked to conform to the new system as best they can.

Finally, I would welcome, and indeed encourage, controversy and discussion in the pages of *Notornis*. Too often a paper is printed and becomes accepted fact even if its readers hold contrary views, reticent though they might be in expressing them. Too many myths have already appeared in New Zealand ornithology about matters that are said to be "well known" or are spoken of but never published. Letters to the Editor and critical reviews will always be welcome.

The Editor's desk is clear. We await a flood of well-presented, clearly-expressed and stimulating contributions, short notes, reviews and letters.