

A. J. Hole Bequest

Not many banders would have known of John Hole and few had the privilege of meeting him, yet we will have good cause to remember him. He was appointed a bander in his eightieth year but died about a year later. A Memoir follows.

His interest in the Association and his dedication to banding, even for this brief period was evidenced nearly three years after his death when advice was received that he had bequeathed \$2,000 to the Association and a cheque for that amount was received last January.

The Committee is investigating the various aspects of investment and use of this most generous bequest.

Hon. Editor.

John Hole, Naturalist A Memoir

I can remember the first time I met him as if it were yesterday, a big man, standing erect as on the parade ground, though he was then in his seventy-ninth year, with the clear eyes of a much younger man. Some time previously he had seen on television a feature about Australian bird-banding, so he had written in to become a bird bander.

As he was completely unknown in ornithological circles, Bill Lane was requested, as Regional Organiser, to find out more, and Bill had asked me, as John Hole's nearest banding neighbour, to accompany him. When we had introduced ourselves, John exclaimed, "You are the first ornithologists I have ever met", and this was literally true, for he was entirely self-taught.

The block which he had chosen for his retirement, some dozen or more years previously, ran down to the edge of what was then one of the finest areas of natural bushland among Sydney's northern suburbs, stretching from the grounds of the Pennant Hills Redemptorist Monastery south to Epping and eastwards to Turrumurra and Wahroonga. He once told me with pride that in the years while he had been there, its tranquility had never been disturbed by either fire or shooters. At least he did not live to see it broken into by "developers".

He was full of surprises. In a small *Angophora* in his front lawn was a log housing a colony of stingless native bees, which he had found in the bush some years previously and brought home, bees and all. In the trees at the foot of his block he had put, high up, some nesting boxes, but was sadly disappointed when they were taken over by sugar gliders.

Bill soon assured himself that John Hole not only had an excellent knowledge of the birds of his locality, but that he had the keenness of vision and suppleness of fingers to make him as proficient a bander as most. So, after a few preliminary lessons, a banding licence was issued; then followed eleven months of steady, dedicated banding, interrupted early in the year by a cardiac illness, but before long he had returned to his banding with undiminished enthusiasm. Then, on 21 November 1965, the bush he loved so well turned traitor. In the morning he went for his regular walk in the bush, and when he failed to return at the usual time they went to look for him. But when they found him, he was dead. And so the curtain came down for this remarkable old man, who had taken up bird banding in his eightieth year, at the close of a full and eventful life.

It was my privilege to have known him briefly, and my loss that our friendship was cut short so prematurely. What had motivated his interest in natural history? This I never learned, but Mrs Hole told me that he had always been interested in such things. He had grown up in an English county, and for 26 years had served in the ranks of the British Army, for the first 13 with the 2nd Royal Fusiliers, and for the second 13 with the Irish Guards. Early in this century he was in a detachment which went to Lhasa, where he was fascinated to meet the ptarmigan on the Tibetan hills. He landed from the *River Clyde* at Gallipoli, and later served in France. He told me how once he was standing in the snow above the trenches on a moonlit night when he saw what appeared at first to be a cloud shadow advancing over the snow. But as it came closer it was a horde of rats. He stood perfectly still as they poured over his boots and between his legs, paying no attention to him. Then he went back to the dugout and told his mates, but, he added, "you know, they weren't the least bit interested". He had much more to tell, but it has gone with him.

A. M. Gwynn