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AUSTRALIAN BIRD STUDY — AN EDITORIAL

Historically, bird study concentrated on publishing data relating to taxonomy, species distribution, breeding records and to a lesser extent behavioural observations. With the advent of the CSIRO sponsored, Australian Bird-Banding Scheme in 1953, the collection of a great deal of new information was made possible. Individual birds could now be positively identified and information on movement, longevity, plumage and morphometric data became more meaningful. However, there is a limit to which movement and longevity can be used to assist conservation of avian species. In a recent editorial, Jerome Jackson (*North American Bird Bander* Vol. 8, No. 4, 1983) summarised the advent of this type of banding as "a romantic game, not unlike putting a note in a bottle to be cast adrift with the hope that it would be found and that the finder would respond."

Whilst banders are required to submit a proposed project, I fear that the majority are collecting little more than longevity and movement data on an unstructured basis. This type of information is of interest but adds little to the basic knowledge we desperately require for our avifauna. However, similar data collected under a more structured framework, where population or species density and diversity are correlated with other biological variables such as rainfall, habitat type, food source availability and so on, provide a wealth of usable information that often has never before been published. Importantly, this type of approach is not beyond any amateur bander or bird observer. For instance, correlating honeyeater species diversity

with plant flowering times in a particular area, requires little more than a structured observational schedule throughout the year and positive plant identification. Since we all had to learn bird identification at some point in our training, there can be no excuses for failing basic plant identification. Whether professional or amateur, each of us practises biology by making observations and entering them in our note-books. It is then a simple extension to take this information and communicate it to the ornithological community.

Any banders or observers who are unable to contribute in this way to our general knowledge of birds, should be honest to themselves and admit that their pursuits are self-centered. Too often productive bird study is hindered when contests between individuals for the greatest number of species observed or banded becomes the major goal. I would be the first to admit that I would like to become more familiar with our avifauna by observing and banding as many species as possible but I realise that this should form only a part of the time I devote to bird study. Rather than being dominated by such pursuits, devote a significant portion of your study time to projects which will provide publishable results. Remember, you don't need to be a professional to publish and don't be frightened to admit that much of your research to date might have been better organised.

In 1985 a new style *Corella* will be presented. The changes have been instigated by the ABSA Committee to assist both amateur and pro-

fessional ornithologists, including bird observers and bird banders. There will be more book reviews, literature reviews, 'Bird in the Hand' and other articles which will assist banders and observers in their scientific endeavours. Similarly, a greater diversity of ornithological material will be considered for publication in an attempt to promote contributions from bird observers as well as bird banders. A guide to material suitable for publication in Corella is included in 'Advice to Contributors' appearing on the back cover of the journal. Most importantly, however, the journal will remain readable and of interest to all ornithologists.

As in previous years, 1984 saw a new set of amateur authors experiencing the enjoyment and excitement from having their research published in *Corella* and referenced in an international periodicals directory; they have made a significant contribution to Australian ornithology. Have you?

THE EDITORIAL PROCESS

Having emphasised the importance and pleasure of publishing it is logical that the mysteries of the publication process be explained.

The publication of scientific manuscripts, whether they are written by amateurs or professional scientists, involves a review process wherein every manuscript received is initially screened by the Editor and then dispatched to one or more 'referees' for evaluation. The initial editorial screening establishes whether the subject matter of the article adheres to the guidelines set down by the Committee and Editorial Advisory Panel and aids in the selection of suitable referees. The function of the referee is to assess the suitability and quality of manuscripts for publication and to make recommendations for revision where necessary. It is then the Editor's task to condense the content of these reports and submit to the author those revisions which are deemed essential before publication of the manuscript can take place. However, these recommendations are not presented draconically and the author has the opportunity to argue the validity of any comment. Nevertheless, as it is the Editor who is responsible for both the content and quality of the journal, he or she must make the final decision as to the manuscript's acceptability and revisions needed.

A further point to remember is that Editors of most ornithological journals provide services on a gratis basis. Thus, the scope of their services must be limited. Editors do not have a responsibility to rewrite manuscripts, prepare figures, analyse data or perform literature reviews. These are among the responsibilities of the authors. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that the ABSA Committee continues to uphold the tradition of assisting authors in preparation of their manuscripts.

Prior to submitting a manuscript, an author should:

- (1) Review the literature to ensure that the material has not been published previously. In fact this should be performed prior to the commencement of any research proposal, no matter how simple, so that the most appropriate questions can be posed.
- (2) Follow the style guidelines laid down by the Committee.
- (3) Not plagiarize nor submit the same or modified manuscript to any other journal.
- (4) Present all relevant data in an appropriately analysed form.
- (5) Be precise, concise and don't become anthropomorphic.

Having outlined these responsibilities a potential author should not, however, be intimidated by the complexities. The guidelines are there by design, not to frustrate authors but rather to ensure that their contribution to ornithology is meaningful. Even major revision of a manuscript should not be viewed as a personal affront. "The Editor's and referee's comments should provide the insight that will allow an author to improve his approach to research and writing" (*North American Bird Bander*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1983).

Finally, on behalf of the ABSA Committee, I extend an offer of assistance to all potential authors. This assistance not only applies to the preparation of manuscripts but extends to advice on the planning and execution of research projects. Brief details of requests should be sent to the Editor who will refer them to an advisory panel.

Graham R. Cam (Honorary Editor)