

OBITUARIES

Mitchell Durno Murray (1925 - 2009)



With the sudden death of Durno Murray on Saturday 25 April 2009, the Australian Bird Study Association lost a dedicated member who had provided a vast amount of expertise and time, especially in directing and driving the Seabird Island Series published in *The Australian Bird Bander* and *Corella*.

Mitchell Durno Murray was born in England to Scottish parents in 1925 and spent much of his non-schooling time near Aberdeen in Scotland. He attended the Royal Veterinary College, London where he trained as a veterinarian. He gained his qualifications (BSc (VetSc)) in 1946 and in 1947 migrated to New Zealand where he undertook veterinary work, firstly for two and a half years with a dairy company in the Bay of Plenty and then two years at the Animal Research Station at Wallaceville. In 1951 Durno was offered a position to work on the ectoparasites of sheep with Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Division of Animal Health, McMasters Laboratory, Sydney. He also studied the epidemiology of arbovirus diseases and the ectoparasites of native fauna (e.g., rock wallaby *Petrogale penicillata*). He worked at this laboratory for most of his Australian working career as a veterinary entomologist and epidemiologist and was appointed Officer-in-Charge from 1974 to 1977. He retired in 1986.

Durno became involved with the study of birds, particularly seabirds, in 1953 when the Australian Bird Banding Scheme (ABBS) was established by Robert Carrick as part of the CSIRO. Durno was one of the first licensed banders in Australia and was issued with licence number 50. He commenced his bird studies on the Five Islands, New South Wales banding shearwaters, Silver Gulls and Crested Terns. For the next ten years he concentrated his banding study activities on the movement patterns of the Silver Gull and Crested Tern. The numbers of long distance recoveries over 50 kilometres that resulted from Durno's banding are: 103 Silver Gulls, 69 Crested Terns and 5 Wandering Albatrosses. As an aside, the first Little Tern chick and Black-faced Monarch banded under the ABBS's authority were banded by Durno.

He was the first Regional Organiser for the Australian Bird Banding Scheme in New South Wales and was instrumental, together with Bill Lane and Clive Campion, in setting up the NSW Albatross Study Group, which was carried on by Doug Gibson and later by Harry Battam. This group later became the Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association (SOSSA).

In 1957 Durno made his first visit to the Antarctic with the summer change over party on the maiden voyage of the MV *Thala Dan* to Macquarie Island. He subsequently became a member of a Biology Advisory Committee to ANARE. In 1970 he became Chairman of the Biology and Medical Sub-committee of the Australian National Committee for Antarctic Research of the Academy of Science. During the 1970/71 season he visited Casey where he was finally able to 'hold in the hand' the birds whose study he had encouraged. Results of the Silver-grey Petrel and Southern Giant-Petrel studies were published in *The Australian Bird Bander* (**10**: 47-48; **10**: 49-51; **10**: 57-58).

Durno was a member of a number of ornithological associations although his major involvement had been with The Bird Banders' Association of Australia later titled the Australian Bird Study Association. He held the position of Vice President from 1971 to 1972 and President from 1973 to 1974 and 1988 to 1991. He was Editor of *Corella* from 1990 to 1994, and during his period of editorship introduced a number of new initiatives into the journal including *The Seas Around Us* series and the *Australasian Bird Reviews*. As President in 1973 he was the major driving force in the formulation of the 'Seabird Island Series', which has now documented and published reports on 252 seabird breeding islands off the Australian coast

He was appointed to Life Membership of the ABSA in February 1993 and was awarded the John Hobbs Medal by Birds Australia for his ornithological work in 1996. Durno was recently awarded an Honorary Doctor of Science by the University of Sydney. Sadly, this award was to be conferred in June this year.

During his scientific career he has written and published over 100 papers or articles in a wide variety of journals. His ornithological contributions have appeared in *Emu*, *The Australian Bird Bander*, *Corella*, *Notornis*, *Journal of Field Ornithology*, *CSIRO Wildlife Research*, *Wildlife Research*, *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, *Australian Journal of Zoology*, *ANARE Research Notes* and *Marine Insects*. He was co-author of the 'Avian Ectoparasite' section in all seven volumes of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union's *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds*.

Durno was actively involved in a number of projects over the last twelve years, including the satellite tracking of Wandering Albatross. This project provided some spectacular results and resulted in the publication of six papers in *Emu* between 1995 and 2003. He re-analysed the 42 years of Crested Tern banding data held by the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Schemes, he also re-analysed the banding data collected by Robert Carrick on the Royal Penguin on Macquarie Island as well as completing the analysis of Carrick's Silver Gull banding data. Durno had the rare ability to analyse and make sense of large data sets. He assisted a number of banders in the collation of material and the writing of papers from data that they had collected over many years. But for his assistance a large number of papers would not have been published.

Durno can be best summed up as a very professional amateur ornithologist who has contributed a vast amount of knowledge on Australian and Antarctic birds, particularly seabirds. He had the rare ability to be able to provide clear planning and guidelines for the operation of scientifically based ornithological projects both in the field and in the preparation of publication material.

He is survived by his wife, Barbara; three children: Robin, Peter and Richard; a grandchild, Aiden; and a sister, Cathleen. All members of the Australian Bird Study Association extend their deepest sympathy to them, and offer this tribute in recognition of Durno's contributions to ornithology.

Alan Leishman

The ornithological community mourns the loss of Mitchell Durno Murray, a driving force behind the NSW Albatross Study Group (later Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association (SOSSA)), the Australian Bird Study Association (ABSA), the 'Seabird Island Series' of *The Australian Bird Bander* and *Corella* and the special seabird issues of *Corella*.

While president of the Australian Bird Study Association (ABSA) and editor of the ABSA journal Durno entered into discussions with Bill Lane, Peter Fullagar and the RAOU executive of the day about the documentation of seabird breeding locations and the magnitude of breeding populations. ABSA undertook to publish the 'Seabird Island Series' and a committee comprising Bill Lane (Editor), Peter Fullagar and Durno (Chairman) was formed to oversee the project. Durno provided a model that guided the format for the series based on his cataloguing of the numerous new arboviruses that were being discovered. In one way or another Durno (largely in collaboration with Bill Lane) was a part of the documentation and publication of reports on over 200 seabird breeding islands off the Australian coast. A significant role that he took on with this project was the production of maps for the series. He produced 121 maps for the series, thus providing a solution to a major problem for both amateurs and professionals involved in the production of manuscripts. It was this involvement in seabird islands and particularly the study of seabirds that allowed me to know Durno on a personal level.

As a fledgling seabird researcher in 1988 having just taken on a position at the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service to study the problem of increasing Silver Gull numbers in urban Sydney and Wollongong, I was inspired by Durno's prior studies of Silver Gulls (another of the areas in which he worked and published with Max Waterman and Robert Carrick). I met with Durno early in my study and was impressed by his enthusiasm and drive for seabird research and particularly his drive in promoting the dissemination of information. He and I subsequently met regularly (often over lunches at the University of Sydney) to discuss the Silver Gull work, seabird research in general and the production of a series of special seabird issues in *Corella* that would tie together inter-disciplinary information on seabirds and the physical environment that drives their patterns of occurrence and breeding. Durno had a further vision to resurvey all the seabird islands that had already been written about and to publish the information in one source document. While at the time this was envisaged to be a coffee table style book the project has only recently come to fruition through the production of a CD. This CD is a tribute to the vision and hard work of Durno. To me personally, Durno has been a great mentor and friend. Like many others I will remember him fondly. I am certainly reminded of his great work by the plethora of publications that remain as a legacy of his commitment.

Geoffrey Smith