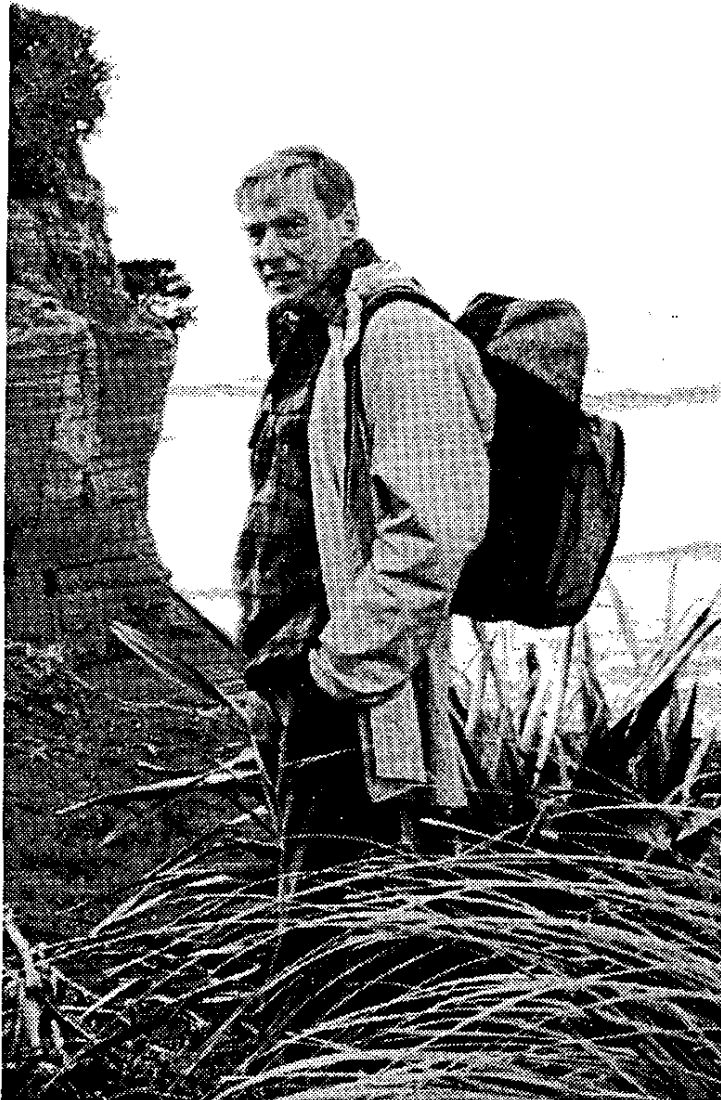


## OBITUARY



### **Barrie D. Heather (1931 - 1995)**

The Ornithological Society lost one of its most outstanding workers, a top amateur ornithologist, a great correspondent, and one of a select band of Honorary Life Members, when Barrie died in August 1995 after a long battle with illness.

Barrie David Heather (or BDH as he was known to many CSN readers) was the son of a teacher and so grew up in a variety of places as his father moved from school to school; however, Barrie had particularly fond childhood memories of his time in the Hokianga. It was not until Barrie went to boarding school at Kings College in 1944 that he became especially interested in birds and bird study. Under the keen eye of Dick Sibson, Barrie caught the birdwatching bug, initially as a good reason to escape the confines of the boarding school, but later as a genuine interest. Towards the end of his five years at Kings he joined expeditions to Little Barrier

and Hen Islands, and later, as a member of the Auckland University Field Club, visited many other islands in the Hauraki Gulf. Although these island trips were often referred to, his real passion was waders, ingrained from school years spent ploughing through the mud of the Manukau Harbour in search of interesting birds.

Having gained an MA (Hons) at Auckland University, Barrie spent several years touring the country ostensibly as a representative for General Motors, but probably more correctly as a way of seeing the country and as many birds as possible. After he married Rosemary, he became a language teacher in Southland and then Upper Hutt high schools. In the late 1970s, he became an editor or, in the current jargon (which Barrie detested), an instructional design tutor, for the Technical Correspondence Institute; a position he held until his retirement in 1994.

Barrie always believed in publishing his observations, whether as humble contributions to Classified Summarised Notes, as short notes, papers or books. His philosophy was that it was not much use leaving observations hidden in notebooks, but better to share those observations with others who may be interested. In Barrie's case, this is particularly apt because, although highly organised in most things he did, his field notebooks were a mess of almost unintelligible scribbblings written on random pages in old diaries. In all, Barrie published 28 short notes or full-length papers, including major contributions on Black-fronted Dotterels, Silktails in Fiji, Dabchicks, Cattle Egrets and Black-fronted Terns. He was the author of the ornithological section of the 1963 textbook "Biology for Sixth Forms", and this was published separately by the OSNZ in 1966 as the 102 page "Biology of Birds". Barrie wrote most of the wader contributions and many other species accounts for the Reader's Digest Book of New Zealand Birds, but was disappointed that the original intention of replacing Oliver's "New Zealand Birds" with an updated text was eventually watered down into a coffee-table book dominated by photographs. With Brian Gill he compiled and edited "A Flying Start" which was a 217 page account of the 50-year history of the OSNZ, and not content with just that, he worked with Trish Sheehan to publish the invaluable "Bird Study in New Zealand - a 50-year index to Notornis".

Although these contributions were worthy enough in their own right to earn him the honours of the Falla Memorial Award in 1989, and the rare distinction of Honorary Life Membership of OSNZ in 1994, these were relatively minor contributions compared with his administrative, especially editorial, work for the Society. Barrie served as the Regional Representative for Southland in the 1950s, and then in 1964-65 he was relieving editor of Notornis while Dick Sibson was overseas. After Barrie agitated to make Notornis more accessible to fellow amateur OSNZ members, the Council finally decided to publish a newsletter style "OSNZ News" to accompany the scientific journal, and for his sins they appointed him as the inaugural editor, although they did over-rule his urge to call it "Notornis Droppings". This newsletter has flourished and has had a valuable role in keeping members abreast of latest happenings and snippets of news that would otherwise languish in regional newsletters, notebooks or people's heads. From 1978 to 1994, Barrie served as the honorary editor of Notornis. Editing a scientific journal is a huge task, and one

which does not get many thanks, but its share of complaints from authors who think that the editorial pencil was too sharp, or from readers who find the articles boring or irrelevant. It was to Barrie's great chagrin that the loudest antagonists were either people who had never submitted articles, or were professional scientists who didn't like their tedious and pompous prose being turned into concise and readable science. Barrie spent many an evening and large chunks of weekends and holidays editing papers, and he put enormous energy into helping other amateur members prepare their papers.

Above all, Barrie enjoyed his birdwatching and editing role in the society, and always believed that ornithology should be fun and should be a family activity, even if the kids did rebel against visiting yet another sewage pond! He and Rosemary generally planned their holidays around attending OSNZ field trips and field courses, or checking favourite haunts of dabchicks, cattle egrets, or black-fronted dotterels in the Wairarapa. In the late 1980s, he helped to reactivate the Wairarapa region by running an adult education course about birdwatching – it is testament to his enthusiasm and sense of fun that almost all the people on that course subsequently joined the society. He was especially proud that in 1991 they returned their genuine thanks by awarding him the “Ornithological Freedom of the Wairarapa”. Barrie combined a sharp wit, love of pranks, mild cynicism and a great sense of timing to ensure that no one took ornithology too seriously; few other recipients of the Falla Memorial Award will accept it while wearing fluffy animal slippers and having just stuffed a rainbow-coloured wig hurriedly into their pocket!

Barrie's final project, undertaken largely while he was seriously ill, was “The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand”, which will hopefully remain a fitting and lasting testament to his exceptional contribution to New Zealand ornithology. To me, Barrie's love of birdwatching and language is best summarised by the brilliant title of his 1958 short note: “Welcome Swallow at Farewell Spit”.

Hugh Robertson