

## Editorial – A change of style for a mature and dignified lady of science

I am loath to begin as editor with an editorial, but matters of space, and a new look for *Notornis*, seem to dictate otherwise. As distinguished former editor, Barrie Heather, once noted, “an ornithological society, by definition, publishes a journal” (Heather 1990). For the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, that journal has been *Notornis*, produced at first as its *Reports and Bulletins*, then as *New Zealand bird notes*, before gaining its present title in July 1950. Since its inception, *Notornis* has been one of the major contributions by the Society and its membership to scientific knowledge and endeavour in New Zealand. Indeed, for the 60 years of its existence, the Ornithological Society itself has devoted a large proportion of its resources to publishing in *Notornis* and, from December 1976, the Society newsletter *OSNZ News*, the results of original research, new observations, reviews, and other information that all constitute the lifeblood of a healthy science and an engrossing recreation.

Despite its long history, *Notornis* has seen few major changes in format. The journal was born at a time when the supply of paper was at a premium. That, and the costs of postage, largely governed the page size adopted. Major changes since then have included the title (twice, as we have seen, in 1943 and 1950), the logo (the Tunnicliffe image of the takahe was introduced in 1952), the colour for the cover (most recently in 1989), and the cover stock and a new cover layout in 1996. Long-time readers will have also noted the removal of the contents list to the rear cover and the provision of details such as the referencing footnote for each paper (both in 1972). More subtle revolutions (to the readership at least) have taken place in its preparation: letterpress to offset printing, and the introduction of electronic publication, which have brought their own interesting variations to the editorial craft. This overall stasis was not so much a result of conservatism, as of continuity, quality, and commercial reality. Barrie Heather summarised the reasons a decade ago:

“*Notornis* is received by all OSNZ members, who in turn support its existence by their

subscriptions as well as by their contributions to field studies and to published results. The general nature of *Notornis* is not likely to change greatly, nor can its appearance change greatly by, for example, having colour plates, so long as subscriptions remain low (compared to those of similar societies); other forms of income are not available, and production and quality standards have to depend on voluntary spare-time editors.” (Heather 1990).

Advances in publishing technology have continued since then and, while the expense of publishing a journal is still the largest call on Society finances, it has now proven possible to make some of the changes that formerly were prohibitive. This issue, the first without “19” in its dateline, introduces both a new page size and a new format for *Notornis*. The demands of figure reproduction and competition from journals with larger page size have finally meant that the journal had to move up and the first issue for 2000 was chosen as an appropriate point to make the change.

The new technologies now allow us to publish the same number of papers at the larger page size for substantially the same cost as before, per issue, as with the smaller page size. We have taken the opportunity provided by the change of page size and format to make some stylistic changes as well. Although these may not all meet the instant approval of all members, they have been introduced to ease the task of production and to follow the best of modern practice.

Technology has also now brought the cost of colour reproduction down to the extent that authors and the Society can contemplate the regular use of colour plates. Colour illustrations will still be charged to the authors, but at a cost that will be affordable for many institutions and individuals. Costs may be reduced further when it is possible to coordinate the publication articles for which colour would be appropriate.

Other changes are happening behind the scenes. The 10 previous editors (joint and sole) of *Notornis* and its

predecessors over the past 60 years have all worked almost autonomously, at least in the choice of referees and assessment of manuscripts for publication. Other stalwarts, notably Archie Blackburn, have contributed much as assistant editors at the proof and production stages, but the processing of manuscripts has been the sole province of the editor. Although the Society has in the past been lucky in gaining the services of people prepared to devote the necessary hours to the journal's production over many years, the pace and uncertainties of modern life make it less likely that people can make that commitment. Although they take on the job with the best of intentions, if an editor needs to relinquish the position through illness or unforeseen moves for job or personal reasons, it can challenge the ability of the Society to maintain the publication schedule. Recently, we have been lucky that interim editors such as Paul Sagar and Hugh Robertson have been able to step into the breach at short notice.

Frequent or unexpected changes in editorship can create difficulties because of the need for continuity in monitoring the flow of papers, and consistency in dealing with authors. Because of these factors, the position of editor is now a Council appointment, tenured for periods of five years. Subsequent terms are by agreement between Council and the incumbent. To make the process of anticipated or precipitate transfer of responsibilities easier, the editorial procedures have been modified to make the editor's position "seamless". The system should now allow the journal to proceed on its course regardless – to a large extent – of who is at the helm. To that end, the enlarged Editorial Board now has a greater role in the review process, although again the editor retains the final responsibility for the content of the journal. Editorial Board members are appointed for two-year, renewable, terms, and are selected to provide expertise in a range of fields within ornithology. Manuscripts are still to be submitted directly to the editor, who, after entering them in the system files, sends the manuscripts and associated paperwork to the appropriate Board member. For most papers, the choice of referee and assessment of revised papers is now the province of Editorial Board members. Any revision that may be necessary to improve the science or presentation is done at this stage. The Board member then returns reports and manuscripts to the editor, with a recommendation on the suitability of the manuscript for

publication. From there, if the paper is accepted, the editor takes the material through final revisions to publication, scheduling it, supervising formatting, and handling the galley and page proofs. With the reduction in work at the other end of the process, there is more time to spend on ensuring editorial and production quality.

Of course, the production of the journal does not end at the editorial desk. *Notornis* readership includes people all over the world, a fact that was brought home forcibly to the present editor a few years ago. A letter arrived unexpectedly from one of the most eminent ornithologists of the 20th century, Professor Ernst Mayr of Harvard University. It was unexpected because this postgraduate student did not often receive personally typed communications from figures of such international repute: never, in fact. Even more surprising was the reason for the letter. Professor Mayr had read his copy of *Notornis* the moment it reached his desk, and was moved to comment on what he considered to be a serious misapprehension on my part in a short article therein. The supposed error apart, this gave the lie to the view expressed forcefully by other students of my vintage, and, I suspect, of more recent years as well, that a paper submitted to *Notornis* was not likely to reach any significant readership. *Notornis* does, and always has, reach far beyond our small corner of the world and is usually the only document by which people can judge us and our work.

As well as the science the journal conveys, the Society membership and an international readership judge the Society by the appearance of the finished product. To produce that quality product, we have been fortunate for many years in having printers who treat the journal as part of the family. For this first issue, my thanks go to Murray Ferris and John Fricker, and indeed to everyone at Te Rau Herald Print involved with our publications, for making the production of this first "new" issue a pleasure when it could well have been a trial.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- Heather, B.D. 1990. *Notornis*. pp. 31-32 In: Heather, B.D.; Gill, B.J. (ed.) *A flying start: commemorating fifty years of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand 1940-1990*. Auckland, Random Century and the Ornithological Society of New Zealand.