

## Obituary



**Patrick Timothy Crombie (1917-1999)**

With the death of Pat Crombie on 10 February 1999 at the age of 81, the Auckland region of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand lost one of its longest-standing and most popular members.

A member of the Society for over 30 years, Pat was a regular attendee at meetings and took part in almost all the region's field activities during the 1970s and 1980s. His main interest and area of expertise was, however, beach-patrolling, first assisting Sylvia Reed, then convening the monthly patrols of Muriwai Beach on the Auckland west coast. He undertook this project with care and thoroughness for 10 years and his meticulous notebooks from this period form an important part of the Auckland regional archive. Pat's ability to identify specimens to species from a few bones or feathers was impressive, but he was equally well known for his kindness and patience in sharing his skills and knowledge with others. In particular, Pat had a gift for encouraging new members of the Society, fostering interest in young and old alike.

In the past few years, Pat was forced to give up an active role in ornithology to care for an older sister. During

this time he maintained contact with friends in the Society and was always pleased to hear the latest news. Following his sister's death last year, we once again had the pleasure of his company at meetings. In spite of his own failing health, Pat also attended several beach patrols, much to his delight.

Pat Crombie will be remembered as one of the Society's quiet achievers, always modest about his considerable store of knowledge and universally popular as a result. The Society extends its sincere sympathy to his family.

John Dowding

One day in August 1978, a 12-year-old boy, a new member of the Ornithological Society, turned up on the doorstep of the organiser of the Muriwai beach patrol. That young boy was me, and the man I had come to see was Pat Crombie. Pat and I became friends on that day and as well as doing many beach patrols together, we shared many other birding excursions; he also gave me lifts to OSNZ meetings for a number of years.

Pat was organiser of the Muriwai beach patrol from 1977 to 1987, and continued to attend patrols until a few weeks before his death. Although seabirds were his main love, Pat was an all-rounder, attending virtually every wader census, and joining in most of the Auckland region's other activities, from Far North lakes census to Caspian tern banding. His birding interests also took him on trips to Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Australia, and Finland.

Pat was a great person to go birding with; he had a great sense of humour, a wide knowledge of birds, and a library of anecdotes. He also loaned me a number of books in my younger years, including a treasured copy of Robert Cushman Murphy's *Oceanic birds of South America*, which I read from cover to cover.

Many of my first birds were seen with Pat, including a light-mantled sooty albatross that he spotted half a mile offshore with the naked eye during a beach patrol in 1989. It took another 10 years before my next sighting, also on a beach patrol. My interest in seabirds, kindled on those beach patrols, continues to this day. Pat also introduced me to the urban wilderness of Pollen Island, next to the Auckland north-western motorway. Here, with the late Sylvia Reed, I saw my first New Zealand dotterel and fernbird. Both species are still present 20 years later.

Thanks, Pat, for your companionship, humour, and generosity, irrespective of the conditions or lack of birds – alive or dead.

Chris Jowett