

A 1927 RECORD OF THE LAUGHING OWL

During Easter 1927 I was camped at a spot called Ormond's Camp, which is at the head of the first inlet on the right hand, after passing through the Narrows from Waikaremoana to Wairaumoana. Some 300 metres distant, on the eastern side of the inlet, is a high, sheer limestone outcrop with its base surrounded by heavy bush.

For five successive evenings, when full darkness set in, several extremely loud piercing calls came from the face of the bluff, calls which can be described as prolonged *kee-wee*, both syllables being of equal length and intensity. At the time I could only think of the calls as coming from a Laughing Owl (*Sceloglaux albifacies*) but did not realise the import of the record.

In his excellent article on the Laughing Owl in the November 1981 issue of *Forest and Bird*, M. H. Douglas quotes W. W. Smith (1884) in the *NZ Journal of Science* 2: 86-88 as saying "The call of the adults on waking up in the evening is precisely the same as two men cooeing to each other from a distance."

Unfortunately there were no answering calls in 1927 to what I presume was a lone male.

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OBITUARY

AVERIL MARGARET LYSAGHT (1905-1981) AND THE NATURAL HISTORY RECORDS FROM COOK'S VOYAGES

When Captain James Cook took a series of cargoes of naturalists to the Pacific in the 1770s they were so overwhelmed by the number of new things that they found that all their successors have been trying to sort them out ever since. One of the more distinguished recent contributions has been made by a New Zealand scholar little known in her own country, Averil Lysaght.

Dr Lysaght was brought up below Mount Egmont, where she first distinguished herself by finding a new noctuid moth named after her, *Melanchnra averilla*, at the age of fifteen. In due course she headed the pass list in botany and zoology for all the New Zealand universities at her first degree examination, and went on to hold lecturing posts at her own college, Victoria College, and at London, Hull and Nottingham Universities in England, where she also worked at Rothamsted (Agricultural) Experimental Station and the Plymouth Marine Lab-

oratory and was awarded a PhD (which she did not use). During the war she worked for the China section of the Ministry of Information and afterwards on the zoology sections of Chambers' Encyclopaedia. Thus she had become a very experienced general biologist.

Then during one of her periodic return visits to New Zealand she discovered an unpublished transcript of the diary kept by Sir Joseph Banks during Cook's first voyage. She discussed this with Professor J. C. Beaglehole, who was editing Cook's own journal of the voyage, and subsequently devoted herself to the elucidation of the natural history records of Banks's and Cook's voyages, which provided an opening for exact scholarship in a romantic setting to her taste. She began with an annotated list of the bird paintings collected by Banks in the Historical Series of the Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History), Vol. 1, pp. 251-372, which is an invaluable guide to the origin of many important early records, and continued with annotations of Beaglehole's editions of Cook's and Banks's journals in 1961-62 and the recent facsimiles of the journals produced by Genesis Publications. She also edited "Joseph Banks in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1766: his diary, manuscripts and publications" (London, Faber & Faber, 1971), which led to an invitation to Newfoundland to receive an honorary Doctorate of Literature in 1979, and "The Book of Birds: five centuries of bird illustration" (London, Phaidon, 1975) and produced various lesser works.

In person she was a perennially youthful enthusiast with a habit of constructing private empires in obscure corners of learned institutions, which were regarded with delight by the staff and grave misgiving by their superiors. After being moved on from the Bird Room and Botany Department of the British Museum (Natural History) she eventually settled in Imperial College nearby. She went to roost in a cluttered apartment a little below Sadler's Wells theatre and overlooking the insalubrious surroundings of King's Cross station, where she was in the habit of offering distinguished visitors strange meals. It is curious that the more eminent they were, the better they liked it, and I first got to know such people as Bob Falla at her table. Shortly before her death she was thrilled to discover stolen silver hidden in the garden. She also helped uncover much buried treasure in the literature, and formed a most attractive ambassador for New Zealand abroad.

— W. R. P. BOURNE