

## OBITUARY

### SYLVIA MARY REED, 1915-1981

Born within sound of Bow Bells, Sylvia, as she was known to a host of friends, received her early education at Crouch End High School. She then went to Cheltenham Ladies College; and, after matriculation, to Reading University, where she studied for a Diploma in Dairying. Her academic studies finished, she became a land-girl, working on farms in Surrey and Devonshire.

Through that admirable publication, *N.Z. Weekly News*, Sylvia made pen-friends, among whom was her future husband, Milford Reed. When he returned to his native Kent in 1939, they were married. Sylvia remained in London throughout World War 2, delivering people daily bread and dodging the blitz.

Mick returned to New Zealand with repatriated forces, and in December 1945 Sylvia followed with their daughter, Phyllida. The arrival of twins kept Sylvia tied to the home, first at Birkenhead, then at Meadowbank. Time permitting, she began to go on Royal Forest & Bird excursions, and so she graduated to the Ornithological Society. The birds of the coast were her especial delight.

In everything she undertook her energy was manifest. 'Get on with the job' could well have been her motto. Appointed Regional Representative for Auckland in 1969, she succeeded Ross McKenzie in 1972 as Associate Ornithologist at the Auckland Museum. Theoretically she was there two days a week; but ornithology had now become the core of her existence. She was elected to the Council of OSNZ in 1973.

Sylvia was an eminently practical person. If she thought a corporate activity worthwhile, she set about organising it and enlisting volunteers. Hence monthly beach-patrols and annual surveys of Muriwai lakes and major tern colonies. She loved to be out in the field. She came to know Muriwai beach and its hinterland like the back of her hand. One needed a steady nerve to sit beside her in her Toyota as she charged at sandhills among the Woodhill pines.

Although her later years were clouded with pain, her spirit was indomitable. In search of birds she had recently visited Samoa, the Chatham Islands and Alaska, and only last September she astonished her friends by setting off to Greece. One very happy memory which she brought back was of big Mediterranean Shearwaters lazily following in the wake of an inter-island steamer.

Her return from Greece coincided with an unusual wreck of Blue and Kerguelen Petrels. Calling in young helpers, she pitched into the fray, salvaging specimens and examining gut contents. Right to the end she was a worker, even if the work was messy.

Her initiative showed itself in many ways. From Ross McKenzie she inherited the patronage of the local New Zealand Dotterels and extended the banding programme. She was a foundation member, a practical adviser and a generous benefactor of the Miranda Naturalists Trust. She set *Tara* on its feet and was the driving force behind it. *Tara* is the Auckland region's quarterly mixture of serious ornithology and light-hearted bird-watching. Her room at the Museum always seemed to be thronged with visitors.

Naturalists from far afield, both old and young, have reason to remember Sylvia with affection and admiration. Grateful for years of unsparing service, the Ornithological Society offers its sympathy to her husband, and to her children and grandchildren scattered across the globe.

— R. B. S.



## LETTER

24 March 1982

The Editor,

Sir,

I have just received the December 1981 issue of *Notornis*, which contained the obituary of our friend, Ross McKenzie.

Mrs Foster and I had the privilege of spending three days with Ross and Hetty, back in February 1971.

We arrived at Auckland on a Saturday morning, and went to our hotel, figuring we would call Ross (whom we had never met, but whose name we had got from the B.O.U.), and hadn't much more than checked in, when the telephone rang, and here was Ross, saying, "Come on, throw your bags down, and get out here." We had a most delightful three days, which was a rare privilege, because both Ross and Hetty were so kind, so hospitable, and so very friendly, that, even though we have not had the privilege of seeing them since, we treasure their friendship. The picnics that we had, which Hetty fixed up, built around her homemade bread, were really something. They not only took us by automobile to various points, but also we had one day out on a boat to see the shearwaters, etc.

I just thought, maybe, this tribute from one of your overseas members might be of interest.

I can close by saying that the list of birds that he showed us, in his area, was terrific, and, furthermore, he and Hetty told us where to go in South Island, which, also, proved most successful.

JOHN H. FOSTER, 1616 Walnut Street, Philadelphia