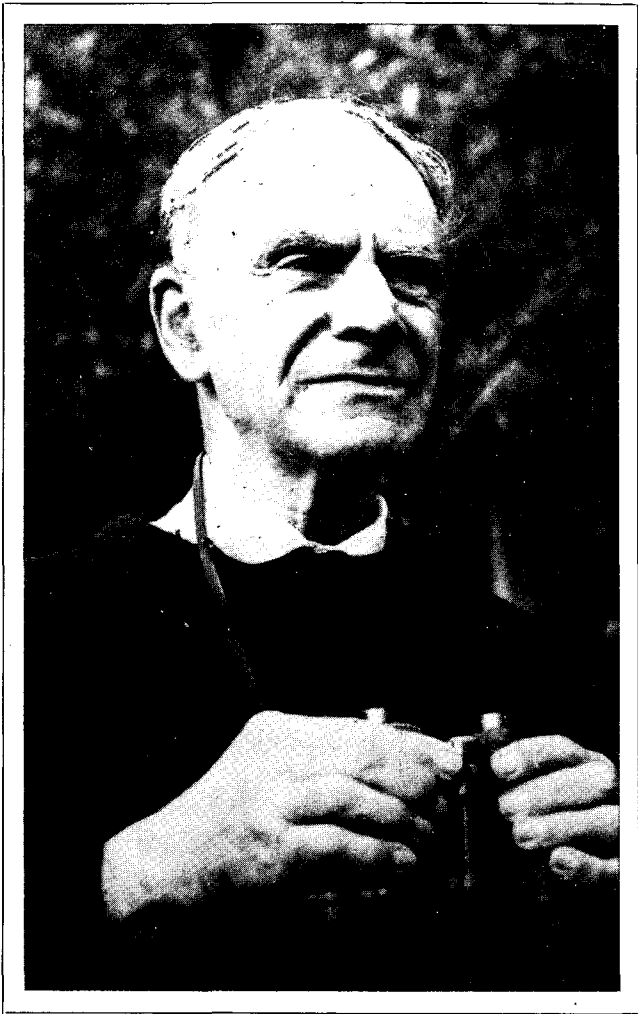


OBITUARY



**ROBERT HECTOR DONALD STIDOLPH
1900-1979**

Some Reminiscences by J. M. Cunningham

His friends will remember "Stid" as kindly, friendly, unassuming, unobtrusive, knowledgeable, capable, according to how well they knew him. To me he was all those. He had a love for his family which came before all, and some of my earliest and fondest recollections of him were of family picnics in the bush at Kiriwhakapapa and on the Ruamahunga riverbed at Te Whiti. Here he developed as uncannily an instinct for finding Banded Dotterel nests as Edgar Stead did for Wrybill nests in Canterbury. There seemed to be rarely a weekend go by but he and his young family tootled off to a favoured bird haunt in the Wairarapa in the tiny Baby Austin. This little car, almost one of the family, was purchased about 1928 for £150 (from the proceeds of newspaper articles) and served him well (he always greased it and changed the oil himself) until the early 1950's. With its purchase he was able to extend his travels and knowledge of birds and their habitats (*Holiday Jaunts in New Zealand*, Emu XXXI 7: 1931). No observation was too trifling for him, and he kept copious notes in 16 uniform-style diaries, giving a continuous record from 1 January 1921 until shortly before his death. He could find any entry: once I showed him a letter which said that Waxeyes left a certain district in the summer and did not breed there. He was quickly able to reassure me from the appropriate diary that he had seen birds in that precise locality in the middle of the breeding season. Reference to his book *The Birds Around Us* (1971) will show the value of such entries and also demonstrate the readable style which came from his literary experience. Perfection is reached in a note (p. 108) made on January 6 1924: "The sublime beauty of the morning chorus of the Bellbird is a rich, unforgettable experience. This morning, on Mount Holdsworth, in the Tararua Ranges, not long after dawn on a bright day, at a height of 4,000 feet, the chiming of the Bellbird, floating up from the depths of the cool, darkened forest in the valley below, held our party spellbound, as we rested on a rocky outcrop in the first beams of the rising sun. Judging from the volume of the melody a good many voices contributed to the chorus."

• He was essentially a field naturalist and was not particularly interested in taxonomy or avian physiology, although he had a full appreciation of both. With his love of birds and the countryside he had a boyish enthusiasm. While he was helping me to ring Waxeyes to trace their local movements in Masterton in 1942 he scorned a funnel trap. He used a baited box trap which fell when the string was pulled. What a sight it was to see his excitement when, while eating his lunch with one hand, he pulled the string through the window with the other and caught a good box of birds. The caricature illustrated was drawn by Duncan McPhee at this time and he agreed many years ago that it should eventually be published.



An avid reader, his library was the envy of many and it did not consist entirely of books about birds, although these were his chief interest. And he did not collect books only: at the age of nine he was saving newspaper clippings, and his books of James Drummond's nature articles are probably complete from 1910 to 1934. Once again, he could readily locate any entry. When I was documenting the spread of the Myna (*Distribution of the Myna in New Zealand*, NZ Bird Notes 3 (2): 57, October 1948), he was able to show me a note by Drummond of 9 September 1923 that "the first two seen at Te Mawhai, south of Te Awamutu, appeared that week."

Some of his other collections were of shells of New Zealand — dated and with localities recorded, they are obviously of great scientific value. His collection of New Zealand stamps was extensive and was the result of a lifelong hobby. To complete his collection of postmarks from every Post Office in the country he would hand me letters to post from various parts of New Zealand when I was touring on holiday, and naturally did the same himself. His collection of model soldiers, in mint condition, was the envy of hobbyists, and in recent years he built many model ships which are a dazzling sight.

It was understandable that with his interest in nature, he became a foundation member of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society (March 23 1923). What he had to do with its formation I do not know, but as early as 1922 he was writing to R. A. Falla (later Sir Robert) about ways and means of protecting New Zealand's birds. His interest in this topic was recognised when he was appointed a member of the Native Fauna Advisory Council to the Department of Internal Affairs, a position he held for 14 years.

His own writings were extensive. Some of the earliest were in the *New Zealand School Journal* and in the *New Zealand Life and Forest Magazine*, and he was a regular contributor to *The Emu*, published by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, of which he was a member for 40 years. He had his own weekly column *Nature Notes* in the *Evening Post*, a Wellington newspaper, from 1926 up to 1940 when shortage of newsprint in the war brought his column to an end. There is much valuable material buried in these notes. Many of his writings were however published in *Notornis*, formerly *New Zealand Bird Notes*, the journal of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. He was a foundation member of this body also and his name appears in the society's first publication. His contributions continued until his death, and under his editorship from 1946 to 1955 the journal gained a world-wide reputation. Although he believed in co-operative investigations and took part in many, he was often disappointed in their results. In particular he was critical of the poor response of ornithologists to his request for information on the numbers and distribution of the Godwit in New Zealand ("*Godwit inquiry*," *Notornis* 4 (6): October 1951 p. 135). It was an indication of his independence that when he was offered the joint editorship of *New*

Zealand Bird Notes in 1946 he refused, but no one will regret his taking on this onerous and honourable duty on his own shortly after. One of his tenets was to publish on time and he never failed, even though sometimes he (and I as secretary-treasurer) had to work late on many nights to prepare the journal for posting before the deadline. The first issue he edited nearly missed: he rang me when the type was set to say he was two pages short, could I write something that night? Fortunately the answer was yes!

Apart from his own writing he edited and published two books: *Kapiti Bird Sanctuary* by A. S. and Amy Wilkinson (1952) and *Kapiti Diary* by Amy Wilkinson (1957).

Born on 4 November 1900, the youngest of the 12 children of Sidney (who came from Kent in the 1850s) and Sarah, his early days were spent in Wellington where he lived above the Gear Meat Company's shop in Lambton Quay. After attending the Terrace School and Wellington Technical College, he eventually became a journalist with the *Evening Post*. In 1926 (the family having moved to Masterton in 1919), he joined the literary staff of what became the *Wairarapa Times-Age* newspaper, retiring in 1965 as sub-editor. His knowledge and love of Kapiti Island was reinforced by his marriage on 4 January 1933 to Nora, daughter of A. S. Wilkinson, who was Custodian of the Bird Sanctuary from 1924 to 1942. He died on 12 August 1979. His wife, son and two daughters survive him. To them I offer my sympathy but gratitude for many an enjoyable hour spent with them and Stid.



SHORT NOTE

BROWN TEAL, NZ DOTTEREL, AND VARIABLE OYSTER-CATCHER — AN UNUSUAL ROCK GROUP

Slightly north of the mouth of Kaitoke Creek on the east coast of Great Barrier Island are two small clusters of rocks, the only isolated rocks exposed on the sand for the full 4 km of Kaitoke and Palmer Beaches. Both clusters are submerged at high tide but the inner cluster is exposed and free of wave splash from half-tide onwards and the outer cluster, some 10 metres further down the beach, is partly or wholly exposed at low tide, depending on the amount of sand on the beach.

These rocks, which have smooth contours, consist of irregular flat-topped blocks with vertical sides, forming many flat-topped ledges or platforms, and with irregular block summits. They vary from 1/3 to 1½ metres high. Most surfaces have dense mats of the small black mussel *Xerostrobis pulex*, which are up to 20 mm long and have reasonably fragile shells. Sometimes they are anchored among beds of *Corallina* or of tiny barnacles. Patches of a short puffy alga are sparse on the inner cluster but quite extensive on the outer.