

explanation, and the State Advisory Committee being agreeable, they are granted a permit. "Every effort is taken to see that the provisions of the proclamations are carried out," he states.

D. L. SERVENTY,
Hon. State Secretary.

Report of R.A.O.U. Committee Appointed at Perth, 1927

At the last Congress of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, held at Perth, we were appointed a committee to consider matters raised by the Presidential Address of the President, Mr. Edwin Ashby, M.B.O.U., F.Z.S., C.F.A.O.U., and a subsequent paper on "Bird Protection" by Mr. James Pollard, R.A.O.U., dealing chiefly with the encouragement and training of young collectors. The members of the committee having considered these matters individually, were able to agree unanimously on the following report, which was prepared at a meeting held at the Western Australian Museum on Thursday, August 9, 1928:—

TRAINING OF YOUNG COLLECTORS.

To get down to bedrock, we should consider how two of the objects of the R.A.O.U., namely, the study and the protection of native birds, affect the proposal. We believe that at the present time in the more populated and settled States, and particularly where young members of the Union are resident near cities, the surroundings of which are ornithologically well known, collecting will not add appreciably to knowledge, but it will offend against the second objective, the protection of birds. It may not be the actual effects on the species collected which will matter, but it will set an undesirable example to others, thereby lessening the power and appeal of protectionist measures.

WHAT CAN COLLECTING OF SKINS AT THE PRESENT DAY ADD TO THE SCIENCE?

(1) We believe that the position has been reached in Australia where the individual collector working alone can add little of real importance to systematic ornithology. Our species are, it may be said, almost all known; it is in the realm of defining sub-species and races that the major work in systematics lies. This investigation can be done only in national museums, where there are large stores of material, not only of local forms, but of types from all over Australia as well. Moreover, this is work with which

trained zoologists alone can competently deal, otherwise ornithology will be burdened with synonyms.

(2) Individual collecting is important in the study of bird distribution, and members residing in the outlying districts where the birds are little known will find it essential to have actual specimens of species which they may record for the first time in those areas.

Collecting is necessary in both of these cases, but to be put to the best use ornithologically it will need to be, in effect, on behalf of the museums, and must, in the majority of instances, be carried out in little-known country, ornithologically speaking.

DEMERITS OF PRIVATE COLLECTING.

(1) We should discriminate between collecting for scientific purposes and the accumulating of specimens which is made almost entirely in response to the instinct to collect something. Where this instinct is predominant it is far better that it should have vent in other directions. The difficulty arises where this collecting urge is associated with real scientific research, but there are instances where semblances of the latter are cultivated as a mask of the real purpose.

(2) In the case of rare and localised species collecting may lead to decimation, particularly if there is any trade or exchange in specimens.

(3) Collecting tends to set a bad example to the general public, who may become suspicious of the sincerity of naturalists who exhort them to protect birds, yet countenance collecting which is purposeless or leads to results of minor value.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

From the viewpoint of training young collectors, we recommend:—

(1) That generally speaking it is undesirable to offer specific instruction to young people interested in natural history in the preparation of bird-skins and egg-shells.

(2) Where, however, a boy is living in an area where collecting is necessary for any purpose he should not be hindered if he exhibits keenness in the subject. In Western Australia such a boy could apply to the Game Department for a permit for scientific collecting, and it should be granted to him provided the Chief Inspector is satisfied that the object is not to accumulate specimens for the sake of quantity.

(3) Direct encouragement of collecting is not advocated, but the desire to undertake research work should emanate from the boy himself before any encouragement is given. Children generally should be taught to love and protect and

study wild life apart from the desire to form collections, and that the use of field-glasses and camera is of far more value to the field naturalist than the use of the gun and knife. In this respect we recommend that the Education Departments in each State be asked to institute a Bird Day as now obtains in all the eastern States.

(4) That students of Teachers' Training Colleges should be required to pass tests in natural history based upon wild life preservation.

As regards wider aspects of bird protection, we make the following recommendation:—

That in any drought-stricken area, or areas, absolute and full protection should be extended to all forms of native fauna and flora deserving of such during the period or periods of drought.

(Signed)

F. LAWSON WHITLOCK.

D. L. SERVenty.

JAMES POLLARD.

Perth, Aug. 9, 1928.

The Economic Value of Birds

By LANCE LE SOUEF, R.A.O.U., Melbourne.

It is open to question if bird observers and collectors fully realise the effect of the avian life on the country generally. Bird economics will probably be of more importance in the future than systematic ornithology. The writer has been fortunate in having had the opportunity of seeing the position as it exists in sparsely settled districts, and it would appear that there is a great need for more attention being given to the economic study of bird-life.

Hoofed animals are scattered all over the country, where originally only native animals existed. This means that there is now no natural balance, such as would have been the case if ungulate animals had not been introduced, or if they had been indigenous. That such balance is necessary has been proved in other continents. In Australia scavenger birds are working overtime, as it were, in trying to cope with insect pests generated or encouraged by the enormously increased animal population. The outstanding pests that affect cattle and sheep are the tick, the buffalo fly and the blowfly. The losses caused by these pests both directly and indirectly is a very heavy drain on our prosperity. In the case of cattle, it would appear that much of the loss is caused by their running in country where insectivorous birds are the exception instead of the rule, as seed-eaters are by far the most numerous in open districts. This question vitally affects our future development, and it is brought under the notice of the R.A.O.U. as a line for