

of Torishima, which was settled in 1887 by about 50 Japanese who killed the birds for their feathers. The dreadful slaughter continued each breeding season: one writer estimated that the inhabitants had taken at least 5,000,000 birds by 1903. In that year a volcanic eruption killed all the Japanese. The island was settled again after a few years and the decimation continued. In 1933 the residents, anticipating protective legislation, exterminated what remnant was left, said to be about 3,000 birds.

The decline in numbers and the probable extermination of Steller's Albatross has been caused entirely by human persecution which commenced about 1885. The first feather hunting was more or less casual but, as the trade proved to be remunerative, it was taken over by big business interests. It is now some sixteen years since a Steller's Albatross was killed. Perhaps a few pairs may still exist on some isolated and unfrequented island, though such a possibility is remote. Austin remarks that it is only too likely that the species has become one of the more recent victims of man's thoughtlessness and greed.—K.A.H.

Correspondence

GENESIS OF THE R.A.O.U.

To the Editor,
Sir,

When recently looking through the files of the Melbourne *Argus*, for 1896, I came upon a report (18/8/1896) of a meeting that had been held on the previous night at Britannia House, South Yarra, at the invitation of Mr. A. J. Campbell. Reference was made at the meeting to the work on Australian ornithology on which Mr. Campbell was then engaged, and the view was expressed that the gathering should "form the nucleus of an Australian Ornithological Union on similar lines to the British Ornithological Union and the American."

The foregoing statement, which varies somewhat both in date and phraseology from a newspaper report quoted in *The Emu* (vol. 1, part 1, page 1, 1901), seems to mark the genesis of the movement that blossomed into the Australasian Ornithologists Union on July 1, 1901. It is of interest in view of the fact that the fiftieth birthday of the Union is to be celebrated in 1951.

Yours, etc.,

A. H. CHISHOLM.

Sydney,
15/11/49.

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