

Report of Hon. General Secretary

This report covers the period dating from Congress held in Brisbane, Queensland, in October, 1958, to the present date, 21/9/1959.

MEMBERSHIP

The present list of members of the Union shows an increase of 42 over the figure quoted at last Congress—it is now 924. There were 68 enrolments, 18 resignations, and eight deaths of which we are aware. Figures for the respective States are: Victoria, 287 (up 4); New South Wales, 241 (up 19); Queensland, 80 (up 3); Western Australia, 69 (unchanged); South Australia, 50 (up 7); Tasmania, 42 (unchanged); New Zealand, 45 (up 4); British, 30 (down 3); Foreign, 80 (up 8).

Deaths advised since last Annual Meeting are of Messrs. C. L. Barrett, C. F. Cole and L. A. Freeman, and Miss Helen Bowie, all of Victoria; Mr. K. H. McKnight, of New South Wales; Mr. E. J. Stanley-Low, of Western Australia; Sir Norman Kinnear, of London; and Mr. W. H. Workman, of Northern Ireland. Mr. Barrett was a foundation member of this Union (1901), and widely known for his publications on natural history. An obituary notice appears in *The Emu*, vol. 59, p. 226. Mr. Workman was elected to honorary life-membership of the Union in 1954 following 50 years' ordinary membership. Mr. Cole had qualified for such an honour, and the Council had resolved to recommend to the 1959 Annual Meeting that he be elected to honorary life-membership. Over the years, Mr. Barrett, Mr. Cole, Mr. McKnight, Mr. Workman and Miss Bowie were authors of papers appearing in *The Emu*.

OFFICERS

The position of Honorary Treasurer is vacant. Mr. E. C. Souter, because of pressure of business, has not nominated for office in 1960. He has been conscientious and efficient in the work of his office, and we are indebted to him for having served the Union for the three years past. The Council will endeavour to fill the position. The vacancy in the General Secretaryship which existed at the last Congress was filled, in February of this year, by the appointment of Mr. Gordon Binns on his return to Melbourne after some years in the country.

Mr. E. S. Hanks resigned from the office of State Secretary for Victoria, during December. He had served in that capacity for 15 years. Mr. J. D. Watson was appointed in succession, relinquishing his position as State Representative on Council to do so. Mr. R. F. Kenyon was appointed to Council, *vice* Mr. Watson, and has subsequently

been appointed Convener of the Conservation Committee of the Union, in succession to Mr. Hugh Wilson. Mr. R. Schodde, of South Australia, and Mr. J. M. Hewitt, of New South Wales, have been appointed to represent their respective States on the Conservation Committee.

Dr. D. L. Serventy has accepted an invitation to serve again on the Checklist Committee.

COUNCIL

The Council has met regularly. In March, the President, Mr. A. R. McGill, was present in Melbourne, and presided at that month's meeting. Mr. Littlejohns has acted as chairman at meetings, generally. In July, it was considered expedient to convene a special meeting of the Council to discuss urgent business connected with the Union's tenancy of its headquarters in Flinders Lane.

CONSERVATION

Many important matters under this head have been brought to the notice of Council, and the Conservation Committee in particular. Brief reference only can be made here to some of these.

The serious problem of the trapping and trade in native species is still with us. During the year, representatives of the various State Fauna Protection Panels conferred at Canberra on this vexed question; this may result in some uniformity in legislation governing the matter. Results of the conference have not yet been published.

The Animal and Birds Protection Board of Tasmania advised that a maximum of twelve Cape Barren Geese may be taken by any one shooter in any one season, with a limit of six birds on one day. (It is estimated that the numbers of this species has been reduced to about 600 in all).

There have been further reports of Fairy Penguins being used for bait by cray-fishers off the islands lying off the eastern tip of Victoria.

Clearing and bulldozing in the restricted habitat of the Helmeted Honeyeater is causing concern.

The Council congratulated Tasmanian members, Messrs. Sharland and Wall, for prompt and vigorous organization of the protest which was instrumental in preventing the resumption of the sealing industry on Macquarie Island. The proposal was withdrawn because of the strength of the protest registered both in Tasmania and on the mainland, the Government admitting that change of policy was due to public opinion. The Union associated itself with the protesting bodies.

Public opinion was again the deciding factor in defeating a determined attempt to alienate a further portion in the Sherbrooke area of the Dandenong Ranges in Victoria, for

the laying out of a sports ground. Swift action by this Union, in concert with kindred bodies, was successful in securing a change of policy by Departments concerned, officials conceding that the re-action of nature lovers influenced them in withdrawing permission for the alienation.

This Union has accepted the policy of the Fisheries and Game Department (Victoria) in the proposed establishment of Game Reserves, aimed at setting aside a chain, throughout the State, of habitats suited to the breeding of ducks. The resumption of certain areas, with restoration to suitable conditions, would be resorted to if necessary. Some of the reserves thus created would become permanent sanctuaries; others would be open to shooters for a limited season when conditions warranted it. It is hoped to repeat the success which attended similar action in the United States of America within recent years, where a greatly depleted duck population, following the draining of normal breeding areas, caused alarm. It is seriously considered that only by the establishment of such reserves can Victoria hope to induce birds, now going interstate to breed, or not breeding at all, because of lack of suitable grounds, to return to the State and become re-established. In spite of press hints that the introduction of foreign game birds was part of the Department's plan in establishing Game Reserves, it is believed that there is no immediate danger of that being done. It is a matter upon which the Union, through its Conservation Committee, has addressed the Department concerned.

The Union has declared its policy, in connection with this matter, in resolving that where there is any conflict between claims for establishment of a Game Reserve as against a National Park, the best interests of conservation were served by the establishment of the latter.

R.A.O.U. Council members and private members have taken an active part in the work of the Victorian National Parks Association. Major projects undertaken include the preparation of requests to the Victorian Government for the establishment of a National Park in the Kulkyne State Forest, in the Hattah Lakes area (site of the 1951 Jubilee Camp-out), and the extension of the Mallacoota National Park, in far-eastern Victoria, to link up with the New South Wales Faunal Reserve at Nadji.

The use of the poison '1080' against rabbits, by State instrumentalities and land-holders is still a matter for concern. The approach of the Conservation Committee of the Union, and of other bodies, is hampered by the dearth of concrete evidence of casualties to native species. This makes it difficult to present a case to the authorities concerned when protest is made against the widespread use of this medium. The assistance of members generally could be enlisted in this direction; the reporting of mortality

amongst native wildlife could be of real help. It is the opinion of the Convener of the Conservation Committee that various State bodies devoted to the welfare of wildlife could perhaps be more vigorous in pursuit of this menace. If any proof is needed of the dangers attending the wholesale broadcasting of poisons, directed at the elimination of pests, the reports of the results of such practices in the southern States of the United States of America are available.

FINANCE

The financial statement has already been printed in *The Emu*, part III, vol. 59.

The Treasurer has been tireless in his efforts to secure payment of membership fees, many long overdue. It is estimated that the default rate is about 5 per cent at the moment. At this time of our financial year, that rate is too great at the present rate of subscription. The time cannot be far distant when Council will be reluctantly compelled to consider an increase in annual fee for membership, if the Union is to continue to publish *The Emu* at its present size. As has been announced before, both in *The Emu* and at Congress, the present subscription does not meet the cost of printing and mailing the journal quarterly. Our hand may be forced at last by the introduction of the heavier postage rates on periodicals, as announced in the latest Federal budget.

The lifting of controls on rentals for business premises in Victoria, came into force on August 1, 1959. The rental paid for use of the headquarters room was immediately quadrupled to a figure beyond our present means. The probability of such happening had been anticipated, and a search for new premises, centrally situated, in the city area for preference, has been made over several years, so far without success, for a place within our means. It is hoped to secure a place with more room for the library. The Union still occupies the Flinders Lane room. The importance of a permanent address is of value to the Union. The Council is making the most suitable arrangements possible for the storage or disposal of Union property should it be compelled to vacate before a suitable new address has been found. In view of the great value of the library, and the irreplaceable nature of many of the volumes, such as Gould, Mathews, and *The Emu*, the responsibility resting on Council is a heavy one.

Council is endeavouring to conduct the Union's business with the least possible drain on its limited finances. The increasing cost of printing, stationery, postage, etc., causes concern. A considerable sum has been saved this year by the courtesy of a member of Council, who has had typed

and duplicated the minutes of meetings, without cost to the Union, a gesture that is appreciated.

The prompt payment of membership dues by every member is again earnestly sought. Provision and posting of accounts to those in arrears has proved costly, and should be unnecessary. It is expensive both in cash, and in the time of honorary officers. Executive officers of the Union feel that the rank and file members do not realize and appreciate the onerous task of conducting the affairs of their organization, which is considerable, and takes much time.

The Union is indebted to those members who have made donations to the funds of R.A.O.U. during the year, whether to general funds or to assist in illustrating *The Emu*. Such sums, irrespective of amount, are gratefully acknowledged.

GENERAL

At the 34th Congress of The Australian and New Zealand Association for Advancement of Science, held in Perth, W.A., in August, the Union was represented by Dr. D. L. Serventy, Dr. J. A. Keast and Mr. R. T. M. Pescott.

During 1959, the British Ornithologists Union celebrated the centenary of its foundation. The Union congratulated that body on reaching this milestone in its history. Dr. A. J. Marshall, a Fellow of this Union, was in England, and represented the R.A.O.U. at the centenary functions of the B.O.U.

GORDON BINNS,
Hon. General Secretary

Square-tailed Kite at Coomboona, Vic.—When school re-started in February 1958, a solitary member of this species, *Lophoictinia isura*, stayed about the area. Spending much of its time resting in trees near irrigation channels, the bird was often under observation. When it flew into the open, Magpies often attacked it, but on many occasions the fight went with the bigger bird and it beat off its attackers. Twice it arose from the carcass of a hare which it shared with a Swamp Harrier (*Circus approximans*) and between them they kept away the usual crowd of Ravens (*Corvus coronoides*). On many nights the Kite roosted in large sugar-gums within the school yard. The bulk of the bird's food seemed to consist of grasshoppers which were in large numbers at that time. The only other occasion I have recorded this species was at Pyramid Hill on November 1 of this year. The bird rose from a telegraph pole and circled as our car went past, then resumed its position.—G. W. BEDGGOOD, Mooropna, Vic., 5/11/58.