

THE SIR CHARLES A. FLEMING MEMORIAL ISSUE

The contributions to this Fleming Memorial Issue of *Notornis* can touch on only a small part of Sir Charles Fleming's encyclopaedic interests. Underlying all the accounts, however, one can discern the extent of his contributions to science and society in New Zealand. The natural sciences, particularly geology and ornithology, are fortunate in being able to claim Sir Charles as their own. His enthusiasm led him to enter many other fields, but it is with birds, and especially Chatham Island birds, that most Society members will associate him. The 1939 paper on Chatham Islands birds (quoted in every contribution) was based on first-hand knowledge of the places and birds, and itself became the basis for future research in the archipelago.

The volume begins with Peter Bull's appreciation of Sir Charles Fleming's contribution to Chatham Islands ornithology in which he summarises Sir Charles's special contribution to knowledge of Chatham Island birds and his staunch and lasting advocacy of protection and research on the islands and their fauna. Then follow 15 papers whose contents range from general summaries of the land (Freeman) and oceanic (Imber) birds, to detailed studies of parakeets (Nixon), passerines (McLean *et al.*), Brown Skuas (Young), and Shore Plover (Davis).

Alan Tennyson and Phil Millener provide some important perspectives on the history of Chatham Island birds with their analysis of two fossil sites on Mangere Island. In so doing, they emphasise how little is known about of the original distribution of Chatham Island birds and indeed the composition of the fauna. This paper provides a link between two of Sir Charles's great loves, palaeontology and ornithology.

The wealth of birdlife on Rangatira (South East) Island, a special island to Sir Charles where he spent two weeks in December 1937 and which he fought long to have reserved, is the subject of three papers. Ron Nilsson and his co-workers give a general survey of all species known from the island. Species such as Chatham Petrel and Shore Plover, that Sir Charles took interest in are well-covered, but the Chatham Robin, whose rehabilitation and re-introduction was fore-shadowed and strongly supported by Sir Charles, is dealt with only peripherally. The species is covered in major publications elsewhere.

Appropriately, perhaps, given their importance to Sir Charles and in the Chatham Islands biota, petrels are the subjects of six of the papers. Five of these concentrate on the Taiko and Chatham Petrel, two of the most endangered species in the world. A species with a high public profile, the Chatham Taiko, is the subject of three papers. David Crockett tells of the long struggle to locate and identify the species, and Mike Imber and his co-workers describe in two detailed papers the efforts needed to discover and secure the Taiko breeding sites, using radio-tracking for the first time on a petrel. Jill West and Ron Nilsson describe the first attempt at a census

of the enormous populations of burrowing petrels. Jill West has summarised knowledge of the elusive Chatham Petrel, which Fleming studied in December 1937, and the research and management efforts being made on its behalf.

There are three papers on shorebird biology, and a note on a penguin. Euan Young and Alison Davis discuss the effects of the limited habitat and food supply found on small islands on the biology and population dynamics of a major predator (the Brown Skua) and a relict shorebird (New Zealand Shore Plover), respectively. They show that island systems are not just repositories for rare species, but provide a wealth of opportunities for research into the evolution of breeding systems and behaviour. Alan Tennyson's note reminds us that, as with most remote oceanic islands where visitors have been few, new taxa are regularly added to the list.

Three papers are devoted to the land birds. A general list of the land and freshwater birds compiled by Amanda Freeman includes much background information on distribution and numbers. A paper by Allan Nixon on parakeets deals with feeding behaviour in relation to hybridization. Another, by Ian McLean and his co-workers, rounds out the coverage with a thought-provoking study of feeding behaviour and niche in the Petroicas, which were the subject of another major paper by Sir Charles.

Notable absences from the species covered here are the Chatham Oystercatcher, the Chatham Island and Pitt Island Shags, and the Chatham Pigeon. Papers on these taxa were offered during the planning stage for the volume, but circumstances precluded their inclusion. It is a measure of the growing maturity of Chatham Islands ornithology, that papers on many Chatham Islands birds appear regularly in the local and international literature. Many, including five in this volume, are based on post-graduate research projects, which Fleming encouraged.

The importance of Fleming's contribution to knowledge of the remote and inhospitable Chathams outliers and their special wildlife is recognised in Alan Tennyson's evocative photographs of Little Mangere Island and Chathams Mollymawks on The Pyramid.

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand, Inc. and the authors and sponsors offer this volume as a tribute to the foresight and energy of Sir Charles Fleming, and his contributions to the study and preservation of Chatham Island birds.

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Editor, *Notornis* Fleming Memorial Issue



Sir Charles Fleming at the Tuku, H.G. Blyth's Station, January 1938.
Photograph by Courtesy of Lady Fleming.