

**OBITUARY****OLGA SANSOM, Q.S.M.  
1900-1989**

The death of Olga Sansom in July 1989 at the age of 89 years marked the end of a long and highly significant association between a vital and charming personality, the community of Southland and Stewart Island, and the natural history of the southern region.

Olga Sansom was a Stewart Islander by birth. She never lost touch with the island she knew and loved so well. It was wholly appropriate that she wrote two very successful books about Stewart Islanders, *The Stewart Islanders* in 1970 and *In the Grip of an Island* in 1982. They stand as a permanent record of many aspects of past Stewart Island life and history. Much of this may well have been lost but for the skills of Olga Sansom as a writer, researcher and collector of worthwhile information.

Notable among the many aspects of her long and eventful life was Olga Sansom's 10-year association with the Southland Museum, where she was director from 1949 to 1959. It was probably during this period that she became best known for her considerable knowledge in the field of natural history. She was the recognised authority. The Southland Museum and Olga Sansom were where Southlanders went in search of reliable information, be it bones, birds, botany, marine or freshwater life. In addition to getting the information sought, they were invariably inspired to look further. She was a constant source of inspiration to others. As I and many of my close associates can testify, she had an enormous influence on our generation and indeed the succeeding generation. My own sons are a case in point. They always came away with something in their hands or minds to encourage them. It was Olga Sansom who pointed me in the direction of OSNZ. As a result, an additional dimension was added to my life. Field trips in Olga's company were, irrespective of time, tide or weather, a delight and an occasion for creation of valued and lasting memories.

For her services to the community, Olga Sansom was awarded the Queens Service Medal in 1979. It was a richly deserved honour.

Olga was a foundation member of OSNZ and was Southland's first Regional Representative. She also served on the Society's national Council.

It was probably not surprising that she was particularly known for her work on self-introduced Australian bird species. Almost without fail Olga Sansom was the person called on to identify the passing parade of stragglers and vagrants, both dead and alive, which arrived from time to time. More importantly for ornithology, she recorded the relevant facts with care and in detail. The arrival and establishment of the Spur-winged Plover in Southland was a prime example. Reference to early issues of *New Zealand Bird Notes* and *Notornis* gives some small insight into Olga Sansom's contribution to ornithology in New Zealand.

Naturalist, teacher, author, broadcaster and highly valued and respected member of the community, Olga Sansom has left a legacy of wider understanding of natural history values and fact and also of succeeding generations who have been encouraged by her dynamic personality to try and follow the outstanding example she set.

Among her many surviving relatives is her daughter, Maida Barlow, well known in Ornithological Society circles and one who follows closely in her mother's footsteps.

Roger Sutton