

John Warham 1919-2010

John Warham was born in Halifax, Yorkshire, UK on 11 Oct 1919 and died on 12 May 2010 in Christchurch, New Zealand. In the intervening period he became world renown for his wildlife photography and avian ecology, particularly marine biology, in which he became the pre-eminent researcher.

Although born in Halifax, John's family soon moved to Doncaster and then to Retford, where he attended the local grammar school and developed an interest in natural history. John began his working life at the age of 18 as a laboratory assistant at a local textile firm. Subsequently, his plans to complete a degree in colour chemistry were sidelined by the Second World War and instead he spent 6.5 years in the British Army before being demobilised in 1946 with the rank of Captain. At a camp outside Taunton he met his future wife, a nurse, Pat Sabido, and they were subsequently married in 1943 at Retford. Following his demobilisation from the army John returned to the firm he had left at the start of the war. Here he quickly became involved in management and instigated many efficiency measures.

Meanwhile John continued his nature photography and soon after published his first book *Bird Watcher's Delight* in 1951. Photography and long hours spent watching the birds closely led to a switch from the photographic aspects to studying the behaviour of birds, and to allow individual birds to be recognised, John became a bird bander. About this time John and Pat made a trip to Skomer, where they became acquainted with auks and Manx shearwaters – the latter the first of the petrels that were to feature so strongly in their lives.

By 1952 the Warhams were able to sell their photographs with some confidence, and so decided to leave Britain for Australia, to look at the wildlife there before it was all gone. For the next 9 years they wandered that continent, often camping in remote areas for long periods, and maintained themselves by selling their articles and photographs. At the end of this period John spent 15 months away as biologist with the 1959-1961 Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition to Macquarie I, where his main study projects concerned rockhopper penguins, royal penguins and white-headed petrels.

In 1961, on their way back to Britain, John and Pat spent 10 weeks in New Zealand, where they were guided by local ornithologists, and so saw a good deal of our wildlife. After John completed a Bachelor of Science with 1st Class Honours degree at the University of Durham (where he had J.Z Young and John Coulson among his tutors) in 1965, the



Fig. 1. John Warham in 2005, when he received the CSIRO Antarctic Research Expeditions medal.

Warhams returned to New Zealand, where John had obtained the position of Lecturer in Zoology at the University of Canterbury. After settling in Christchurch, John's research initially concerned crested penguins and involved expeditions (and they were expeditions in those days before more rapid means of transport and communication became available) to The Snares (for research on Snares crested penguins), Campbell I (rockhopper penguins), Antipodes I (rockhopper and erect-crested penguins) and a mainland site on Jackson Head (Fiordland crested penguin). During these trips to the subantarctic islands John also turned his attention once more to studies of albatrosses and petrels - particularly Buller's albatross, sooty shearwater and mottled petrel.

During these expeditions John achieved a good balance between accomplishing his own research and providing rigorous supervision for students. As a former student I can attest to him as a hard task master who could be critical, but at the same time he was always willing to help those who tried to meet his exacting standards. John was a perfectionist, he set high standards for himself and expected his students to strive for similarly high standards. Indeed, he would tell us in no uncertain terms if we were not striving for the exacting standards he expected of us. As an example of John's attention to detail I can relate one of my experiences when John returned a manuscript that I had asked to review with the comment "Not a semi-colon in the entire article!"

With his university position John found himself examining theses written by post-graduates, and so decided to write one himself, based on the data he had collected on the relationships between body size and other variables among the petrels. This formed the basis of his M. Sc thesis submitted to his parent university at Durham and in due course he was

awarded this degree in 1968. Another advantage of moving to the University of Canterbury was that it was possible for staff to complete a Ph.D., and he was awarded this in 1973 for his work on crested penguins. In this he brought together the results of his field work on 5 of the 6 species of crested penguins undertaken at The Snares and Antipodes Is, Macquarie I, and South Westland. These results were published as a series of papers which, 30 years later are still important references for this group. A further academic honour followed in 1985, when John was awarded a D.Sc. from the University of Durham.

John officially retired from the University of Canterbury as a Reader in 1985. Over the years John studied a large number of petrel and penguin species and his published record of these studies is prodigious – about 140 papers and articles, and from his fieldwork in Australia and New Zealand alone he published at least 60 scientific papers on seabirds covering aspects of the biology of at least 23 species.

The results of his research in Australia were summarised in *The Handbook of Australian Seabirds* which he co-authored with the Serventy brothers in 1971. However, it was only following his “official” retirement that John embarked on his most ambitious projects – a 2-volume monograph of the petrels – the 1st volume published in 1990 and the 2nd in 1996. These have been widely acclaimed as the definitive texts on the petrels. Indeed, one correspondent told me that at the Department of Zoology, Glasgow University, these volumes were never on the shelves – they were always on the desk of post-graduates who consulted them extensively. In conjunction with this monograph, John compiled over 14,400 references in a bibliography of petrels from Aristotle to the present.

The significance of John’s contribution to ornithology has been widely recognised in New Zealand and overseas. His many honours include the Royal Australasian Ornithologists’ Union Serventy Medal in 1992, and becoming a Fellow of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand in 1999. And in 2001 he achieved an honour rare for a field biologist when he was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit, for services to ornithology.

John’s legacy is a greatly enhanced knowledge of the biology of seabirds throughout the world, photographic essays of remote places in an earlier time, and a body of former students inspired to continue long-term high quality ecological research, sometimes in remote places of the world. And John’s contribution to field ornithology has not ceased with his passing. In Apr 2010, some of the Buller’s albatrosses banded at the study colony established by John and his students in 1969 were still breeding.

Unlike the rest of us, these old birds did not look any different from when I first saw them in 1976.

Paul Sagar

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

B.Sc. Hons. (1st Class) University of Durham 1965

M.Sc. University of Durham 1968

Thesis entitled: *Biometric studies of birds of the Order Procellariiformes*

Ph.D. University of Canterbury 1973

Thesis entitled: *The breeding biology and behaviour of Eudyptes penguins.*

D.Sc. University of Durham 1985

AWARDS & HONOURS

Australian Antarctic medal 1960

Frank M. Chapman Award 1973 & 1996

Prince & Princess of Wales Award (Royal Society of New Zealand) 1988

Claude McCarthy Fellowship 1988

Serventy Medal of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists’ Union 1992

Kenyon Lifetime Achievement Award of the Pacific Seabird Group 1999

Member New Zealand Order of Merit 2001

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