

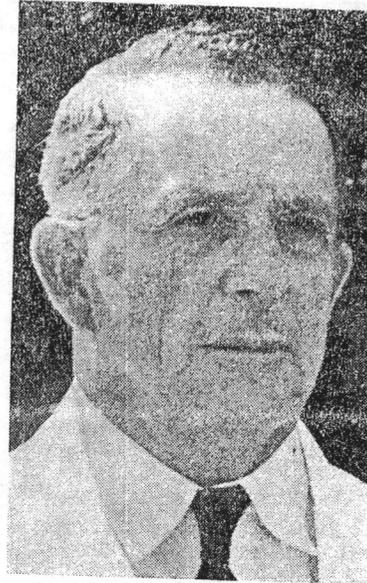
The North Queensland Naturalist

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Mr. J. Wyer.

J. WYER—Secretary of the Club since its inception, it came as a surprise to many of the guests at a recent "Nats" function to hear Mr. Wyer say, unashamedly, "I am not a Naturalist." Perhaps that is the greatest tribute ever paid to the Secretary, unwittingly, by himself!

Inspired by the ideals of the Club, firmly believing as all Club members do, that the "Nats" is for the ultimate benefit of the very land we live in, our Secretary has given of his wide executive and administrative experience to benefit the organisation through the past eighteen years.

In 1932 when the Cairns and Tableland Publicity Association (later known as the Cairns and District Tourist Development Association) was the local body endeavouring to convince Australia that the North was really a tropic wonderland, Mr. Wyer came in contact with Dr. H. Flecker, and "Doc's" enthusiasm regarding the possibilities of a Naturalists' Club inspired him to become associated with the venture. The Club's success and world-wide recognition are largely due to his businesslike approach to problems

which, to the Naturalist, pure-and-simple, would appear insurmountable. "Not a Naturalist"—our Secretary brought to the service of the Club his experience as chief executive officer of the Cairns Harbour Board—one of the few Harbour Boards in Australia to maintain an active interest in Tourist Development.

A leading citizen of the town, he is an authority on the early history of Cairns because as he says, "I have lived and grown with the city." Always actively associated with any body honestly working for the betterment of the city, he is a member of the Cairns Chamber of Commerce, the Cairns War Memorial Committee, and the North Queensland Museum Committee.

To his personal knowledge of the district, his sympathetic approach to its problems, and his far-sightedness when surveying the future in prospect, the Club owes much of its success today.

HUGO FLECKER M.B., Ch.M., F.R.C.S. (Edin.), B.A.R., F.F.R., D.R., F.R.G.S.A.—It was said of a retiring headmaster of a famous English Public School that even though his academic achievements were of the highest, his scholastic record most outstanding, and his opinion on the British educational system the accepted authority, yet these paled into insignificance beside the highest honour his students could confer. Throughout his thirty years' association with the School he had always borne an affectionate nickname.

And so it is with our Past President. Universities have honoured him, Royal Societies have been pleased to confer their Fellowships, international authorities have looked to him for a final opinion on points of dispute in his chosen field of Radiology, but to the "Nats" he will always be—"Doc."

Possessed of that gift of almost ingenious simplicity which marks the truly great, his single-mindedness over his eighteen years' association with the Club has been the rock on which the whole structure has been built.

When the Club was founded in 1932, it was "Doc" who associated with our present Secretary in guiding the puling infant through its

first irregular steps. From a local body the fame of the "Cairns Nats" spread throughout the land—and overseas. In a few years it became the accepted authority on all matters appertaining to the Natural History of North Queensland. Membership extended to all Australian States—to Hawaii, and to New Zealand. Perhaps the only place where the fame of the Club was not fully appreciated was the city of its origin.



Dr. H. Flecker.

Mt. St. John Sanctuary

(By Keith Kennedy, Museum of Music, Townsville)

Sixty years ago Mrs. Catherine Robinson bought 3,000 acres of grazing and swamp land $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Townsville and adjacent to the Town Common. She was the third white woman to settle in Townsville, and in those days there was real pioneering to be done. On the land were two lagoons separated by a hill which was called Mt. St. John after her son who now owns the property. The hill is of interest from a geological aspect for it is a residual—part of the worn down remains of the ancient and much higher land surface of which, Mounts Louisa Marlowe, Cutheringa, Stewart and Elliot were part.

Mr. St. John, Robinson has always been interested in native animal life and in 1930, at his request, the Gov-

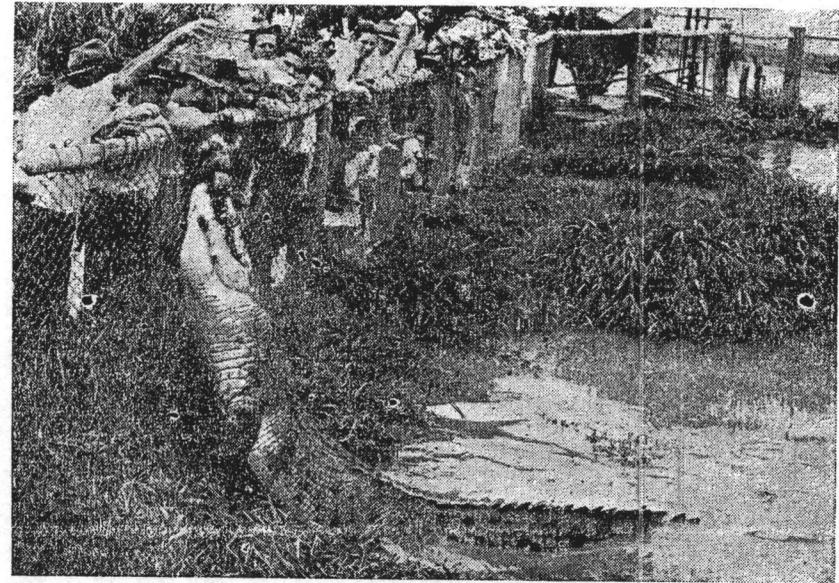
And behind each extension of interest, each widening of scope, was the quiet suggestions of "Doc." In a store-room at the City Council nurseries at Edge Hill, the beginnings of a museum were collected, and in conjunction with the museum, an herbarium. These were later to be housed in their present location at the "Kuranda" barracks on the Esplanade. Moving spirit behind the museum was "Doc," and his untiring efforts in the field and from a purely collector's viewpoint have resulted in the Club herbarium being the most complete collection of tropical plants north of the metropolis. Even today when ill-health has prevented his active participation in field work he may be found on each Saturday afternoon amongst his beloved specimens, classifying, examining and noting. Unostentatiously, and with a persistence which never fails to amaze the initiates who appreciate the full extent of his self-imposed task, "Doc" continues his classifications, unselfishly working in order that those who follow after may have the benefit of his unequalled knowledge.

"The North Queensland Naturalist," the quarterly publication of the Club, was his brain-child. Due to health reasons he had, some months ago, to relinquish the major portion of his active Club work and also his journalistic work in connection with the magazine. It is without his knowledge, but actuated, by a desire to see the Club's founder and most beloved member duly appreciated that this small tribute is paid.

Long may you be spared to guide and advise us—"Doc."

ernment declared the area a sanctuary, thereby creating the largest privately owned wild life refuge in Australia. During the dry season, however, the lagoons used to dry up completely, so at considerable expense Mr. Robinson erected a large dam at the outlet of each, which converted the lagoons into lakes holding water throughout the year, and so providing a permanent home for multitudes of birds that otherwise would have had to migrate in search of water holes.

Every species of duck known in the North now live there, and the Magpie geese (*Anseranas semipalmata*) formerly rare in the district, now amount to thousands. Other birds which have taken advantage of the protection afforded



Feeding Time at Mt. St. John Crocodile Sanctuary.

by the sanctuary are Jaibarus (*Xenorhynchus asiaticus*) Brolgas (*Megalornis rubicundus*) Herons—several species, Pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*), Swamp Hens (*Porphyrio melanotus*), Masked Plover (*Lobibyx miles*) and the quaint Lotus bird (*Irediparra gallinacea*). These and other birds form a reservoir from which the Town Common and other parts of the Townsville district receive the overflow. They are fully protected for, unlike Government sanctuaries which are inadequately policed, St. John sanctuary has a full time caretaker who patrols the area and is especially vigilant on moonlight nights.

The birds know that they are protected for, as soon as the yearly shooting season opens at the end of June, flocks of them make for the sanctuary and remain there. They also know that the numerous visitors

to the zoo and sanctuary will not harm them, so are comparatively tame and act entirely differently to what they do in unprotected areas.

Looking at the dense swarms of birds one would think that there would be a food problem, but they seem to be able to gather enough for their wants. The rhijome of *Nymphaea gigantea*, and bulgoot nuts—the tuber of a species of rush—form their main vegetable diet.

The zoo itself is at the foot of the hill and contains not only Australian but animals from other lands. However, the pride of the sanctuary are the crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*) which are Mr. Robinson's specialty. Crocodiles rarely breed in captivity, but these nest regularly every wet season and exact accounts of their habits have been recorded in Mr. Robinson's diary and published in scientific journals.

North Queensland Naturalists' Club

It was with much regret that the Club had to abandon the December issue of the Journal, owing to the grave illness of Doctor Flecker. At the time when the articles, reports and general "copy" which constitute our quarterly were due for the printer, "Doc's" health was a matter of deep concern for all Club members, and as he has, over the past

years, handled the "Journal" publication almost exclusively, it was considered in the best interests of the high standard set by previous issues to let a number lapse rather than lower that standard. It has taken some little time to become familiar with the routine connected with the magazine's publication, but the Club is doubly happy to be able to go into

print again, and have the "Doc" still with us to give the benefit of his knowledge and experience.

The Election of Officers at the September meeting resulted in Mr. A. Read being elected President, with Dr. Flecker, Messrs J. Gray and D. Cummings Vice-Presidents. Mr. J. Wyer again assumed the onerous duties of Secretary, and will be ably assisted by Mr. H. Burns (Asst. Secretary-Organiser) and Mr. Gordon McLaughlin (Asst. Secretary-Correspondence). Mrs. A. Read will guard the finances as Treasurer, and the Committee elected comprises Messrs Courtney, Toogood, and Peiniger. A hard-working, proven team, and all look forward to a progressive year for the Club.

The unexpected "early wet" curtailed the Club's Field activities, and a proposed visit to Brown's Bay was only accomplished at the second attempt. At the first call, sixteen stout-hearted members assembled at the wharf at 7.30 a.m. and watched the "wet North" live up to its name for two hours before postponing the trip for a fortnight. It speaks volumes for the interest shown by members when so many will turn out in inclement weather to attend field functions.

Cliff Cantell excelled himself on February 13th when he gave a talk on "The Origin of the Earth." So ably did he handle his subject that it is still hard to decide which created the greatest interest—the masterly handling of the talk itself, or the facile and accurate way in which the lecturer answered the questions which were showered on him at the conclusion of his address.

Townsville And District Naturalists' Club Lectures And Field Days

The Club meets on the first Friday of each month in the Adult Education Centre Lecture Room.

President, Mr. K. Kennedy, Esplanade and Rose Streets, Kissing Point, Townsville.

Hon. Secretary, Elizabeth Kennedy, P.O. Box 178, Townsville.

SEPTEMBER MEETING—After the election of officers the meeting took the form of a members night.

The following officers were elected: Patron, Mr. F. H. Brazier; President, Mr. Keith Kennedy; Vice-Presidents, Mr. H. Strauss and Mr. A. Perkin; Hon. Treasurer, Mr. J. Pepham; Hon. Auditor, Mr. Sleigh; Hon. Secretary and Librarian, Mrs. E. Kennedy; Committee, Mr. L. R. Black, Mr. J. J. Selvaige, Mr. R. Sleigh, Mr. S.

The meeting closed at quite a late hour, but none felt that the time had passed slowly—a tribute to the lecturer's ease of delivery and aptitude for holding his audience.

Highlight of the half-year's activities was the Christmas party held at the President's residence on December 15th. Almost a hundred guests enjoyed the films, games and liberal table provided by the Ladies of the Club, and the subsequent presentation of travelling cases and rugs to Dr. Flecker and Mr. J. Wyer in appreciation of their long association and unselfish services to the Naturalists, brought the evening to an unexpected climax for the two recipients.

This party was fully reported in the daily press, but one cannot let this occasion pass without quoting a passage from the address in reply of Mr. J. Wyer who said "Men have been knighted for doing less for Australia than Dr. Flecker has done for North Queensland."

This statement, made in all sincerity by one to whom the Club owes a debt of deep gratitude, was echoed in the hearts of all present.

With "Doc" back in harness (albeit—light harness) and Mr. Wyer retaining the secretariat, the Club looks confidently forward to a most successful quarter. The civic programme for 1951, which includes the official celebration of Cairns' 75th anniversary, will give opportunities for many functions, and it is felt that the members owe it to the sterling example of such men as Dr. Flecker and Mr. Wyer to see that the Club, like Australia—ADVANCES.

Breck, Mrs. E. Maloney, Miss N. Hopkins.

Miss N. Hopkins then gave a talk on bird observations during the month of August, which was illustrated by pictures on the screen. Mr. Kennedy spoke on different ways the primitive peoples make fire, describing one method with the aid of a North Queensland fire drill. Mr. Cassidy spoke on astronomy and after discussions on many subjects of natural science the meeting closed.

September field day was to Kissing Point to observe bird life.

OCTOBER MEETING—The lecture was given by Mr. H. Strauss, who spoke on experiences in New Guinea whilst on a geological expedition in the Markham Valley. The

climate and topography of that part of the island were described. He then proceeded with a description of the kind of natives he encountered, their ability to travel long distances over mountainous country, their agriculture, customs and method of using the bow and arrow. Pictures of native life were thrown on the screen and details explained. Specimens tabled included a young carpet snake by Mr. Black, a stone fish by Mrs. Searle, a stone adze and Trebriand wooden sword club by Mr. Kennedy.

October field day to the Town Common.

NOVEMBER MEETING—Mr. Keith Kennedy gave the lecture entitled the Story of the Zulus. A resume was given of the rise of the Zulus from a small tribe to a powerful nation, which was accomplished by the genius of Chaka during his lifetime. The absence of temples or any set form of worship, their belief in spirits, ghosts and wizards, the profession of witch doctor and rain doctor and other details of Zulu life were explained. He also compared the wearing by the witch doctor of snake bones, fish bladders and other talismans to the wearing of caps and gowns, wigs, and using strings of letters after their names by white people. Both races he said, used them for the purpose of inspiring ordinary people with the feeling of the wearer's superiority. Many coloured lantern slides photographed by the lecturer were shown depicting Zulus and their kraals, weapons, etc. Examples of their bead ornaments, wire bangles, shields and assegais and clubs were displayed and described.

After the lecture Mr. Black showed pictures of butterflies he had identified on the Town Common during the Club's field day, Miss N. Hopkins exhibited the cast off skin of a snake,

and two birds nests, one built over the other.

November field day to Cape Pallarenda.

DECEMBER MEETING—The lecture, Rambles on the Town Common, was given by Mr. Sleigh. He commenced with the ponds and marshes at the entrance to the Town Common and took his listeners on an imaginary walk through different parts, finally coming out at the foot of Mt. Marlow, on Cape Pallarenda. The unique bird life and some of the flora was described and he compared the locality to what it looked like when he was a boy.

Butterflies of Cape Pallarenda were described by Mr. L. R. Black, and he pointed out the various marks of identification. Exhibits included were part of a porcupine fish, a seed vessel of the wild Kapok tree (*Cochlespermum Gregorii*), a large mangrove fruit, a laminated stone from the Ross River, a scented flower and leaf (unidentified) from Fantome Island, and an Indian orchid (*Cymbidium aleofofolium*).

December field day to Mt. Louisa and district.

JANUARY MEETING—Mr. Popham spoke on Street Names of Townsville, when much information of historical interest was disclosed. For example, Stokes Street is connected with natural science, for it is named after Captain Stokes, who commanded the Beagle on its historical voyage with the naturalist, Charles Darwin. Stanley Street is named after another naval officer and explorer, Owen Stanley, after whom the Owen Stanley Range of New Guinea takes its name.

Miss N. Hopkins described the birds observed during the last field day to Mt. Louisa district to Althouse Creek.

The Spangled Drongo

Chibia bracteata (Gould)

(By J. McLoughlin)

The spangled drongo is about one foot in length, and appears to be jet black.

The main characteristic of this bird is its forked tail, which it wags once or twice when alighting on a branch. When seen at a distance it appears to be jet black as mentioned, but when viewed from close quarters it will be noticed that on the breast, behind the ear-holes, and on top of the head, patches of bluish feathers are distinguishable.

The bird shows great loyalty to its eggs and young. I noted this with interest last nesting season when I

was fortunate enough to find a nest built low enough for observation without the usual difficulty of extensive tree-climbing. I was about four feet from the nest when the brooding parent bird which had been glaring at me whilst I made the short ascent, flew off with a harsh cry. It returned shortly with its mate and I was subjected to a "dive bombing" attack by both birds.

Nevertheless, I managed to obtain a good view of the nest, and noted on the bottom, three fledgelings barely covered with down of a darkish colour.

The spangled drongo builds its nest from a height of forty to fifty feet from the ground, entwining tendrils of wild creepers with local grasses to make a comfortable brooding place, and lining the interior

with thin vine-tendrils. Three to five eggs are laid in one clutch, and are pinkish-white, spotted and streaked, chiefly at the large end with dark red, light brown and underlying markings of grey.

Expedition through Cape York Peninsula From Cairns To Palmer River

(By Douglas Veivers)

Less known and more interesting trails further North will be described in a further series of articles.

To the devoted student of natural history or the geographical, and to him who would wish a job done well or not at all, I feel that I must first apologise for the nature of this article.

It is not, as probably expected, a comprehensive survey of the Cape York Peninsula, but is compiled from observations made during a rush tour, and represents a cross-section, or rather longitudinal section of the "Big Cape," with some insight into its life and its people and such geography and natural history as may be incidental.

The road (query road) from Cairns to Cape York covers a distance of roughly 750 miles. I made the round journey during the comparatively easy winter months of 1949, one of a party of four, consisting of R. Veivers, organiser of the tour, C. Veivers, E. Quinlan, and lastly and leastly myself.

A 15 cwt. Chevrolet army utility served as our means of transportation, and when laden with the large quantities of petrol, stores, camping and road building equipment, proved little more than adequate for such a journey.

Of the first stage of the journey, through Mareeba, Dimbulah, Alma Den, Chillagoe, and so to the rail-head at Mungana, I need dwell upon but little. It is a road often travelled. At Kuranda, some twenty miles from Cairns, the coastal scrubs are left behind, and thence the way lies through open forest country.

In those dry months of the year, the heat of these regions makes itself felt, and most of one's time is taken up in searching for adequate shade in which to gain some respite from the sun. But there is always some respite. I recall the charm of places where beer sold at the same price as "outside" despite their comparative isolation, and every hotel was a stopping place. Chillagoe I remember for the majesty of its famous limestone caverns, secondly, for the personal discomfort experienced through imbibing quan-

ties of its equally infamous lime-water.

From Mungana it is a short drive to the crossing of the Walsh River, and the beginning of the Peninsula cattle country. The centres of civilisation now become fewer and farther apart.

We spent several hours beside the well-built causeway which spans the then dry bed of the Walsh, while the tyres of the utility cooled, and we ate a midday meal in company with myriads of ants and flies.

During that time the camp was invaded by two snakes. One, a specimen fully ten feet in length and possibly of the species *Oxyuranus scutellatus* (commonly known as taipan), was despatched immediately from a respectful distance. The other, a much smaller but more ferocious reptile of the same species, we boxed alive with a view to domestication. (The domestication of a taipan would be entirely without precedent). But within a half hour of captivity the reptile had died, probably from sheer fright. We broke open one of our several bottles of rum and preserved his body in a mixture of rum and water hoping to obtain positive identification of the type. Not long after, observation of his condition showed that all colour in its body had been bleached to a pastel white. With all due consideration for personal internal organs it was decided that the remainder of the rum be jettisoned, but the decision was of course, a little hard, and finally it went along with us on the journey.

Beyond the Walsh the road (particularly good in this area) crosses the rich blacksoil plains of the Wrotham Park station to the Wrotham Park station settlement itself, and thence runs through a "short" 25 miles stretch of further blacksoil country to the Mitchell River. (The "Short" 25 miles was a distance supplied by one of the station hands. Apparently miles here are measured as "long" or "short," but I was not able to determine

whether this basis of measurement is due to the comparative natures and conditions of the roads to be traversed, or whether mileages here are measured to the nearest five and allowance made by further stipulation as to long or short). To Wrotham Park the road leads almost west; from there the actual ascent of the Peninsula begins.

Rising three-quarters of a mile from the eastern coast, the Mitchell, biggest of the Cape's rivers, flows some 300 miles west to discharge into the Gulf of Carpentaria. The waters flow perennially, and throughout its length the river is abundant in wild life.

Fish are plentiful in the stream, as are also the small freshwater crocodile (*Crocodylus johnstonii* to you), not a man-eater, but to my mind anyway, capable of inflicting a bite and therefore not to be tempted. They average between four and five feet long, but some may attain a length of up to nine feet.

Wild pigs roam the banks of the river, and game there is in abundance. The two common varieties of duck, the common grey duck (*Anas superciliosus*) and the black and white Burdekin duck (*Spatula rynchotis*) are plentiful, together with a variety of goose (*Anseranus semipalmata*—not strictly a goose), and two varieties of pygmy goose (*Nettion*).

The Squatter Pigeons (*Geophas scryta*), small brown flock pigeons and excellent table birds, are common right along the banks of the stream. Though generally found on the ground, they will scatter and rise swiftly when disturbed. The red-eyed Diamond dove (*Geopelia humeralis*) is not a rare bird in the region.

Probably the most interesting bird here is the ordinary black-breasted plover (*Zonifer tricolor*). A comical bird on the sandbanks of the river during the day (it dances ceaselessly about with mouth wide open), its weird cry at night as it flies continually overhead is one of the currier aspects of this country.

A great deal of the bird life in the Peninsula makes its presence known in this way. There the crows disturbed our rest by day, and hordes of black cockatoos by night.

From the Mitchell River and Mt. Mulgrave Station on the northern bank the road leads north, through a short strip of eroded country, past the imposing landmark of Mt. Mulgrave on the right, and finally runs out on to the broad bed of the Palmer River and Palmerville T.O. (On this stage the road meets for the first time with the overland telegraph from Georgetown, which it follows generally for the remainder of the journey).

The Palmer, at the time of our crossing dried to a string of water-holes, is one of the more imposing of the Peninsula's big rivers. Here was the biggest of the Peninsula's former goldfields, at its peak during the 1870's when the bed of the stream, with its rich deposits of alluvial gold supported a population of 50,000 people, whites and Chinese. Now all is gone. The once prosperous centres of Maytown, Byrnestown and Uhrstown farther upstream are today typical "ghost" towns, silent and deserted.

The rich gold reefs that were here have long since yielded up the total of their treasure, and apart from these centres, there remains but even little evidence of the magnitude of this once teeming field. Now the population of the entire area can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Stand here on the banks of this broad river bed, and feel a little of the spirit of those dead days. Feel the awe and oppression of a land where even the stars go down. Watch them at night from your blankets—the hosts of shooting stars that would seem to be still writing a valediction to the dominion that here was once man's.

But later gaze up again at the stars, and realise their true substance, hear the cry of wild ducks and geese that fly continually overhead and the ceaseless chattering and calling of the other free creatures of this land, feel its peace and contentment and understand the falseness of your former impressions, your misconstruction of the change that was manifested in this great land with the departure of close civilisation—not death, but restoration.

(To Be Continued)