

THE
NORTH QUEENSLAND
NATURALIST
CAIRNS

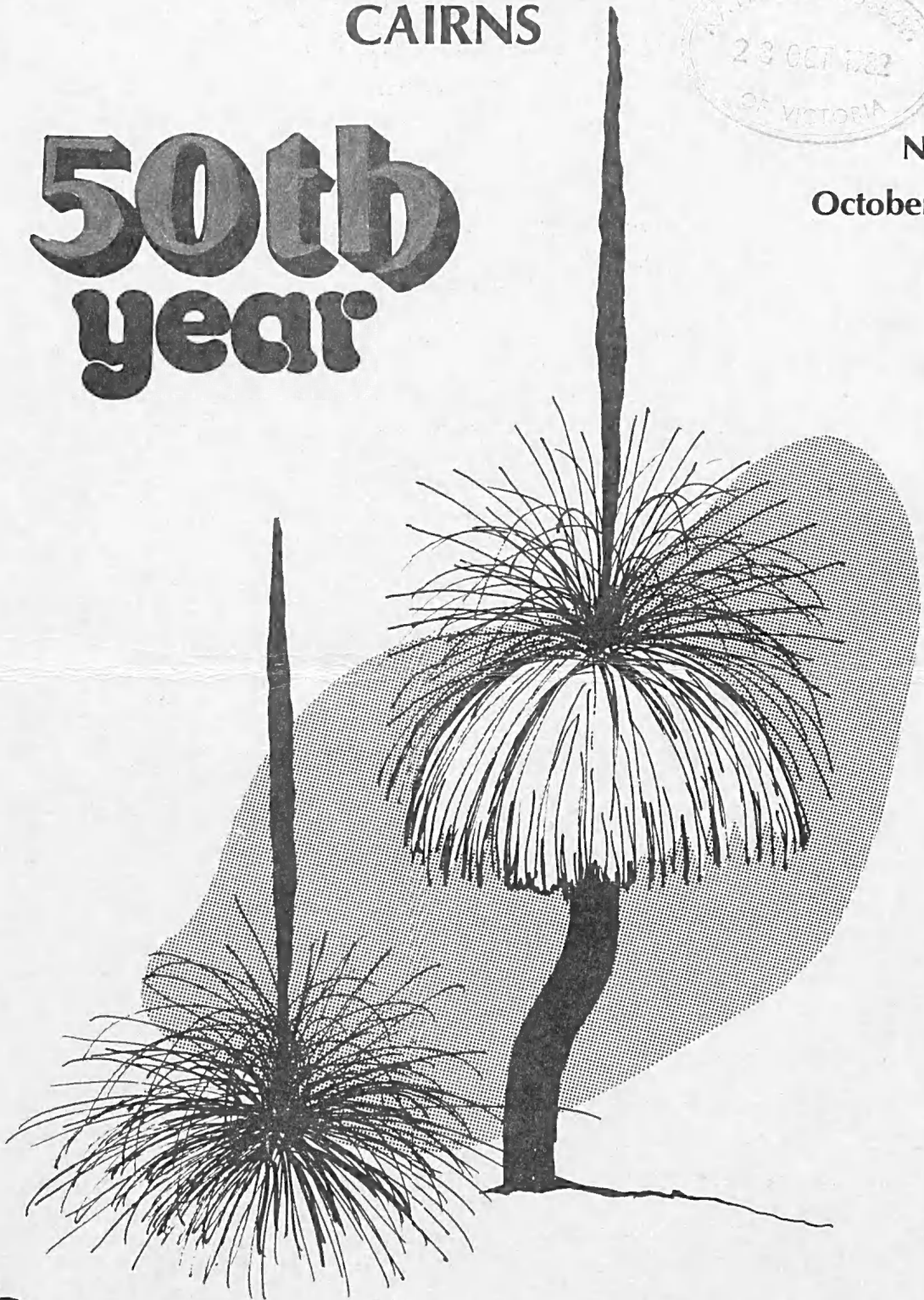


**50th
year**

No. 181

October 1982

50¢



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The NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALIST CAIRNS

Journal of

NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS CLUB
Box 991, P.O. CAIRNS, Q. 4870. Australia.
Phone 53 1183

Founder President: The late Dr. HUGO FLECKER
International Library No: AT ISSN 0078 1630

OBJECTS: The furtherance of the study of the various branches of Natural History and the preservation of our heritage of indigenous fauna and flora.

MEETINGS: Second Tuesday of each month at Cairns Education Centre, Cnr. Morehead and Lazarus Sts., Bungalow, 8.00 p.m.

FIELDS DAYS: Sunday before meeting. Notice of place and time given in "Cairns Post".

SUBSCRIPTIONS: (Due September 30th)

City and Suburban Members	\$ 5.00
Country Members	\$4.50
Pensioner and Junior Members	\$1.50

CLUB OFFICERS:

PRESIDENT	MR LES FRANCIS
HON. SECRETARY	MRS D MAGARRY
HON. TREASURER	MR W FELTON
HON. EDITOR	JOURNAL COMMITTEE
PATRON	MR S.E. STEPHENS

50th YEAR

No. 181, OCTOBER 1982

PRICE 50¢

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Each author is responsible for the facts and opinions expressed
in his or her article.

OUR FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION DINNER



On August 21st fifty present and past members and friends gathered for dinner at the R.S.L. rooms on Cairns Esplanade to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the North Queensland Naturalists Club. The president, Mr. Les Francis welcomed the speaker, the Club's patron, Mr. S.E. Stephens who was president in the forties. His talk, full of interest for all and nostalgia for some, is given here in full:

" The First Fifty Years of the North Queensland Naturalists Club

The 29th August - tomorrow week - marks fifty years of activity of the North Queensland Naturalists Club. It is quite a long time and, as far as I know, none of the foundation members are still actively associated with the Club. Some have moved away from the North and are still living in other localities, but very many have passed on.

The Club was formed at a public meeting called by the then Mayor of Cairns, Alderman W.A. Collins, on 29th August 1932. A provisional committee elected at this founding meeting consisted of Ald. Collins, Miss Hooper, Capt. Fish and Messrs. Roberts, R.G. Gorton, Bruce Cummings, L.J. Jeppesen, Les Wright the Council Curator, A.E. Wilkinson the Town Clerk, Joe Wyer the Harbour Board Secretary and Dr. Hugo Flecker.

Dr. Flecker was the moving spirit behind the founding of the Club and was elected its first President - a position he held from 1932 to 1945 and again in 1949 and 1950. He was keenly interested in Natural History and especially in Botany. Quite early in the life of the Club he started assembling a botanical collection of North Queensland plant specimens. On any field trip by the Club and even on private days out, "the Doc" as he was familiarly known had his black tin collecting box slung over his shoulder and always came back with a trunk full. These were dried and mounted on herbarium sheets and sent off to the Government Botanist for official identification. You can well imagine that only a few years of collecting in such a vast field as North Queensland yielded a collection that taxed the resources of the Club to house. The City Council came to our assistance and provided a herbarium store-house at the Botanic Gardens at Edge Hill. Eventually the Herbarium was handed over to the Forestry Department and moved to its offices on the Atherton Tableland.

In addition to collecting the plant specimens Dr. Flecker published a Census of North Queensland Plants as a supplement to the Club's Journal, which was started quite early in the Club's life.

From quite early days the Club was kept in the public eye with a weekly column of Current Nature Notes in the local press. This was maintained regularly over many years

Another community oriented service that the Club undertook in its early days was the provision of an honorary guide service on the reef at Green Island each week-end when the tides exposed the reef. This proved a popular service to visitors with limited knowledge of the varied forms of life met with on a coral reef.

Also on Green Island, at the request of the Club, the then Parks Curator of the City Council, Mr. Les. Wright, compiled a list of plants growing on the island. This revealed that there were twenty-six species of native trees and shrubs established on the island in addition to vines and grasses.

A Wild Nature Show was introduced in 1935 as an annual exhibition. It brought together, and put on display to the public, the collections of members in the various fields of Natural History in which each specialised. Some of the earlier shows

actually surprised some of the members themselves at the scope of the field a Naturalists Club should embrace. These shows continued on a regular annual basis until disrupted by the second world war. Since the war they have been resumed on an intermittent and limited basis only, with the most recent being a display at Raintrees Shopping Centre during World Wilderness Week. They still create a good deal of public interest.

Over the years the Club has been associated with many scientists working on a multiplicity of projects connected with natural history. Back in 1948 the American Museum of Natural History sent out an expedition to study and collect the flora and fauna of Far North Queensland. Known as the Archbold Expedition, this was sponsored by Richard Archbold and the Arnold Arboretum of America. It collected widely in the Cairns and Peninsula region over a period of several months. The Naturalist Club members, with extensive local knowledge and varied natural history interests, were able to provide much assistance with various phases of the project which the leader, Dr. Brass, fully acknowledged in his official report on the expedition. We had an unexpected benefit from this association at a later date as Dr. Brass, on his retirement from the Archbold Biological Station in Florida, came back to Cairns and took charge of the Naturalists Club Herbarium and was able to organize it on a useful scientific basis before his death. It was after this event that we passed the Herbarium over to the Forestry Department.

Early in this century a number of cases of sudden and unexplained blindness occurred in North Queensland. As a doctor, our first President, Dr. Flecker, became interested in these cases and prepared a case history that appeared to incriminate a native fruit known as the Finger Cherry. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research became interested and utilized the services of the Club to grow Finger Cherry trees to provide a fruit supply for research work. This took several years but eventually the work was able to prove that a fungus infection sometimes carried by the fruit was the actual cause of the blindness.

Together with a number of other organizations the Naturalists Club has interested itself in the possibility of establishing a museum in Cairns. It accumulated a number of specimens towards a museum collection. These, together with some other collections, were placed on display for a short period after the end of the last war when a building from Kuranda Barracks, the war-time naval establishment, was made available. However these buildings were subsequently disposed of as war-time surplus and the exhibits were stored at the Council's Edgehill Nursery until more recent developments made possible the setting up of the museum in the old School of Arts building under the sponsorship of the Historical Society. This project has actually gone through a full cycle, having started with the School of Arts in 1888 and been finally established in the old School of Arts Building in 1981.

These are just a few instances that show the Naturalists Club has proved itself to be a useful and worth-while organization. But I would not like to create the impression that membership in the Nats. Club is all work. Field outings have always been a pleasurable feature of the Club's activities. Locations are picked with special reference to their suitability for study of some particular branch of Natural History. These field days are held just as regularly as the monthly meetings.

In this talk I have purposely refrained from quoting names of members - other than those of the foundation committee. Over the fifty years many members have contributed largely to the success of the Club so that, to name some and probably omit others who may have given equally valuable service, would be unjust. The fact that the Club is still active and strong is a good indication of the dedication of a majority of its members.

OFFICE BEARERS FOR THE FIRST FIFTY YEARSPRESIDENT

		<u>Years</u>
1932 - 1946	Dr. Hugo Flecker	14
1946 - 1948	Mr. S.E. Stephens	2
1948 - 1949	Mr. J.M. Gray	2
1949 - 1951	Dr. Hugo Flecker	2 (making 16 years)
1951 - 1963	Mr. A. Read	12
1963 - 1965	Mr. Vince M. Reilly	2
1965 - 1972	Mr. A.J. Cassels	7
1972 - 1974	Mr. W. Huddy	2
1974 - 1976	Mr. A.M. Cassels	2 (making 9 years)
1976 - 1981	Mr. N.C. Coleman	5
1981 - 19--	Mr. Les Francis	1 +

SECRETARYTREASURER

<u>Years</u>				<u>Years</u>
1)	Mr. J. Wyer	1932 - 1933	Mr. R.J. Gorton	1
12)	"	1933 - 1945	Mr. J. Wyer	12
3)	"	1945 - 1948	Mr. R.J. Gorton	3
2) 24	"	1948 - 1950	Mrs. Legge	2
2)	"	1950 - 1952	Mrs. A. Read	2
2)	"	1952 - 1954	"	2
2)	"	1954 - 1956	Mrs. A. Smith	2
3	Mr. J. Orrell	1956 - 1959	Mr. J. Orrell	3
2	Mr. E.S. Fielder	1959 - 1961	Miss B.P. Mole	2
1	(Mr. E.S. Fielder (Mr. S. Dean	1961 - 1962	Mr. S. Dean	1)
1	Mr. A. Dockrill	1962 - 1963	"	1) 3
1	Mr. Carl Luppi	1963 - 1964	"	1)
1)	Mrs. M.L. Cassels	1964 - 1965	Mr. Carl Luppi	1
2)	"	1965 - 1967	Mrs. Irene Mears	2
3)	"	1967 - 1970	Mr. Graham Ayres	3
2) 12	"	1970 - 1972	Mr. W. Huddy	2
1)	"	1972 - 1973	Mrs. Hazel Turner	1
3)	"	1973 - 1976	Mr. Bill Felton	3)
6 +	Mrs. Dawn Magarry	1976 - 19--	"	6) 10+

A BRIEF STUDY OF CAPTIVE SHARP-SNOUDED TORRENT FROGS
Taudactylus acutirastris

by Andrew Dennis.

An overshot, pointed upper jaw is the main defining feature of this very distinctive little frog. It is highly variable in intensity of colour which changes from greyish olive to dark chocolate brown above. A pale line runs from the snout above the eye down to the groin. This line is the margin between the dorsal colour and the much darker grey or black sides. The ventral surface is usually greyish white. The hind legs have darker cross bands on them, sometimes barely detectable but usually quite conspicuous. Fingers and toes are free of web and the average size is about 30 mm. It is known only from the rainforests of the Atherton Tableland area where it is most commonly found along rainforest creeks. At Mt. Lewis, its type locality, it is most prolific. The lowest altitude I have found them is on Mt. Peter at Edmonton.

There are three other species in the same genus, T. reophylus (with the same distribution), T. diurnis and T. eungellensis, these two being found in south Queensland. None of the other species in the genus have such a distinctive snout shape.

The individuals I studied were housed in a glass aquarium 3-ft x 15-ins x 15-ins. I designed the aquarium to be as like their native habitat as practicable, using mosses, ferns and rocks to form hiding places for the frogs, about 40% of it being water.

Once they had settled down it became obvious that the males had established distinct territories, each with one or more hiding places. As it was breeding season I was not at all surprised. Altogether I had thirteen individuals - eight males and five females. The males' territories took in some land (approximately 3-ins) and went as far out into the water as a footing could be obtained. Each male would vigorously defend his territory with a great deal of calling and displaying. Their calls are a high pitched tinkling sound, similar to someone tapping a glass with a spoon. While the males called and defended their territories the females would wander and swim around the tank wherever they pleased, only occasionally being accosted by a short-sighted male defending his territory. When this happened they immediately dived and swam away to leave the male vigorously calling.

Being a diurnal frog they were fairly easy to observe, the only hindrance being the fogging of the glass with the moisture. Although I often saw them in amplexus (the mating posture) I was not lucky enough to see the lead-up to it. Nor did I see any eggs produced even though three of the females were gravid.

Very few small insects were able to wander into each male's territory as the tank was covered to keep in the humidity. Therefore feeding became difficult so, to solve the problem, I put in a large flat rock which became the feeding rock and at feeding time this rock became neutral territory, even though it was on the border line between two males' territories. The moment I placed a bundle of termites or ants on this rock all previous activities would cease and there would be a mass convergence on the rock. They would encircle the seething mass and pick off individuals as they wandered away from the main heap. All frogs would happily feast in each other's company for about ten minutes then, as the prey diminished in number and the males became satiated, they either wandered back to their respective territories or were chased away by the two males whose territories met at the rock. These two males and the females would remain at the feast. As the other males settled down again and began a vigorous bout of territorial calling the two males still eating would stop and join in the pandemonium, leaving the females to pick off the few remaining termites.

The frogs' day would start off early and they would begin calling with the first light. This activity would continue most of the morning to the dismay of one frog whose territory included two sections of land, one on the mainland and one on a small island between which he would swim to and fro, calling at each side. At about 11.00 am the activity would slow and each wandering female would find a nice place to rest and the calling of the males would be down to a minimum. At about

3.30pm they became active again as this was their second feed time, the first one being at about 8.00am. After the feed the usual pandemonium reigned and this would last most of the afternoon. The females would again start wandering at about 6.00pm in the evening after a long rest since their feast. The males would continue with subdued calling until about 8.00pm when the small nocturnal microhylid frogs would take over ownership of the aquarium.

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LIFE ON A BACK VERANDAH AT WAU.

BY John Crowhurst.

I wanted to do some night collecting at Wau but was having trouble finding a suitable place. Then Mrs. Barbara Robinson told me I could use her light. Barbara hailed from Britain. She was working for the Smithsonian Tropical Research, studying phasmids and the life history of some of the orb weaving spiders. She had been in Wau nine months, having come straight from Barro Colorado Island (Pasadena) where she was also studying spiders. She was leaving shortly for Peru for a conference where she was reading a paper for her husband, Michael, who was in Northern Ireland at the University of Coleraine. Assisting her was Yael Lubin, a young girl from Israel who was leaving to finish her university course in Florida.

Barbara's light was on the back verandah overlooking the valley. The verandah was festooned with spider webs. Resting in them were giant community spiders guarding greenish egg sacs, and a few nephila or bird catching spiders. Apparently their houseboy, Yuwi, was all for clearing the webs and doing away with all the spiders. They told him that he does so under the pain of death as they were studying them.

I noticed that these were not the only inhabitants of the verandah. In a large cage I could hear shufflings. Looking in I saw a cuscus resembling a woolly, earless white and tan possum with long curling tail. It toddled and scrambled up the sides towards me, nose sniffing energetically, whiskers twitching, eyes sparkling. Barbara handed it a hunk of cheese which it held in its forepaws and nibbled delicately while squatting on its pink bottom. She opened the cage door but it wouldn't venture out, only cautiously poking its head around the side of the door, its large round eyes warily roving for possible dangers. All the while I was at the light it ceaselessly patrolled up and down its domain.

On top was a cage which held three squirrel gliders. All I could see of them at first were three pairs of beady eyes, small noses whiffling with interest and soft, silky ears. They were quite at home, snug in their small boxes. About 1 a.m. I looked in again to see them scampering over the floor in pursuit of grasshoppers that Barbara had put in. One grabbed a grasshopper, scrunching its head off and crammed the body into its mouth, eyes screwed up either in pain or pleasure.

And that was not all. At the other end of the verandah Barbara had six separate cages each holding a single bandicoot. They were darting round like high powered dynamos, tucking into their fruit and standing on their hind legs. They were on the move all the time. When Barbara caught largish moths and pushed them into their cages they would dash forward with great ferocity, pummel the poor moth, then chew rapidly from one end to the other, getting covered in moth wings and scales which caused them to sneeze violently now and again. Some in seeming high spirits hung from the wire top of their cages, swinging daringly.

Inside, in the lounge room, Barbara and Yael had glass boxes full of breeding phasmids, others with rare katydids, still others with odd looking crickets. They had four cats that were continually mewing at the door to be let in or out, skittering playfully around the floor or stalking moths which they chewed disgustedly. Old Ferdinand, the head cat, seemed to take a fancy to me, following me out when I sat on the steps by the light. He curled up by one of the bandicoot cages where he was pestered by the inmate who kept trying to pull his fur out and eat it. Barbara also had two shepherd dogs who tried to get onto the verandah, wagging friendly tails, but they retired rapidly when Ferdinand slowly rose and paced

deliberately towards them, ears back and phizzing.

So you see at Barbara's light I had plenty of company. The verandah was full of shufflings, whifflings, thumpings, snortings, scamperings, chatterings and munchings.

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A TYPICAL PRESS RELEASE

As our Patron, Mr. Stephens, mentioned in his Jubilee speech, we publish an account of our activities regularly in the "Cairns Post", and the report for March 1982 is reproduced for this edition:

" Highlights of a camping weekend at Malanda by members of the North Queensland Naturalists Club were a night walk along a nearby rainforest track and early morning sightings of platypus.

The bright spotlight enabled us to see two specimens of possums, ring- and brush-tailed, their whereabouts betrayed by the light reflecting in their eyes, a bandicoot, several species of bats, leaf-tailed gecko, musk rat kangaroo and a native mouse. On the forest floor were examples of luminous fungi, one whole log glowing when the torches were extinguished while through the trees flashed numerous fireflies.

An early morning walk along the same track gave good views of a family of platypus. One lucky member saw an adult lolling on a log while having a good old scratch.

Large rainforest trees included black walnut, celerywood, spur mahogany, plum satinash, sassafras, watergum, tulip oak, tallow wood, black bean and some huge specimens of strangler fig. The larger trees were festooned with lovely climbing and basket ferns, elkhorns and crows nests. In the understory were treeferns, wild ginger and young lawyer palms while on the ground were hundreds of the broken shells of the walnut tree seeds.

Insects noted were a large white-kneed cricket, robber fly, slaters, pill millipedes and, of course, lots of leeches.

Bracket fungi decorated rotten logs and under one we found several prickly forest skinks. A green and brown patterned frog with serrations on the back of its legs was identified as Littoria serrata. Several water dragons and a spotted tree monitor were observed and lots of Cairns birdwing and ulysses butterflies hovered in the open areas.

At the monthly meeting, slides were shown by Dawn and Arnold Magarry of a trip to Carnavon Gorge and Girraween National Parks. Both parks are noted for their spectacular scenery and many interesting walks. Girraween is also well known for its display of wildflowers in spring.

Members voted the recent camp-out a great success and look forward to another outing.

Exhibits included a landsnail, fruit of lawyer vine, seed pods of black walnut, yellow plum (Kimonia americana) and archidendron, horse hair fungi and several skinks.

Mr. Les Francis gave a short illustrated talk on cockroaches of which there are 439 Australian species. The two most common household varieties, Germania and Americana, are both introduced. The large Americana species can live up to four years. President Les thanked members who helped at the recent plant stall. This was the first of several activities planned for the Club's golden anniversary year.

The North Queensland Naturalist Club was first formed in 1932 by Dr. Hugo Flecker and the committee is planning several functions to celebrate its 50 years of operation, including an anniversary dinner to which all present and past members will be invited, and also a special edition of the Club's journal.

The next outing will be on April 4th to the Kamerunga Research Station followed by a visit to Half Moon Bay, and speaker for the April meeting will be Mr. Mark Weaver from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. "

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BOOKS OF TODAY AND YESTERDAY IN OUR LIBRARY

by Dora Stokes, Hon. Librarian.

Today

1981/2: "Focus on Nature" by Gerald Thompson and Oxford Scientific Films with foreword by David Attenborough. Presented to the N.Q.N. Club by Penguin Books, Australia Ltd., Ringwood Vic., for review by our members:

"We must thank the authors and all involved in the printing of this book for enabling us to see the details of the small things in nature which would otherwise go unnoticed." - Dawn Magarry, ornithology, botany and photography interests.

"Wonderful photography and a marvellous insight into natural history. A very valuable book." - Bill Felton, 'bird doctor' and photographer.

"An impressive revelation of the techniques, skills and equipment used in high class nature photography. Reading this book enables the man in the street to have a better appreciation of nature films." - Sybil Kimmins, poet and nature photographer.

"The unique photography was what impressed me most." - William Hosmer, zoologist, long time member of N.Q.N. Club, widely travelled herpetologist.

Yesterday

1777: "The Complete Farmer" OR "Dictionary of Husbandry in all its Branches" containing the various methods of cultivating and improving every species of land. (Comprising everything Valuable in the Best Writers on the Subject, viz: Linnæus, Chateaubieux, the Marquis of Turbilly, Platt, Evelyn, Worlidge, Mortimer, Tull, Ellis, Miller, Hale, Lisle, Roque, Mills, Young etc.) together with a Great Variety of New Discoveries and Improvements Also the Whole Buifinefs of Breeding, Managing and Fattening Cattle of All Kinds and The Most Approved Methods of Curing the Various Difeafes to which they are Fubjected Together with the Method of Raifing Bees and of Acquiring Large Quantities of Wax and Honey without defstroying those Laborious Insects. (LONDON MDCCLXXVII.)"

1882: "European Butterflies and Moths" by W.F. Kirby (Assistant in the Zoological Department of the British Museum and the Secretary of the Entomological Society of London). With 61 coloured plates. Based upon Berges "Schmetter Lings Buch.

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NOTES :

As our financial year commences in September your subscriptions for 1872/83 are now due.

We are still in need of original articles to keep this journal rolling.

An item from the Flecker Herbarium, Atherton:

One of the earliest specimens collected by Dr. Flecker is Barringtonia calyptata (Miers) R. BR. ex Benth. This collection, which does not have a number, was made on the 24th October 1933 and was collected from Anzac Park, Cairns.

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