

Tess Kloot

A quiet achiever

"I have always loved sharing bird experiences- that is bird-watching at its best."

Since joining the (then) Bird Observers Club in 1957 Tess Kloot has published many articles in various ornithological and natural history magazines and also in Victoria's La Trobe Library Journal.

Less well known to some birders could be her 1987 contribution to the South Pacific Square Dance Review. This, Tess says, deals with her determined efforts to 'get back to normal life' after the death of her husband, Bern, in 1979.

At the time Tess joined the BOC, prospective members had to be nominated and seconded. Her proposal for membership by the late Betsy Lew was seconded by Fred Smith.

Tess claims the cheerful, sweet song of the Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* first triggered her interest in birds and she became determined to learn more about both the species and the song.

"I have always felt that the Bird Observers Club of Australia was very special because it enabled members to enjoy the wonderful world of birds at many levels - assisting and participating in club activities from camps, outings, study groups, tag-along and overseas tours, and monthly meetings with their speakers, to bunkhouse and coach tours."

She watched with interest as BOCA grew year by year. "The growth has been enormous in membership and the various departments. The club has really taken off in many directions."

Over the years Tess has been able to develop her special interests of biography and bird behaviour and pass on her knowledge to others through her writings. "I approached bird behaviour from the unscientific angle and spent many hours watching and writing about it, from feeding habits, and leaf bathing to courtship displays."

Outside club hours she enjoys chamber music, theatre, mounting botanical specimens for the National Herbarium - and writing. "I have thoroughly enjoyed all my writing and research, but flogging my brains to bring the material to a publication level is another story."

Tess has produced ten contributions on naturalists in the 'Australian Dictionary of Biography', published by Melbourne University Press. These appear in Vols 9, 10, 12 and 13.

In 1970 she collaborated with Ellen McCulloch to produce a book, '*Some Garden Birds of South-east Australia*' (pub. William Collins). 1980 introduced their publication '*Birds of Australian Gardens*' (original pub. Rigby; reprinted 1990 by Weldon Publishing).

Tess worked with Sadie Evans in 1993 on the BOCA Report no. 2 '*Birds of Cranbourne Botanic Garden Victoria*.' This was the culmination of a study conducted over several years by a group headed by Sadie. It details valuable information on the occurrence and nesting habits of the many birds of the then-in-infancy gardens in Melbourne's south-east suburbs.

Birders Australia-wide have appreciated her series 'The Biography behind the Bird', of which, at the time of writing (Feb 2004), 22 have been published.

Tess has also contributed to H.M.Whittell's *'The Literature of Australian Birds'*, with supplemented additions and emendations. These are published in BOCA Report no 6.

'Birds of Box Hill' (her home suburb in Melbourne's east) was published in 2000 by the Victorian Ornithological Research Group.

'Meet the Members' columns have been enjoyed by readers of The Bird Observer over the years, and Tess contributed many of these. Her work with the club Publications and Library Committees often involved writing letters and a 'Library News' series, interviewing and photographing members, some of whom were reluctant to appear either in print or on film.

Tess counts the establishment of the Australian Ornithological Archives as one of the most important of her many achievements. (See *The Australian Bird Watcher*. Vol 7 no 7 pp 216-221).

"The material I collected is in the State Library of Victoria. Although it is held as the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union Archives it belongs to all interested people. It was realised at the outset that for the project to succeed it must range well beyond just a single organisation. It is many years now since I relinquished that work so I do not know if it is still being maintained."

The State Library of Victoria also holds Tess' personal files on anyone who has made a contribution to Australian ornithology. "I carried out this work for over 30 years and, mindful of advancing years, at the end of 2003 placed it in the (state) library. Now anyone wishing to access the material can do so there."

At the suggestion of Mr Jock Murphy, then Manuscripts Librarian, these numerous specialised biographical files, newspaper cuttings and photographs became known as the Tess Kloot Collection.

One special task Tess undertook for several years was giving talks to school children for the Gould League of Bird-lovers at well known birding spots like Eltham Park, north-east of Melbourne and the You Yangs ranges near Geelong, south of the capital.

"Several of us took turns. We would talk for about half an hour, dealing with one bird, say a Magpie-Lark and talking about its life history. We'd go for a walk and try to find the birds, and answer the children's questions. One favourite question, she remembers, was "How long do birds live?"

Bird-watching trips to Canada's Northwest Territories, Alaska, Israel, and Greece provided special interest and enjoyment. Other trips to USA, Russia, Spain, England and other parts of Europe were not specifically 'birdy', but birds certainly gave a focus and purpose to the travel, Tess says.

Soon after joining the club, Tess found joy in monthly coach trips. "I hung onto Roy Wheeler's coat-tails and am just one of the many who were guided by the late Jack Hyett."

She has always enjoyed the involvement with people who share her interest in the world of birds and nature.

For no particular reason, Tess has a special spot in her heart for the Common Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*, a bird she regrets not seeing as often as she used to. "Once in Denmark I saw a male Greenfinch displaying with a very pretty spread of wings to show off his gold bars

to the female.” Her true favourite among Australian birds always seems to be the one she happens to be watching at any particular time.

“I have always loved sharing bird experiences - that is bird-watching at its best.

Birds and bird-watching were always more than just a hobby. They became a passion which found an outlet both in writing and outings.”

Written by Leonie Robbins from notes by Tess Kloot