

OBITUARY

WALTER REGINALD BROOK OLIVER, Corresponding Fellow of the A.O.U. since 1923, and senior exponent of natural history in New Zealand, died at his home in Wellington, New Zealand, on May 16, 1957. He was known to all New Zealand biologists if only for the fact that he had, during his 73 years, delved into a great many aspects of natural history including the taxonomy and biogeography of plants, whales and seals, molluscs, and birds, living and fossil.

Dr. Oliver was born in Tasmania in 1883, and came to New Zealand at the age of 12 with his parents. From 1900 to 1920 he worked in the New Zealand Customs Department but was able, as his scientific writings show, to be active in natural history. After war service from 1915 to 1918, he joined the Dominion Museum, Wellington, in 1920 and was appointed Director in 1928. After his retirement in 1947 he spent a year as relieving Director of the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.

Apart from his early, and fruitful, expedition to the Kermadec Islands in 1908, he took part in several expeditions notably to the Subantarctic Islands of New Zealand in 1927 and to the Fiordland District with the joint New Zealand-American Expedition of 1949. While closely associated with a number of scientific societies, reflecting his wide interests, his principal links were with the Royal Society of New Zealand which honored him with a Fellowship in 1927, and of which he was President from 1952 to 1954. He was President of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union from 1943 to 1944, and his Presidential Address (*Emu*, 45: 55-77, 119-152, 1945) is a landmark in the annals of "Australasian" ornithology. Dr. Oliver was known to visiting Americans as a Divisional Chairman of the Seventh Pacific Science Congress in New Zealand in 1949 and as leader of the New Zealand delegation to the Eighth Pacific Science Congress in Manila in 1953.

Although he was also a botanist of high standing, for which he was awarded the degree of D.Sc., he will best be remembered for his book on New Zealand birds which appeared in 1930 (reviewed in *Auk*, 48: 300, 1931). It was pleasing that he was able to live to see the publication in 1955 of the second and much enlarged edition (reviewed in *Auk*, 73: 563, 1956). Dr. Oliver's ideas on the classification of birds were unorthodox by the standards of the committee responsible for compiling the current *Checklist of New Zealand Birds* (1953). He did not hesitate to criticise the basis for the taxonomic principles involved, and his comments (*Emu*, 54: 190-198, 1954) are worthy of the attention of compilers of similar lists. The second edition clearly shows his views and has brought adverse criticism from reviewers of the *Checklist* "school." Dr. Oliver is, however, the only man who has had the courage and energy, in the last eighty years, to produce and to revise such a necessary book. It already serves as the standard reference for all future studies on birds of this interesting region.

It was my privilege to know Dr. Oliver in my student days, and I, and the majority of the younger New Zealand biologists, owe him a great debt if only for providing a basis for our own future studies. I was fortunate to be able to participate in a number of field trips with him and then, as in the museum, he was ever ready to impart his knowledge, to encourage and to stimulate. He was glad to help when others were planning expeditions to areas in which he had worked or in which he had some special interest, and it was gratifying to his friends to see so many of their field notes from such trips put to good use in his books.—E. W. DAWSON.

