

Obituary— Jack Wheeler, B.E.M.

John Russell Wheeler was born at Coleraine seventy-five years ago. In his youth he joined the Victorian Railways and worked as a railwayman until the beginning of World War II, when he enlisted in the Second A.I.F. He served in the 1st Australian Signal Corps and was one of the Rats of Tobruk. He served also in New Guinea where he received his commission in the field.

After the war he joined the Department of Agriculture and was appointed as a Dairy Inspector. He remained with the Agriculture Department until his retirement about ten years ago.

He compiled the Nature Notes column in the Ballarat *Courier* for 25 years and through that column had a very great influence on the people of the Ballarat area in encouraging and enhancing their interest in the plants and animals which shared their environment. For many years he manned the polling booth at Enfield, south of Ballarat, and at each election he brought there some interesting and exciting specimen to delight and interest the voters at that small booth. He was something of an evangelist in Natural History; he had found something supremely good in the observation and understanding of the living things of the bush and he wanted everyone else to share the pleasure and joy that he had found.

Although his interests in Natural History were very wide he was especially interested in birds. Lake Wendouree was a favourite place and he made regular surveys and counts of the birds which frequent that lake. Perhaps the most important of his studies were those of the Black Swan and the Blue-billed Duck.

As well as being interested in birds, other animals and plants, he was fervently concerned for their preservation and among his many conservation activities was his work for the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. He was chairman of its controlling organisation from 1968 to 1981.

Apart from his weekly notes for the *Courier*, possibly a record for amateur Natural History journalism, he contributed material to a number of Natural History journals and edited a pamphlet, *The Care of Sick, Injured or Orphaned Native Birds and Animals*, which has had very wide circulation within Australia and overseas. In collaboration with Roger Thomas he also wrote *Birds of the Ballarat District*, recently published.

He was foundation secretary and a life member of the Ballarat Field Naturalists Club, a life member of the Geelong Field Naturalists Club, having held most offices within that organisation, and a life member of the Geelong Association of the Rats of Tobruk.

He was also a long-term member of the Bird Observers Club and of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. For his work in conservation he was awarded the British Empire Medal and an Advance Australia Award. For his work in Natural History he was a recipient of the Australian Natural History Medallion.

He was a kindly, friendly and helpful man, well-liked by all who knew him, and naturalists throughout Australia will mourn his passing and deeply sympathise with his wife, Trix, his daughters, sons-in-laws, grandchildren and great grandchildren in their grief at their loss.