

HFNC Life Membership to Lionel Elmore

Rod Bird

Lionel Elmore (1915-1996) was self-educated, widely read and intensely interested in the natural world. Lionel's interests were many and varied; forests and flowers, fauna and fossils, Aborigine camps and relics, geography, volcanology and photography. Lionel was a tireless crusader for the creation of a Mt Napier-Byaduk Caves-Harmans Valley-Wallacedale Tumuli volcanic complex National Park and part of that wish was achieved when the main part became a State Park. He was, in some ways, born ahead of his time and it must have been frustrating for him to find so little interest or concern among the leaders of local, State and Federal government for the objects of his attention.

Lionel had a keen interest in the distribution of trees across the basalt plain and his nephew Christopher Elmore has edited and published Lionel's book '*Trees and the basalt plains*' (2002).

Lionel was also a champion of the Eastern Barred Bandicoot (*Perameles gunnii*) in the 1960s and 1970s. Lionel's association with John Seebeck (Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research) stemmed from his interest in the conservation of the EBB, a small marsupial omnivore that frequented his small farm on Chatsworth Rd on the outskirts of Hamilton. Lionel provided information and support that later enabled John to develop the EBB Recovery Program.

Lionel's capacity for keen observation and lateral thinking can be illustrated by one example. He noted that the bandicoots sought insects and arthropods in the soil beneath fence lines, in preference to areas within the paddocks or non-grazed areas. Why so? His explanation was that this soil had not been trampled by grazing animals and was less compacted and easier to dig in. Being also grazed, cockchafers found it easier to lay eggs in the soil there than in the compacted open paddocks.

In a letter in 1990, Lionel also speculated on the cause of the decline in the fortunes of the barred bandicoot, at that time confined on the mainland almost entirely to the Hamilton area, its former distribution having shrunk alarmingly from Peshurst to Hamilton during the previous 20 years.

- Drainage of wetlands – thereby much decreasing the frontage of slowly receding water levels in summer, a time when crickets, grasshoppers and worms would have been present in the green strip near the shore [drier years from 1997 would also have also caused a decline in EBB].
- Phosphatic fertiliser – this only became widely used after 1950; before then the grazing industry gradually exported phosphorus from the landscape, in livestock and grain products, thus rendering the country infertile and biologically poorer. The soldier-settlers applied large amounts of fertiliser from the 1950s, to be followed by plagues of army worm on oat crops and pasture grubs
- Pesticides – DDT the cure for pasture pests – was applied on the ground or by aerial spray in the 1960s, and lindane was applied in super. 'Silent Spring was the order of the day'.
- Predation by foxes – more significant following the decline of the rabbit with myxomatosis virus, so that by mid-1970s bandicoots could only be found along the Grange Burn, the municipal tip, abattoir area and sewerage farm. These areas provided a greater food supply, as a result of higher nutrient levels, soil moisture and essential shelter.
- Predation from cats – and the virulent effect of their disease of plasmototoxicosis.
- Shelter – as townsfolk and the City Council became tidier the bandicoot disappeared. Lionel constantly reminded us that the EBB is a lover of untidy places where they can get shelter!

Presently, partly as a result of our indifference to their needs, there are very few – if any – bandicoots surviving 'in the wild'. There is an active captive breeding program in force, in an attempt to provide sufficient animals for protected areas and, possibly, to return to the wild.

Lionel was a founding member of the Hamilton Field Naturalist Club in 1963 – and later Secretary of the club – and an active member of several other societies. In later years he was elected to the Royal Society of Victoria. My fond recollection of Lionel is of an observant, kindly, considerate, caring but often obdurate man who did not hold an anthropocentric view of life.

Lionel richly deserved the honour in 1979 of being the first Life Member of the HFNC. He was a man who devoted much of his life to protecting and promoting the natural environment.