

HFNC Life Membership to Murray Gunn

Rod Bird, August 2008

From the beginning of HFNC in 1958, Lionel Elmore was awarded the first Life Membership in 1980. Now, in 2008, Murray is one of only 4 people to have been recognised in that manner by HFNC.

Murray was among the band who started the HFNC, no doubt as a keen and determined young man in his early twenties. He sought to make a mark in Ornithology, although I think I recall Murray saying that priority may have been influenced by the circumstance that in those days it was too difficult to get to Africa and indulge his other interest in the mammals there.

Murray was acquainted with other well-known birders in Roy Wheeler, Claude Austen and Graeme Pizzey and quickly developed an expertise and a sizable district birdlist for the local region. His enthusiasm can be seen from the 296 visits that he made to Lake Linlithgow from 1962-1995.

Murray went further than being a mere observer – he became a registered Bird Bander, working mostly in the Grampians.

In 1964, in various monthly reports:

- Banded 80 birds of 19 species
- Banded 165 birds of 26 species
- Banded 349 birds of 49 species
- Banded 156 birds in one month

In 1965:

- Banded 1239 birds in recent months – 70 species and 67 re-traps
- Banded a total of 1816 birds to that date, with 130 re-traps

In 1968/69:

- Banded 869 birds, with 214 of those being re-traps (19% re-traps)

Murray has continued for nearly 50 years to provide data for the Bird Atlas and other projects – many thousands of bird records – a mammoth effort indeed.

Murray Gunn served on many HFNC committees and was the 5th President of HFNC (Feb. 1968 to Feb. 1972). Murray observed in his Presidents reports:

- *'some, at least, of our excursions should achieve something more than a pleasant afternoon drive'*
- *'HFNC fulfilled its purpose as a meeting place for those interested in the various aspects of natural history; a place where a wide range of information and knowledge can be both given and gained'*

Murray contributed largely to HFNC, particularly in the first half of this 50-years period. In the second half, Murray has always been supportive of HFNC and a great mentor for budding bird observers. I still recall, when, as an early bird-watching enthusiast, I was telling Murray of an interesting sighting of a rare species when he cocked his head slightly on one side and adopted what I would call 'The Gunn's Quizical Look'. I was to see that quite often! And quite right, too. How easy it is to see what you want to see and not what is really there!

Murray was the one HFNC member who lobbied Hamilton City councillors when the Grampians State Forest was being considered by the Land Conservation Council for National Park status – and I think that was a key element in eventually gaining support from the very conservative council.

Murray is known also as a tree expert – and as a keen gardener with native plants. His expertise is given to SGAP and others.

The HFNC award to Murray takes account of his contribution to the club and to conservation in general. He is a most worthy recipient.