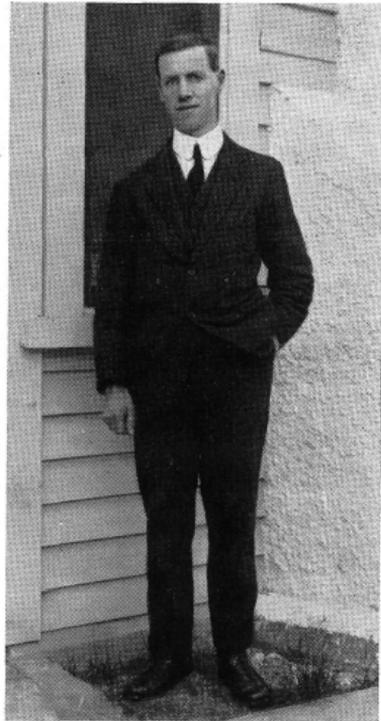


## W. R. B. Oliver, F.R.S.N.Z.

ON 16 May 1957 there passed away the founder of this society Walter Reginald Brook Oliver.

Although known to the members of the society primarily as a botanist of distinction, Dr. Oliver was one of the most versatile naturalists of New Zealand, known and respected for his work far beyond the shores of this country. He was President of the Wellington Philosophical Society 1929-30, Chairman of the Botany Section of the 7th Pacific Science Congress 1949 and of the 8th Pacific Science Congress at Manila 1953, and President of the Royal Society of New Zealand 1952-1954.

Born in Launceston, Tasmania, in 1883, he came to New Zealand at the age of thirteen. He joined the Customs Department in 1900 and served at a number of ports. Soon, however, he became interested in natural history and began to collect widely. In 1908 he had joined an expedition to Sunday Island of the Kermadec group where the stay of ten months resulted in a series of papers. He then paid a brief visit to Lord Howe Island in November 1913, publishing an account of the vegetation and of the island. After an interruption by war service in 1917-18 he resumed his investigation with renewed energy. By 1920 he decided to give up his career in the Customs Department and successfully applied for appointment on the staff of the Dominion Museum. On coming to Wellington he attended Victoria University College and graduated M.Sc. with honours in Botany and later D.Sc. for his work on the genus *Coprosma*. In 1927 he accompanied the visiting Swedish botanist G. Einar Du Rietz to the Subantarctic islands of New Zealand. He became a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute in 1927 and then director of the Dominion Museum in 1928. He continued in that office until his retirement in 1947. The New Zea-



Dr. Oliver at Seatoun.

land Institute awarded him the Hector Medal for his botanical researches in 1936. This was followed by a further award of the Hutton Medal in 1950 for his work in the field of zoology and botany.

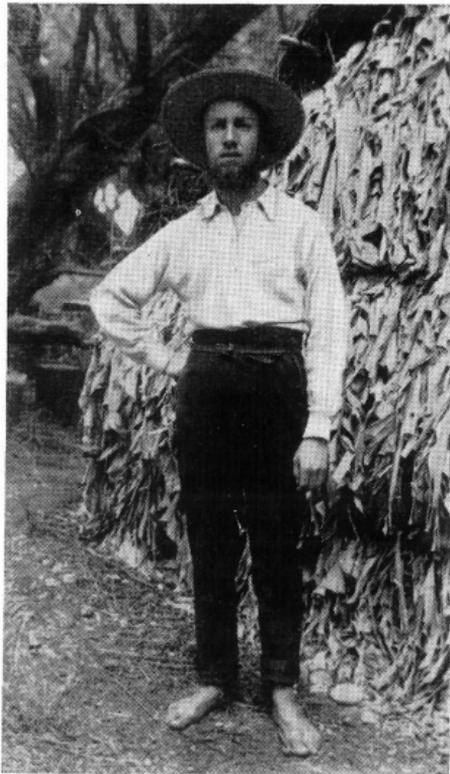
Dr. Oliver belonged to and actively participated in New Zealand and overseas ornithological societies. Among his contributions to ornithology are to be noted his book on *New Zealand Birds* (1930), which was a standard work of reference until supplemented by a revision of this in 1955, and his treatment of *The Moas of Australia and New Zealand* (1949).

Dr. Oliver was for many years an active member of the council of the Royal Society of New Zealand, held office and served on its various committees. He was a member of the committee which convened the inaugural meeting founding in 1941 the present New Zealand Association of Scientists, was its president and later its patron.

Dr. Oliver wrote papers on many subjects. Two might be mentioned specially, a substantial one on "Marine Littoral Plant and Animal Communities in New Zealand" in 1923 in the Transactions of the New Zealand Institute, and one on the "Biogeographical Relations of the New Zealand Region" in the Linnean Society's Journal in 1925.

Despite his varied interests Dr. Oliver devoted a substantial part of his time, interest and activity to botany. Quiet and unassuming, he was ever ready to help the beginner. It was quite characteristic of him to write in the notice calling for a meeting on 18 July, 1939: "With the object of forming a Botanical Society in Wellington. . . . With a schedule of lectures and field days, such a society would foster popular interest and help the younger botanical enthusiasts."

Slight of build he had found energy enough to travel through the length and breadth of the country



Dr. Oliver, Kermadec Is., 1908.

ascending many of its heights. He continued to do this until a short time before his death. Equally indefatigable at his desk he worked long hours. His large private collection of specimens in natural history were methodically classified and labelled. At his home, 26 Ventnor Street, Seatoun, a visitor was always welcome; here he was always ready to talk over his encounters among the plants and birds of the field, bush and shore. He was tenacious in his pursuits and stubborn in his purpose, yet withal a kindly man.

V. D. ZOTOV, Christchurch.

IN the first years of the Wellington Botanical Society, Dr. Oliver, who was its father, presided over its fortunes and worked with enthusiasm in all its activities. Saturday outings were happy picnics in the field with amateurs and professional scientists in the same garb, and here the newcomer or young student was often surprised to learn that the elderly silver-haired man with the slight, youthful figure, so quiet and retiring and yet so friendly to everybody, was in fact Dr. Oliver, Director of the Dominion Museum. Friendliness could have been Dr. Oliver's password. He was a man of tremendous systematic industry who rose to eminence in science the hard way, by working for years as an amateur in his spare time from the job he had to do for his living; and yet, although time must have been far more valuable to him than to most people, he was ever willing to lay aside his own work in order to talk at length with anyone at all who was interested in nature study. His conversation had no hint of condescension; rather the opposite. He would consult earnestly with any tyro and seek his opinion, not only because he never knew what personal presumption or conceit meant, but also because he had the completely open mind of the best of our old-time naturalists. He would seek and listen to anyone's observations and opinions, and so often succeeded in picking up a useful fact where no one else had bothered to look.

I was often surprised at what he accomplished physically. He was clearly not robust but the force of his interest in field studies was sufficient to drive the frail machine on innumerable strenuous expeditions. He made many journeys in small boats to outlying islands even though he was a wretched sailor. After being ill all the journey he would struggle out of his bunk, get quickly ashore and be off up the nearest mountain.

His boundless enthusiasm was entirely free from boisterousness; his immense capacity for taking endless pains in his research was entirely free from selfishness. These qualities made Dr. Oliver perennially young, boyish in spirit as well as in figure, friendly always to everyone.

GRETA CONE, Wellington.