

The History of the Birds of New Zealand

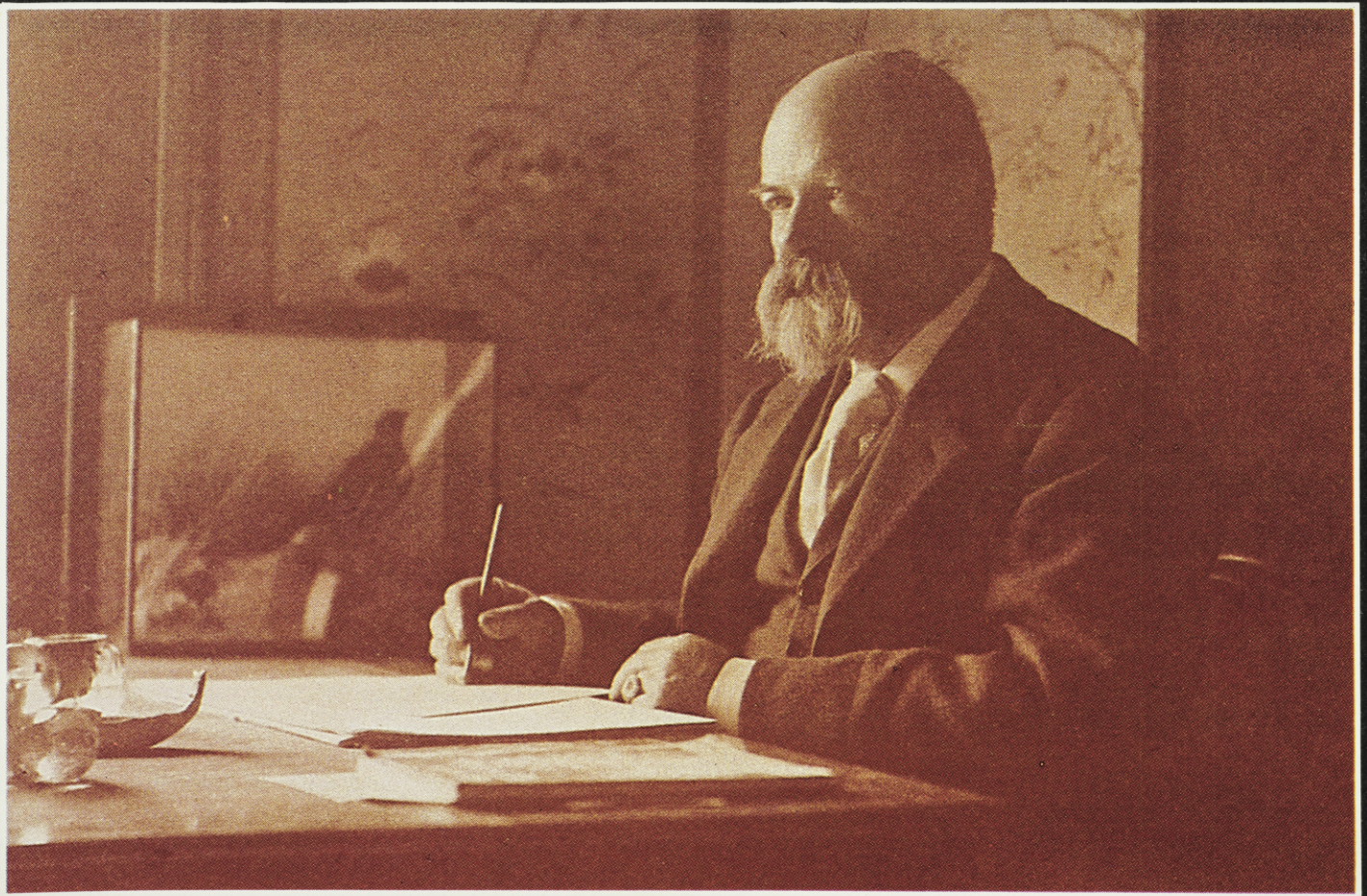
The original edition of Buller's *Birds* is now a rare book preserved in libraries around the world; the facsimile will make its descriptions of bird life over a hundred years ago, and its beautiful coloured illustrations, more accessible. Buller wrote three large bird books, in 1873, 1888 and 1905. The last was written as a 'supplement' to the 1888 edition, which is the most familiar; its illustrations in particular have long provided the standard images of New Zealand's best known birds. Buller rose to fame and fortune by his efforts in science and law; these books were his greatest achievement.

Walter Lawry Buller was a remarkable man, in many ways epitomising the Victorian era which his life spanned: energetic, confident and enterprising. He was born in 1838 at Pakanae, near Opononi, and grew up on his father's mission station at Tangiteroria (between Dargaville and Whangarei). By the time he finished his education at the newly founded Wesleyan College in Auckland he was already

TO MARK its 60th anniversary the Society has produced a facsimile of Walter Lawry Buller's *A History of the Birds of New Zealand*, first published in 1873. In this book Buller gave the first, and still one of the finest, comprehensive accounts of New Zealand's bird life.

notable both for his precocious ability and for his interest in natural history, which in those times meant not only observing but also collecting specimens of birds and insects. After leaving school he worked for a time in a bank, then in 1855 moved to Wellington where he was appointed official interpreter of Maori in the Magistrate's Court — a humble beginning to a successful legal career.

In 1862 Buller was appointed Resident Magistrate for the Manawatu, moving to Wanganui in 1866 (magistrates then were not required to have any legal training). During this time he also began working toward a boyhood ambition: to produce a grand illustrated volume on the birds of New Zealand. In 1862 he wrote to a friend: "at present every spare moment is devoted to the preparation of a 'New Zealand Ornithological Manual' which I have promised Sir George [Grey] to have ready for the press in the course of two months . . . He has also very liberally offered to get a thousand pounds or more



Photograph Miss G. Buller