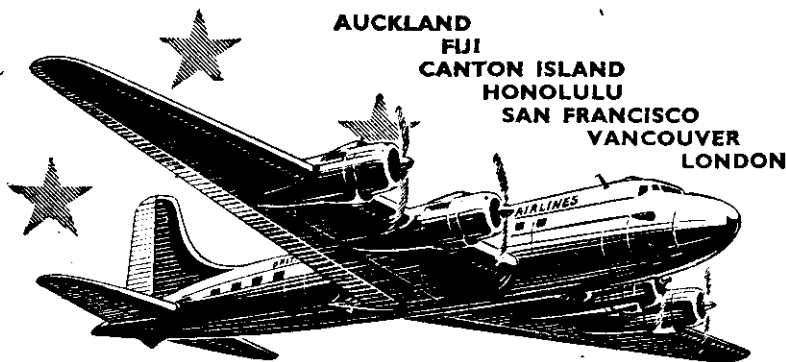


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# THE SUM OF A LEGEND

## E. F. Stead's Less Formal Work

(Written for "The Listener" by G. le F. YOUNG)

"EDGAR was a legend among ornithologists," said the Director of the Canterbury Museum.

The more formal parts of the legend have appeared in the obituary notices in the daily newspapers, but the sum of a legend is also made up of the less formal and the less well known.

The patience and devotion of a man who reconstructed two moa's eggs from fragments numbered in hundreds is worth recording. The first egg, or the fragments of it, was found at Waikari. The second, the one pictured, was found by J. R. Eyles in 1939, at a now famous occupation site of the Maori moa hunters, the Wairau Bar, near Blenheim. The moa hunters blew their moa eggs through a hole at one end only, so that the empty shell could be used as a water bottle. Sometimes the blown eggs were buried with the dead in graves, and shattered by the earth flung back on to them. The egg reconstructed by Mr. Stead was one of these. The solution of these incredibly difficult jigsaw puzzles took him some months of work. The pieces had to be glued together with due attention to the curve of the shell, then lined on the inside with a varnish to enable the fragile joins to hold the weight of further additions. The first Wairau egg, when reconstructed, was within a millimetre of the length of the only perfect, unshattered egg that has yet been found. Both are on display in the Canterbury Museum. At the time of his death Mr. Stead was working on a second Wairau egg.

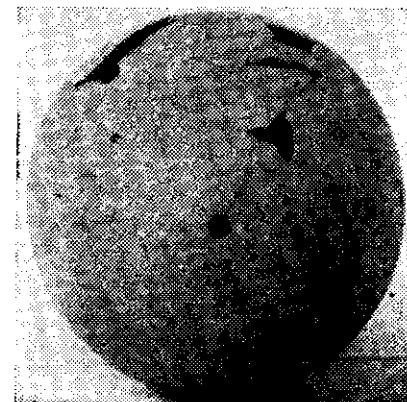
### Native Birds in Aviaries

Mr. Stead always maintained that native birds could be kept, with suitable safeguards, in good aviaries. He proved this theory by keeping, in thriving condition, kakas, parakeets, bush pigeons and kiwis. He thought that by seeing native birds in aviaries, the public could more easily recognise them, and respect them, when they saw them in the wild state. This theory fitted in with his whole idea of the conservation of wild life; birds and people, to survive in natural balance, must know and respect each other. He held strongly that to restore balance and give them a better chance of survival some of the shorter flighted native birds established on only one of the many Southern Islands with which he was familiar, should be taken and liberated on other islands.

As far back as 1926 he said that fish hatcheries would destroy the balance of life in our rivers, and in the long run would not increase the numbers or quality of fish. It is now admitted, rather cautiously in some quarters, that this view is correct, although when he first made the statement he was laughed to scorn. It has always proved unwise to doubt any pronouncement he has made

on the habits of wild life. He was never willing to take hearsay evidence of animal habits, and before he was willing to say anything definite he had to prove by his own keen observation over a long period of time, that some habit was in fact a habit.

Indeed his keenness, perception and dogged perseverance are a great part of the sum of the legend. If an undescribed species was about, perhaps differing only in small details from another, he would



END VIEW of moa's egg reconstructed by Stead from hundreds of fragments

spot the differences; if a rare migrant arrived, he would set it; if there was a nest to be found, he would find it.

### The Ornithologist

His interest in birds, and particularly in migratory birds, extended over the whole of the temperate zones, and it was probably for this reason that he was made a member of the British Ornithologists' Union, of which there are only a dozen or so members outside Britain.

But birds were not enough. He was also an authority on rhododendrons and azaleas. He imported seed from India and from the Kingdom Ward Burma and Assam expedition at the beginning of the century, and produced new species by crossing with his own variety of Cornubia. Because of our more suitable climatic conditions seed planted at the same time in England and New Zealand would develop into flowering plants several years earlier here, and he took full advantage of this in his development work.

Last year the Department of Internal Affairs gracefully recognised the legend by setting up an advisory committee of ornithologists, and convening the first meeting at Mr. Stead's residence, "Ilam." It was little enough to do to pay tribute to a man who, three days before his death, made a gift of £1,000 to the Canterbury Museum in the hope that it would go towards the building of the New Zealand section of the enlarged Centennial Museum.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, FEBRUARY 25