

IN MEMORIAM

A TRIBUTE TO ALEXANDER JOHN MANSON

The many bird ringers who have met Alec Manson, stayed at Seldomseen in the Bvumba Mountains in Zimbabwe's Eastern Districts and appreciated his work, will be sad to learn of his death on 24th March 1995. Alec was nearly 55 years old when he first became interested in ornithology, and soon realised how valuable and interesting bird ringing can be. He started ringing in his garden in Harare and then, over the next ten years, spread his wings to Murawati Farm near Mazoe, and Dichwe Forest near Chinoyi.

But it was in the Bvumba that he finally settled. By then Alec was nearing 65 and thinking about what to do when he retired. Five hectares of land in the Bvumba was available and he bought it. There was no house on the property and the first thing was to put up a wooden prefabricated cabin. That cabin is still there although it has been extended. I accompanied him in most of his early visits to the property. There was still terrorist activity in the area, and before going out there, one had to obtain an Agric-alert from the Police in Mutare.

Music had interested him from an early age, and he made an extensive collection of bird sound recordings. Unfortunately, nearly all his tapes were stolen.

Ringing at Seldomseen started in 1977, but it was 1980 before Alec and Cecilia moved permanently to the Bvumba. During the next 15 years, he ringed about 10 000 birds, and recaptured many more, some up to 12 or more times. From time to time, he published results

of his studies in *Honeyguide*, the journal of the Ornithological Society of Zimbabwe. These included studies of the Buffspotted Flufftail (1986), Swynnerton's Robin (1987), Bronze Sunbird (1989), Whitetailed Flycatcher (1992), and Redfaced Crimsonwing (1992) as well as a summary of his ringing activities in two parts (1990). Seldomseen agreed with him and his health improved, but failing eyesight finally made him give up ringing around 1992. It was, however, continued by his wife Cecilia. In 1991, I persuaded him, Cecilia and his assistant Peter Mwadziwana, to cooperate in a general account of the birds of the Bvumba, and it is good to know that this was published as a supplement to *Honeyguide* six months before his death.

Richard Harwin

