An oologist at Tinaroo: Sid Jackson's 1908 expedition to north Queensland

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Abstract

Sid Jackson (1873-1946) was once renowned as a field ornithologist and collector. Beyond his attainments in those domains, he is exceptionally interesting from an historical perspective for the meticulousness with which he recorded not only his ornithological activities but also his subjective state while carrying them out. His diaries offer a window onto the world of a field worker of a bygone age, through which we can glimpse both the similarities and the differences between the ornithological enterprises of then and now. This article, focussing on one of his collecting expeditions, gazes through that window to recount how Jackson conducted his ornithological activities and to explore the passions and ambitions that drove them. It shows that despite the disparities between his modes of birding and those of today, there are many parallels and congruences.

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Introduction

Sidney William Jackson (1873-1946) was among the most renowned field ornithologists and collectors in early twentieth-century Australia (Fig. 1). In 1908, aged 35 and already celebrated for his oological (egg-collecting) talents, he embarked on an expedition to north Queensland. The previous year, he had been engaged as curator and field worker for the wealthy private collector H.L. White of Belltrees near Scone, New South Wales, who funded the publication of Jackson's 1907 book, *Egg Collecting and Bird Life of Australia*. Jackson's north Queensland expedition was his first major collecting assignment for White.

Jackson published an account of his north Queensland expedition in a special issue of the *Emu* in June 1909, plus an additional short piece in October 1910 (Jackson 1909a, 1909b, 1910). Almost 50 years later, in the same journal, the eminent naturalist Alec Chisholm published a summary of this and other expeditions by Jackson, with an appraisal of their ornithological significance (Chisholm 1958). Chisholm's article was based on his examination of Jackson's unpublished diaries just before they were deposited in the National Library of Australia. The diaries, along with a vast collection of other writings and photographs by Jackson, remain there today and provide the foundations for this article[1], supplemented by Jackson's and Chisholm's pieces in the *Emu*. For modern bird names, I have followed BirdLife Australia's 'Working List of Australian Birds, Version 3. August 2019'.

In her comprehensive history of Australian ornithology, Libby Robin (2001) gives Jackson due recognition as both collector and photographer. Peter Slater (1980) credits him (though with his first name misspelled) as one of the pioneers of bird photography in Australia. In 1991, Judy White, related by marriage to the White family of Belltrees, published a biographical account of Jackson's achievements, particularly in photography (White 1991). More recently, in their

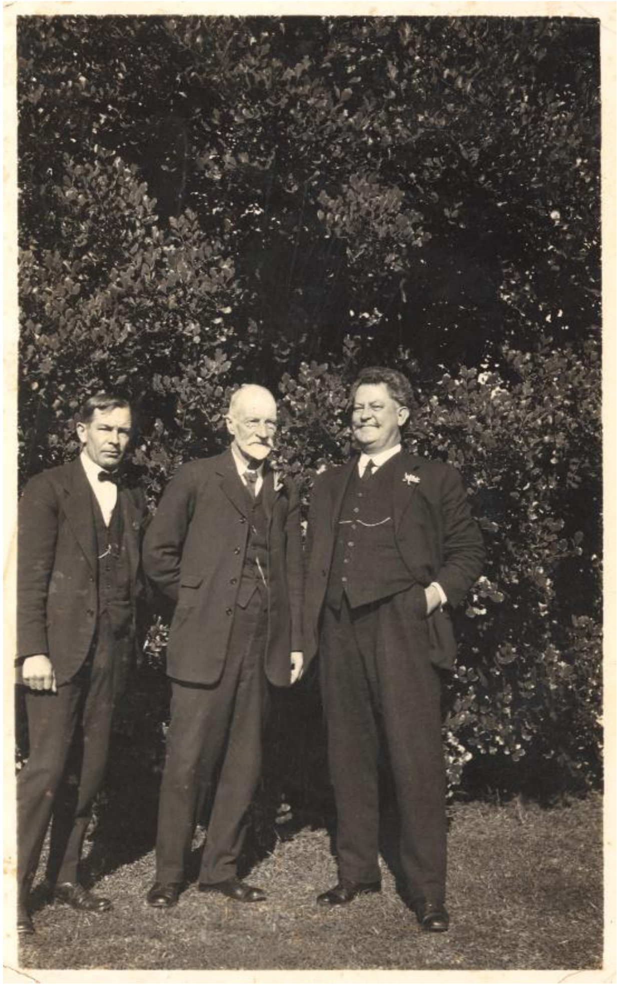

Figure 1. Sid Jackson (right) with ornithological notables of the day: Neville W. Cayley (left) and A.J. Campbell (centre), 1921. National Library of Australia (NLA), PIC BOX PIC/7586 #PIC/7586/149.

massive historical compendium of Australian egg collectors' contributions to ornithology, Ian Mason and Gilbert Pfitzner (2020) offer a finely researched tribute to Jackson's accomplishments in that domain. However, none of these works gives a clear account of how Jackson conducted his collecting, or the ambitions, passions and predilections that drove him. This article explores those facets of the collector's enterprise.

By focussing closely on what Jackson did on a single expedition – or more accurately, what he wrote about what he did – I seek to deepen our understanding of the history of ornithology in Australia. Pitfalls of over-generalisation must be avoided, and I am not suggesting that Jackson's records offer an archetypal account of ornithological collectors' collective experience. Yet there are virtues in a close focus, for it can clarify issues that become blurred in more distant vistas. For their extraordinary level of detail and comprehensiveness, Jackson's diaries are ideal for a closely concentrated study. He meticulously recorded his daily activities, thoughts and observations in field notebooks, the contents of which were transcribed soon afterwards into foolscap-sized diaries, each day's entry comprising up to twelve pages, many illustrated with pen-and-ink sketches. As Chisholm remarked, Jackson "'talked' to his diary" and by doing so made "the entries more 'human' than matter of fact narratives" (Chisholm 1958, p. 103). Jackson's diaries bring back to life the day-to-day experiences of a field ornithologist from an era when collecting was central to the enterprise.

Like others at the time, Jackson's collecting interests were omnivorous. Birds came first, but he was also interested in terrestrial molluscs, and collected other animals, plants and, occasionally, Aboriginal artefacts. In his lifetime, he was renowned for his extraordinary tree-climbing skills, then essential for both collecting and photographing birds. Jackson's arboreal agility is all the more remarkable for his portly figure – he weighed 16 stone (110 kg) – and his contemporaries marvelled at the disjuncture between appearance and aptitude (Chisholm 1958). His diaries are strewn with observations on all sorts of topics, some piquant, such as his comment on Ingham: "To drink, fight and swear seems to be the hobby of most persons here, it is the same I find in all the sugar growing districts of Queensland" (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 122-123). Jackson's diary entries reveal something of his personality: his egotism, enthusiasm and emotionality. These attributes will be given due attention here, for one of my purposes is to illuminate the passions that impelled oology.

This article has two aims. First and most basically, I want to give a realistic depiction of how ornithological research was conducted in what was a relatively remote corner of the country around the turn of the twentieth century. Second, I suggest that although Jackson's ornithological activities seem in significant ways alien to those of birders today, there is a substantial kernel of congruence. He was a professional collector, but also a devoted observer of birdlife and a keen lister, with an enthusiasm for rarities which in many ways parallels that of modern twitchers.

Magnetic north

Explaining the motivations for his expedition, Jackson (1909a, p. 233) noted that “apart from the general attractions which would draw the bird-lover to the elevated scrub-lands of the far north, there was a very special object which attracted me like a magnet, and that was the desire to study, and to collect particulars of the haunts and habits of, the Tooth-billed Bower-Bird [*Scenopoeetes dentirostris*]”. Here, and elsewhere, Jackson called himself a “bird-lover” even though he shot birds and robbed their nests for a living[2] (Figs. 2 & 3). Birders today might baulk at such a conjunction, but in 1908 loving birds and collecting them were not considered incongruous. The majority of members of the Australasian Ornithologists’ Union (AOU; after 1910 Royal Australasian Ornithologists’ Union, RAOU), founded in 1901, and the South Australian Ornithological Association (SAOA), founded in 1899, were collectors of skins and/or eggs. This they found quite compatible with their personal admiration for birds and their organisations’ commitment to bird protection (Truran 2000; Robin 2001). So did their counterparts in Britain and North America (Barrow 1998; Moss 2004).

The first two decades of the twentieth century were a heyday for ornithological collecting in Australia. Supplementing the already established museums, both the (R)AOU and the SAOA provided ornithologically-focussed institutional bases for the men, and the few women, who collected and studied skins and eggs as part of their endeavours to advance the scientific understanding of Australia’s avifauna. The (R)AOU journal, the *Emu*, provided a publication platform and discussion forum for these collector-ornithologists, with a high proportion of its pages devoted to oological topics. Before the First World War, there were some murmurings of disquiet about collecting, and a few ornithologists were urging their fellows to forsake the gun and collectors’ cabinet and confine themselves to field observation. But such voices were mere whispers. It was not until after the First World War that dispute over collecting broke into open conflict among Australia’s ornithologists (Robin 2001; Mason & Pfitzner 2020; McGregor 2021). Until then, Australian oologists and ornithologists could conduct their collecting forays with few pangs of conscience, confident that their activity was advancing the frontiers of knowledge on the avifauna of the continent. Indeed, as the

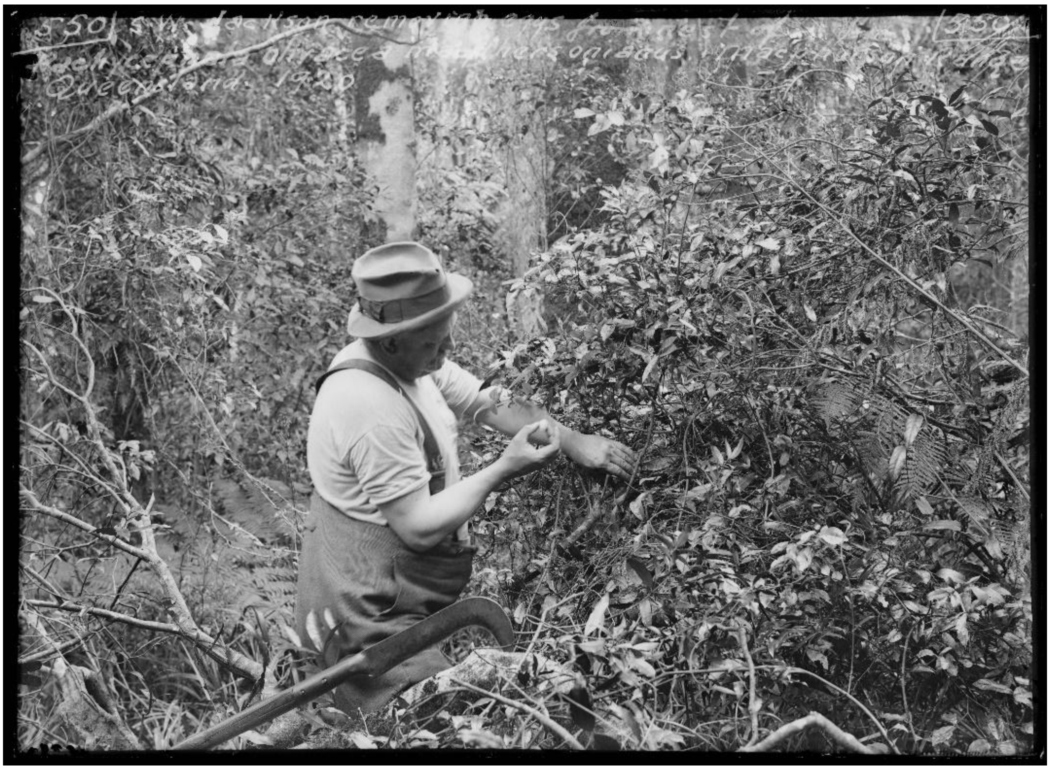
1550 S.W. Jackson removing eggs from nest of
Queensland 1920

Figure 2. The oologist at work: Sid Jackson collecting an egg of the Olive Whistler (*Pachycephala olivacea*), McPherson Range, S.E. Queensland, 1920.
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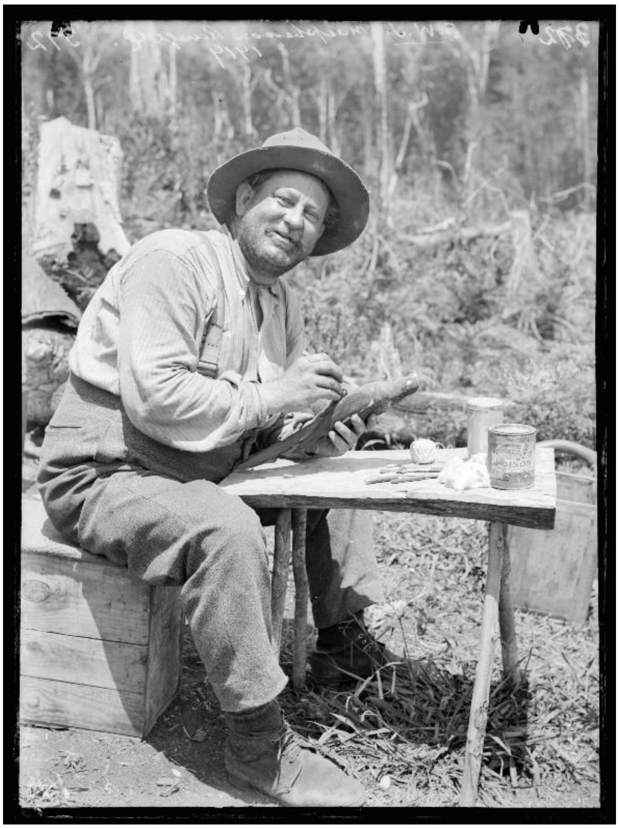

Figure 3. Preparing a specimen: Sid Jackson skinning an Australian King-Parrot (*Alisterus scapularis*) at his camp on the McPherson Range, S.E. Queensland, 1919. NLA, PIC COLD STORE ROW C4 BAY 7 SHELF 1 BOX 4 #PIC P887/372.

Director of the Australian National Wildlife Collection, Leo Joseph, has pointed out, the "collections of yesteryear" are still of inestimable scientific and conservation value today (Joseph 2011).

In 1908, the nest and eggs of the Tooth-billed Bowerbird had not yet been scientifically described. Although Jackson claimed that the prospect of collecting them drew him "like a magnet", the pace of his journey suggests something less powerful than magnetism. He arrived in Brisbane at the beginning of June 1908 and zig-zagged his way north for the next four months, collecting and birding in dozens of locations along the way. One reason for the slow place was that his duties included engaging egg collectors for H.L. White in the various towns and settlements he visited. He may also have been in no hurry because he considered November the most promising time to begin work on the Atherton Tablelands. In any event, he travelled north in no haste.

Jackson arrived at Atherton on 2 October and made a reconnoitre of the local area. Four days later, he caught the train back to Cairns and from there took a ship to Geraldton (now Innisfail), thence to Cardwell, returning to Atherton on 28 October. Why he made this detour back south he did not explain, but it included the interesting interlude of a visit to Dunk Island as the guest of Edmund and Bertha Banfield from 18 to 20 October.

Under the Banfields' guardianship, Dunk Island was a bird sanctuary and Edmund was one of Australia's most ardent advocates of bird protection (Banfield 1906a). As a professional bird shooter and nest robber, Jackson would seem an awkward guest. But his and Banfield's shared passions for birds and nature transcended their differences. Jackson gloried in the beauties of the island. "I never stood in such a paradise spot before in my life", he gushed (Jackson 1908-09, p. 192). He and Edmund went on rambles together, during which they admired not only the birds but also the other creatures and forests and flowers on Dunk and nearby islands. But if being hosted by one of Australia's staunchest bird protectionists on a bird sanctuary island cramped Jackson's collecting to some extent, it did not stop it.

On Timana Island, just offshore from Dunk, he "took a set of four eggs" from an Orange-footed Scrubfowl's (*Megapodius reinwardt*) mound. Edmund Banfield was with him at the time, although Jackson did not specify whether he helped excavate the mound. On Bedarra Island, which like Timana was part of Banfield's bird sanctuary, Jackson reported: "We took a clutch of 2 eggs of the Southern Stone Plover" (Bush Stone-curlew, *Burhinus grallarius*). In this instance, "we" seems to have included Banfield as well as his Aboriginal companion known as Tom. On nearby Kumboola, Jackson and Tom searched for eggs of the Nutmeg Pigeon (Torresian Imperial-Pigeon, *Ducala spilorrhoa*), unsuccessfully because in all the many nests they examined, the eggs had already hatched (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 201-205). In all instances, Banfield was with Jackson when he collected eggs, and although his degree of participation is not clear from Jackson's diary, it nowhere indicates that Banfield tried to impede the collecting. He was not being inconsistent or hypocritical. Protecting birdlife was part of Banfield's "religion", as a reviewer of his

Confessions of a Beachcomber, published in the same issue of the *Emu* as Jackson's north Queensland articles, put it (Anonymous 1909). But in the era before ecology's impact, conservation was understood differently, even by its most steadfast champions. In his island sanctuary, Banfield shot falcons on sight, reporting his actions as if doing a favour for the honeyeaters, flycatchers and other small birds (Banfield 1906b). Within the horizons of early twentieth-century bird conservation, Banfield's condoning a certain level of egg collecting was unexceptional.

Returning to Atherton on 28 October, Jackson made arrangements for his extended stay in the district. He opted to camp with timber-getter and amateur egg collector, Ted Frizelle, and spent most of the next two months in this man's bush camp about seven and a half miles from Tolga. More than just a camp mate, Frizelle was a hard-working contributor to Jackson's collecting success. Halfway through the expedition, while Jackson was away in Atherton and Evelyn, Frizelle moved camp a short distance, from the southern to the northern side of the Barron River. The picturesque setting was "a naturalist's paradise", Jackson (1908-09, p. 389) enthused. They called the new camp Cherra-chelbo (Fig. 4), after the local Aboriginal name for the Tooth-billed Bowerbird (Jackson 1909a).

Yidinji collectors

Jackson and Frizelle knew the name for the bowerbird because they had close interactions with the local Yidinji people[3]. In earlier expeditions in northern New South Wales, Jackson had employed Aboriginal people as collectors, as was then common practice (Olsen & Russell 2019). Reporting on those earlier expeditions, he acknowledged the skills and contributions of his Aboriginal assistants; he singled out one man, Nymboi Jack from the Clarence River, for special praise; he seems to have had amicable relations with local Aboriginal people (Jackson 1907, 1937). On the Atherton Tablelands, relations were more fraught and his attitudes toward Aboriginal people an uneasy composite of fear, apprehension, disdain and admiration.

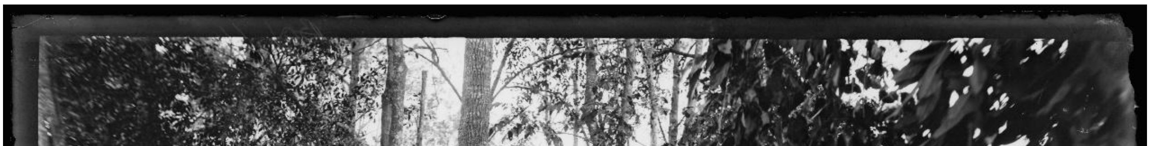

Figure 4. Jackson's "Cherra-chelbo" camp on the Barron River, 1908. Seated, centre, is Ted Frizelle; the Aboriginal man seated in the tent may be Mitchell; the name of the other Aboriginal man is not known. NLA, PIC ALBUM 1243/3 #PIC P887/1360-1404.

Fear and apprehension are understandable, for the frontier wars between Tablelands Aboriginal groups and invading settlers were well within living memory, having ended only about two decades earlier. Rainforest peoples were able to mount an exceptionally protracted resistance partly because their environment provided a refuge in which the great military adjunct of the Europeans – the horse – offered little advantage. As Noel Loos (1982) has pointed out, the tenacity of resistance from the rainforest was a major factor prompting the Queensland government to adopt new Aboriginal policies at the end of the nineteenth century. When Jackson arrived at Atherton in 1908, open warfare was over, but the local Aboriginal people were far from fully subjugated. Stumbling across an Aboriginal campsite in the forest, he "judged it wise … to give these wild warriors a wide berth" (Jackson 1909a, p. 257).

But he did not give all Yidinji people a wide berth. Those he engaged as assistants he described, with a characteristic combination of disdain and admiration, as "intensely lazy, but possessed of climbing powers beyond anything any white man could ever develop. Moreover, their local knowledge of places, birds, and animals was exceedingly useful" (Jackson 1909a, p. 257). In his *Emu* article, Jackson (1909a, p. 264) singled out one man for his exceptional climbing ability and aptitude for collecting, noting that he "was one of the very best among the many marvellous aboriginal climbers I have known". Yet while Jackson acknowledged his reliance on this man, in the *Emu* article he was never named but simply referred to as "my best climber" or some similar sobriquet.

It is not clear why, for in the diaries the man's name recurs continually. Or at least, the name by which he was known to Europeans does. In his first diary mention, Jackson noted that he was "known to Mr Frizelle as Mitchell" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 264) (Fig. 5). Presumably, Jackson did not know Mitchell's Yidinji names or could not render them into writing (although he transliterated many Yidinji bird names into writing). In any event, he lavished frequent and fulsome praise on Mitchell. On his climbing skills, Jackson could only resort to superlatives, describing him, variously, as "truly a wonderful tree climber", "a splendid climber", "a capital climber", and "a beautiful climber (champion of all I have met)"[4] (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 264, 269, 364, 366, 423). For Jackson, this was no small matter. He was intensely proud of his own climbing skills, and by acknowledging Mitchell's prowess in that domain he was offering a supreme compliment. He also praised Mitchell for his intelligence, perseverance, diligence, practicality and knowledge of nature. Frizelle and he evidently trusted him, for Jackson (1908-09, p. 423) recorded that when both were absent, the "camp was left in charge of Mitchell". Nonetheless, the tone of Jackson's commentary indicates that his respect for the man was offset by a patronising assumption of superiority.

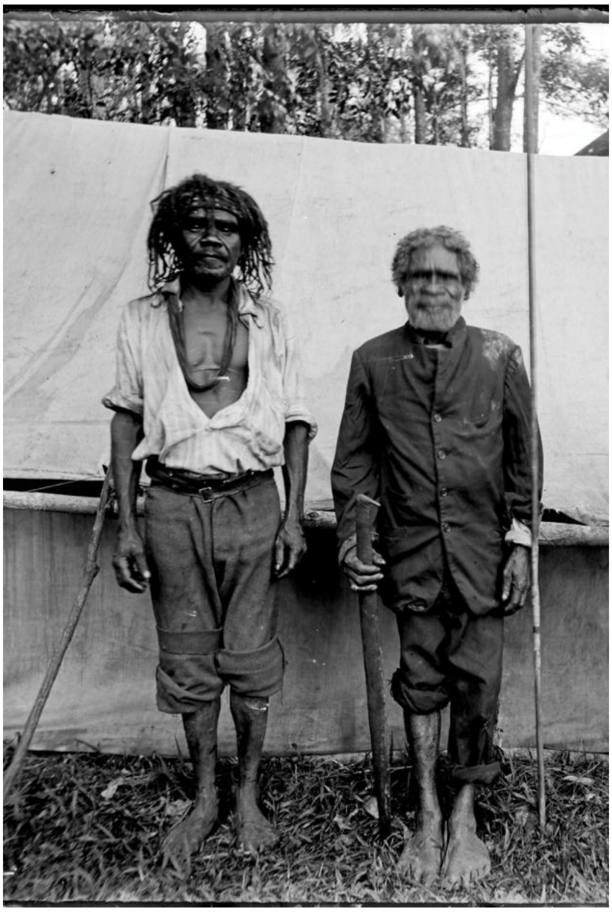

Figure 5. Mitchell (left), probably a Yidinji man, in Jackson's Tinaroo camp, 1908. The identity of the other man is not known, although he may be Billy. Detail from NLA, PIC ALBUM 1243/3 #PIC P887/1360-1404.

The only other Aboriginal assistant Jackson named was "Billy". His retinue of Aboriginal helpers was quite small, only two to four men at any one time. They were, nonetheless, essential to the success of his collecting enterprise. Jackson acknowledged this and praised his unnamed "dark servants" in his *Emu* article. Yet the diaries reveal a greater degree of dependence on his Aboriginal employees, especially Mitchell, than the published work indicates. The discrepancy may not have been deliberate, nor necessarily connected with Mitchell's Aboriginality. After all, even Frizelle, Jackson's white companion, takes a more prominent role in Jackson's diary entries than in his *Emu* article. That said, Jackson's commentary on Aboriginal people was laced with language that today would be considered racist.

Tooth-bill tribulations

Jackson first saw a Tooth-billed Bowerbird at Lake Eacham on 3 October, the second day of his reconnoitre of the district. He identified the species by a means no birder is likely to adopt today. In 1908, there were no field guides to Australian birds and the few published handbooks were meant for specimens in the hand, not flighty creatures flitting about the forest. Following a concatenation of harsh, throaty notes and mimicked songs he thought likely to come from his target species, Jackson recounted: "At last I sighted my quarry – he was a grey-plumaged bird, and his thrush-like breast was turned towards me, so that from my memory of preserved specimens, which I had recently examined in the Queensland Museum, I recognized the lonely vocalist as indeed a veritable Tooth-bill" (Jackson 1909a, p. 236) (Fig. 6).

Seeing a Tooth-billed Bowerbird was easily accomplished. Collecting its nest and eggs – the primary purpose of his expedition – was not. The birds were so common and their courts so numerous that by 11 November he had found 112 Tooth-billed Bowerbirds' "playgrounds" but "strange to say have not yet found a nest after all the great patience and most careful hunting, day after day" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 267). He kept diligently searching. On several occasions over the next few weeks, he thought he had found what he was looking for. Once, on 24 November, he was so confident that he wired his employer, H.L. White, "informing him that I had the oological types of the Tooth-billed Bower Bird" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 311). But his oological identification was erroneous, as he soon realised.

It was 5 December before he held a Tooth-bill's nest that had been collected by Frizelle and Mitchell. He was sick with fever and in the depths of despair after weeks of fruitless searching. Even the nest did not raise his spirits, for it contained not an egg but a downy chick. "This was a fearful disappointment", he told his diary (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 350-351). Not until 8 December did Jackson and his team find a nest with eggs. By that time, they had been beaten to the punch. Working in the Evelyn scrubs south of Herberton, another collecting team headed by George and John Sharp had acquired a Tooth-billed Bowerbird nest and eggs on 7 November. George Sharp was reputed to have engaged 60 Aboriginal helpers, as against Jackson's four. Perhaps that was why he was so successful.

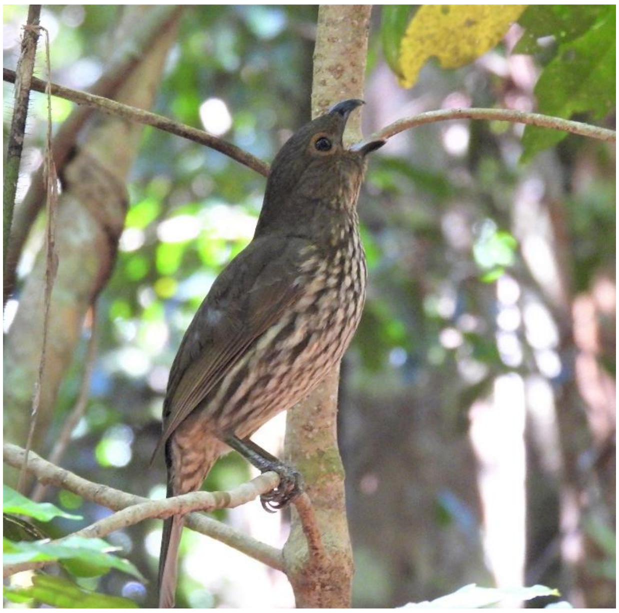

Figure 6. Tooth-billed Bowerbird (*Scenopoeetes dentirostris*), photographed by Russell McGregor at Lake Eacham, October 2021, near the spot where Jackson first sighted this species in October 1908.

To judge from his diary entries, Jackson envied but did not resent Sharp's success (Jackson 1908-09). They visited each other periodically and relations between them appear to have been amicable. George Sharp was interested primarily in Golden Bowerbirds (*Prionodura newtoniana*), and he and his Aboriginal assistants guided Jackson to one of this species' spectacular bowers. Toward the end of December, Jackson began negotiations on behalf of H.L. White to purchase Sharp's collection of Golden and Tooth-billed Bowerbirds' eggs. Soon afterwards, relations soured. On 1 January 1909, White sent his employee a telegram alleging improprieties in Sharp's egg selling activities and instructing Jackson "not to close with him" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 435). From this point, misgivings deteriorated into enmity. It bears noting that it was the commercial aspect of collecting – an aspect at which Jackson seems not to have been adept – that precipitated the quarrel. In the field, Jackson and Sharp seem to have enjoyed some sort of camaraderie among collectors.

In any event, after the initial disappointment of finding a chick rather than an egg in the nest collected on 5 December, Jackson was quick to resume operations. On 7 December, he and Frizelle planned a raid on a Tooth-bill's nest they had been keeping under surveillance. For days before, Jackson had been suffering a debilitating fever, but now, anticipating a 75-foot climb into the canopy and taking the eggs "by my own hand", he went to bed "in a great fever of excitement". He had a restless night, for "all I could keep in my mind was Tooth-billed Bower Birds and their nests and eggs" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 356). The emotion Jackson invested in his birding and collecting is one of the most striking aspects of his records.

In his *Emu* article, Jackson reported "Success at last" on 8 December. He and "our best black" climbed 80 feet into a tree they knew held a Tooth-bill's nest, and when they reached it:

> "I slowly lift my head, and at last! – yes, at last! – my eyes actually rest upon the frail stick nest, which contains two lovely very dark cream-coloured eggs. I can scarcely realize the situation, my excitement being so great. I am trembling like a leaf from head to foot. That which has haunted me day and night – the principal object of my mission to North Queensland – has been at length discovered." (Jackson 1909a, p. 272)

In his diary, Jackson also documented the intensity of his emotions at this oological encounter, giving Mitchell's role a little more prominence. As the two men climbed into the tangle of vines in which they knew the nest was located, Jackson recorded that he was "in a state of intense excitement" (double underlining in the original) but it was Mitchell's "hawk-like eyes" that found the hidden nest, within which "lay two yellow eggs of the Tooth-billed Bower Bird. I rested after viewing these two unique specimens in this nest at an altitude of 75 feet". According to Jackson, Mitchell was in "high delight" at their achievement and Frizelle, who had remained on the ground, was "in a great state of excitement". "We left the scrub happy happy men", he told his diary (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 357-359). In the published article, they were just "happy men" (Jackson 1909a, p. 273).

The next day, the collectors went to a tree they knew contained another Tooth-bill's nest. Mitchell climbed 90 feet to the nest and on signalling that it held two eggs, Jackson and Frizelle "jumped about with excitement" at the realisation that "another set of these rare eggs should fall to us again" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 364). Photographs reveal Frizelle as a big, muscular man. The sight of him and the portly Jackson jumping about in excitement at finding eggs may have provided some entertainment for their Yidinji companions. On 10 December, they found another Tooth-bill's nest. "Now the excitement was intense", Jackson noted, "and Mitchell was picked to do the climb". But excitement soon turned to "disgust" when he found the nest contained not an egg but a chick. Not to miss an opportunity, Jackson added that "we took the nest and young the latter I preserved in formaline" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 372).

Birding and collecting

Jackson liked to emphasise the difficulties and drama of what he did. This surfaces in his *Emu* article but he could be more dramatic when writing to himself. In one diary entry, describing the labours of finding Tooth-bill's nests, he declared:

> "They are extremely shy birds, and they fly so fast and usually in a straight line through the dense scrub that a man has NO chance in the world of following them, and to find a nest is a great conquest and is the result of much patience and perseverance, climbing and examining trees and watching the birds day after day and locating them to a certain area of the scrub. That is the ONLY way to find them. I say that from practical experience." (Jackson 1908-09, p. 389)

Collecting was doubtless difficult and dangerous, but there were other sides to his interactions with birds, many of which were not so different to what birders do today.

One fact that is not obvious from Jackson's published articles but is evident in his unpublished diaries and notebooks is that he did a lot of incidental birdwatching, both during his extensive travels on route to Tinaroo and after arrival there. Indeed, perusal of the diaries of all his expeditions, through to 1922, reveals that birdwatching for fun was his favourite pastime. In that, he resembles many professional ornithologists today, who, when workaday bird studies are over, don binoculars and venture out to watch birds for pleasure (Weidensaul 2007; Joseph 2021). While traveling by train or coach, Jackson would compile lists of the birds seen and heard on route, apparently challenging himself to see as many as he could. These observations were not part of his professional assignment. They reveal Jackson as an enthusiastic – perhaps compulsive – lister, rather like many birders today.

Throughout his north Queensland diaries, Jackson recorded his joy at being among the birds and hearing them sing. His entry for 25 December at Tolga is typically lyrical:

> "Birds sang and whistled everywhere just as if they tried to greet me on the morning of Xmas. Before breakfast I walked along the edge of the scrub and the first loud notes which greeted me were those of the Black-headed Log Runner as it cried – "Chowchilla chow-chow Chowchilla chow-chow".
>
> Other birds which I heard plainly were – the Tooth-billed Bower Bird, Blue-bellied Lorikeet, Black-faced Flycatcher, Swainson's Graucalus, Lesser Pitta, Ashy-fronted Robin, Coachwhip Bird, Northern Oriole, YB Fig Bird, Ptilorhis Victoriae, Spotted Cat Bird, Pigeons, YT Sericornis, Y-spotted Honey Eater, Bower Thrush, Koels, etc, while in the forest on the hill near Tolga, the Pale Flycatchers were singing sweetly in the cool balmy breezes. This morning was a perfect Xmas morning for the ornithologist, and here I was in the midst of all the glorious bird life." (Jackson 1908-09, p. 414)[5]

Later that day, while walking along the Tolga—Atherton road after Christmas lunch, he happened upon a Tooth-billed Bowerbird that appeared to be nesting. He instantly switched into collecting mode, scrutinised the forest for the nest, climbed 50 feet into the canopy when he located it, and assessed the right time for a later raid (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 415-416). The juxtaposition of enthusiasm for nest robbing and delight in birdlife can be jarring. It recurs continually throughout Jackson's diaries.

Jackson had optical accessories, which he called, interchangeably, "field-glasses" and "binoculars" but gave no details on them. On one occasion, he referred to the "powerful lenses" of his "faithful old fieldglasses" but did not specify magnification (Jackson 1908-09, p. 357). We can be sure, nonetheless, that by today's standards, his optical equipment was rudimentary. Because of deficiencies in optical equipment, plus the lack of field guides, sight records of birds were then not normally accepted as reliable by ornithological authorities. Into the 1920s and beyond, leading Australian ornithologists such as A.J. Campbell and Edwin Ashby insisted that field observation alone was not enough and any record, especially of a rare bird, must be "authenticated by a skin" (Ashby 1927, p. 2; Campbell 1928). They had a point. Until improved optical equipment and reliable field guides became available, largely from the 1930s onward, sight records were generally not accepted overseas either. Even then, acceptance required concerted pressure from the practitioners of the new, systematic techniques of field identification (Barrow 1998; Weidensaul 2007; Dunlap 2011).

Jackson's own records illustrate some pitfalls of contemporary sight records. He claimed to have seen several species that ornithologists today confine to the far north of Cape York Peninsula, including, most spectacularly, two Trumpet Manucodes (*Phonygammus keraudrenii*) at Tinaroo (Jackson 1909a; 1908-09, pp. 216-217, 223). Not only did he claim to see the birds; his diary also contains records of three purported manucodes' nests. Ornithologist Clifford Frith (1994) rejects Jackson's claimed sightings, and, like Chisholm (1958) before him, wonders why Jackson did not support his observation with a specimen. The diaries provide some clues. In one instance, the bird was too far away, and the encounter too brief, to allow opportunity for a shot (Jackson 1908-09, p. 223). For both sightings, the casual manner in which Jackson noted the bird suggest that he did not realise that seeing a manucode at Tinaroo was anything exceptional. The distribution of Australia's avifauna was then so poorly known that contemporary reference works specified the manucode's distribution with no greater precision than "north Queensland" or 'North-east Australia" (Hall 1899; Campbell 1900; Lucas & Le Souëf 1911). Add to that the lack of field guides and poor optical equipment, and Jackson's occasional errors of identification are understandable.

Jackson was alert to the gaps in knowledge of Australian bird distributions, commenting several times on observing species not listed as occurring in north Queensland in Robert Hall's 1899 *Key to the Birds of Australia* (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 405, 410). They include Brown Gerygone (*Gerygone mouki*), Australian King-Parrot (*Alisterus scapularis*), Australian Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*), Noisy Miner (*Manorina melanocephala*) and Mistletoebird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*), all of which do occur in this region. Hall's *Key* was one of the few reference works Jackson had with him in the field, although it was not a field guide but an instrument for identifying specimen birds. Hall was then the leading expert on Australian avian distributions, and the fact that he could provide only general (and sometimes mistaken) information on the distribution of birds is symptomatic of the contemporary state of knowledge on the topic.

Jackson sometimes did shoot birds to identify them. On one occasion, after finding the nest and egg of a Bower's Shrike-thrush (*Colluricincla boweri*), he "shot the bird for identification, just to convince Mr EDF [Frizelle] that it was C. Boweri" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 372). However, he resorted only rarely to the gun for identification purposes, preferring usually to identify by sight and call. Even when he used alternative strategies, the results could be unfortunate. On 15 December he found a Buff-breasted Scrub Wren (White-browed Scrubwren, *Sericornis frontalis*) at nest, and with his butterfly net "captured the little bird for correct identification, but it died within a few moments from fright. I was sorry about it as I had no intention of doing this to the dear little creature" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 391).

Observing birds with the available technologies could be painfully uncomfortable. On 8 November, Jackson found two Tooth-bills' courts only about 36 yards apart, so set himself into a position from which he could observe both. This was in a tree fork, ten feet aloft, selected partly for the visual field it offered and partly "to avoid the scrub itch, for if a man sat for a few hours on the ground he would be a crawling mass of this minute and fearfully irritating pest" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 253). Perched in the tree for nine and a half hours, from 7 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., he found it "a punishing job – arms, eyes, and back ache intolerably with the strain and cramp of enforced stillness in an awkward position" (Jackson 1909a, p. 258). It was not, however, in vain. As well as learning more about the birds' leaf arrangements and song mimicry, Jackson noticed hints that they were building a nest. In this instance, watching birds was intended as a prelude to robbing their nests. That was often the case. Just as often, it was not.

Some of Jackson's commentary on birds might cause modern ornithologists to wince. He credited the Tooth-billed Bowerbird with "a marked aesthetic sense", "foresight and artistic perception" and "a strong taste for form and neatness" (Jackson 1909a, pp. 236-237, 258; 1910, p. 86). Of a Victoria's Riflebird (*Lophorina victoriae*) he wrote: "He was a handsome creature, a regular scrub aristocrat, and I spent something like an hour, motionless, watching him…. He had no looking-glass before him, yet I think he was fully conscious of his handsome personality" (Jackson 1909a, p. 241). These comments appeared in the *Emu*, a journal that would scarcely publish them today. However, such anthropomorphism was commonplace in the *Emu* of Jackson's time (e.g. Parker 1902; Banfield 1908). Indeed, in the early twentieth century, anthropomorphism featured prominently and purposefully in the bird writings of notable naturalists such as Alec Chisholm (McGregor 2019). In science journalism, at least, it seems to be making a comeback today (e.g. Ackerman 2020).

Rare and unusual

While Jackson appreciated the common birds around him, he became excitedly agitated when he encountered species that were rare, new to him or possessed some unusual feature. Whenever opportunity offered, he eagerly avowed the rarity or uniqueness of birds he saw and eggs he collected, in ways that bear comparison with the rarity-hunting of modern twitchers. Indeed, the comparison can be pushed further, for as birding historian Stephen Moss (2004) has pointed out, twitching and collecting have in common competitiveness as a major motivation. Beyond that, the twitchers' lists and photographs are analogous to the egg and skin collections of birders of earlier times: tangible mementoes of avian encounters that matter to the practitioner.

Early in his northern travels, at Hawkins Creek near Ingham, Jackson found fresh Southern Cassowary (*Casuarius casuarius*) footprints and "became quite delighted to realize that I was for the first time actually in the true haunts of this interesting bird". He searched likely places "in hopes of finding a set of their beautiful green eggs, but I had no luck. 'Oh' what a grand find such a thing would be to me. It makes one dream of such finds, it does so with me repeatedly" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 130). The parallel with modern twitchers' excitement at seeing – and anticipating seeing – a new species is palpable, although Jackson was more enthused by the prospect of getting his hands on the beautiful green eggs than of seeing the shaggy black bird itself.

He loved getting his hands on skins, too, especially those of rare and beautiful birds. When Jackson first met fellow collector George Sharp in the Evelyn scrubs, the latter handed him "several beautiful skins of the handsome male of Newton's Golden Bower Bird and also one female. These I handled in the flesh for the first time in my life, and not many persons have done so" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 294). Jackson clearly appreciated the natural world in a spirit of wonderment. Equally clearly, he revelled in the fact that what he did and saw was out of the ordinary, beyond the experience of most people.

On Frizelle showing him, for the first time, two Tooth-billed Bowerbirds' nests high in the rainforest canopy, Jackson excitedly recounted how rare and difficult to see they were, enthusing over the fact that he was seeing something few others had the privilege of seeing:

> "Both [nests] are most difficult to see, in fact nest No.2 could not be found if a man examined the tree from the ground for 20 years. They are MOST difficult to see and at the same time very small, and only consisting of a few sticks makes them all the less conspicuous of course. They will always be rare I am quite sure of that. I can quite understand why they have not been found before this." (Jackson 1908-09, p. 352)

Enthusiastic about rarities, Jackson's excitement peaked when physically performing his collecting exploits. There was the exhilaration of climbing trees to dizzying heights, the spice of danger, the edge of unpredictability and, if successful, the palpable reward of lustrous eggs and delicate nests. Some instances have already been noted regarding his collecting nests and eggs of the Tooth-bill, but he was similarly animated when collecting those of other species.

"Now the excitement started", he recorded in his diary when a female riflebird landed close to him in Belson's scrub near Atherton. He thought she may have a nest nearby, and when he saw her disappear into a bird's nest fern, "the excitement was intense". So, the excitement grew as Jackson found the nest, tied a mirror to a long pole to ascertain that it contained eggs, climbed 25 feet into the canopy to collect them, and successfully returned to ground with his prize. "What Luck", he exclaimed to his diary (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 312-314).

Even when the climbing and egg-taking were deputised to others – usually Mitchell, sometimes Frizelle or Billy – Jackson became highly excited at the moment of collection. On 11 December, Mitchell showed him a Victoria's Riflebird nest he had found just behind their camp. "Now the excitement was intense", Jackson enthused in one of his favourite phrases. "Fancy this nest only 20 paces from the back of our tent, why it seems wonderful". To raid the nest, which was located in foliage that could not bear a person's weight, they erected a makeshift pole, secured with equally makeshift vines, up which Mitchell climbed to find two eggs. "Oh the joy that followed", Jackson gushed. "Mr E.D. Frizelle and I were on pins and needles until Mitchell got on the ground again, then the bag of treasures was opened and needless to say delighted us all" (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 376-379). After the eggs were taken, the climbing pole was left in place so the nest could later be cut down and nest and eggs reunited for a photograph. This was Jackson's usual practice. Bird photography then was not for the faint hearted.

Photographs

The camera has been credited as a major factor in the supersession of collecting, the photograph replacing the specimen as the trophy or memento of the birding experience (Barrett 1945; McGill 1968; Moss 2004). There is a large measure of truth in that, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, relations between photography and collecting were mutually supportive. Many of the great collectors of the day, including

A.J. Campbell and A.H.E. Mattingley, were also pioneer photographers (Slater 1980). In his 1907 book on egg collecting, Jackson explained that while in the field:

> "I always carried a camera with me when practicable, and succeeded in supplementing my oological trophies with many unique and interesting photographs, a large selection of which appears in the present volume. The camera proved invaluable for recording the natural situations of those nests, which were too bulky to collect *in toto*, and in this way a mass of interesting information was made available which would otherwise have been lost." (Jackson 1907, p. vii)

That – as a supplement to collecting rather than as a replacement for it – was how he used his camera in north Queensland (e.g. Jackson 1908-09, p. 365). So, it seems, did almost all bird photographers of the day.

Collecting came first, both in importance and temporally, as Jackson made clear in his explanations of how he took his nest and egg photographs. Occasionally, he photographed nests in situ, if they were built close to the ground, but usually nests would be removed from their arboreal sites; sometimes, the limb containing the nest would be cut from the tree or the entire tree cut down. Once the nest was on the ground, eggs would be reunited with it and then the photograph taken. Sometimes, nests and eggs were positioned in more-or-less naturalistic-looking settings with leaves and branches; sometimes they sat on stark, bare backgrounds. Either way, the photograph was a mere convenient image of an object whose prime value lay in its physical (and portable) reality. It would be some decades before possessing the image came to be valued over possessing the object itself.

Despite their supplementary status, Jackson's photographs often demanded strenuous labour and entailed environmental alterations that would appal today's nature photographers. On 29 November, George Sharp and eight of his Aboriginal assistants guided him to a Golden Bowerbird's bower that Jackson was to photograph. "It was after five pm when we arrived at this spot consequently the light in the dense scrub was very poor", so Jackson had the Aboriginal assistants – who had just lugged his camera gear over seven miles of rough track – cut down the surrounding trees "in order to get better light on to my subject" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 329). The trees felled, the assistants' work was still not finished. For purposes of scale, he positioned a couple of Aboriginal men and boys in each photograph, and because the exposures were necessarily long, they had to stand perfectly still for up to five minutes.

Photographing anything, not only eggs, nests and bowers, could demand extensive preparatory effort. An example is Plate 26 in Jackson's *Emu* article, captioned "Native climbing Kauri Pine in quest of Nests of Shining Starling (*Calornis metallica*) [now Metallic Starling (*Aplonis metallica*)], Tinaroo Scrubs". The "native", of course, was Mitchell, and the diary explains how the photograph was taken. For days before, Jackson had been busy, probably with the assistance of Frizelle, Mitchell and Billy, cutting down a swathe of forest that impeded a view of the huge Kauri. The same scrub clearing was done in preparation for photographing a massive fig tree. "Taking these two photos", Jackson explained, "entailed a vast amount of work for me and more than the ordinary observer would think. There was no snap-shot work about this class of photography here a man has to work in dense scrub" (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 366, 375-376).

Of the 20 photographs in Jackson's *Emu* article, only one is of a bird. It shows a fluffy Tooth-billed Bowerbird chick in a nest: the bird and nest that Frizelle and Mitchell had found on 5 December. According to Jackson in the *Emu*, the chick "was well cared for and fed on bruised scrub-figs and sugar for several days, when it was photographed…. Unfortunately, it died one wet night, notwithstanding all our careful nursing; I then preserved it" (Jackson 1909a, p. 272). His diary tells a different story. On Sunday 6 December he recorded his plan to feed the chick, for by doing so "we will be able to keep it alive until Tuesday when I will photograph it in the nest. This will be something unique. Afterwards the young bird will be preserved for ornithological science" (Jackson 1908-09, p. 353). In the event, it was not until Thursday 10 December that Jackson photographed the chick, and then he "had indeed very very great difficulty in photographing Cherro chelbo primus, as it would not keep still for a second". Consequently, he was forced to take a quick exposure in bright sunlight, resulting in an inferior photograph. The chick, he noted, was "still doing well" that evening (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 373-374). Exactly when it was sacrificed for science is not clear, but by 14 December it had joined another chick preserved in a pickle bottle (Jackson 1908-09, p. 387).

While taking photographs was laborious, so was developing them in the field. One of Jackson's many descriptions of the process explained:

> "After tea everything was fixed up for developing these plates in the tent before the moon came up, and I had no time to lose. After the damper had been cooked the fire was spread out in the galley to go out, while this was in operation we were busy arranging boxes and bottles and dishes for chemicals on the tent floor. Then the fire was out and we drew the large tent door over and pinned up a blanket over the opening in order that no light should get into the tent. This was 8.30pm. Then a red cloth was passed over a box and a candle lit inside, and I then proceeded with my developing, surrounded with dishes of all shapes and sizes. At 10.30pm I had the five plates developed and fixed."

But the field photographer's toils were not yet over. "The next step was to wash the negatives so I proceeded down to the clear running waters of the Barron River just in front of the tent". He had a place where he had strategically arranged several rocks against which to rest the submerged plates and there they were placed for 35 minutes. For this part of the process, Jackson was accompanied by Frizelle, and the two men chatted and smoked as they sat by the riverside guarding the photographic plates against damage by fish or platypus. It was past midnight before the washed negatives were safely stashed away. The next morning, he got up at 6 a.m. (Jackson 1908-09, pp. 373-375). Jackson performed these painstaking photographic chores most nights of his fieldwork.

Conclusion

By focussing on a single collecting expedition, this article has illuminated certain facets of the history of ornithology and birding in Australia. Sometimes, it has merely shone a beam onto some specificities of matters already known, such as collectors' reliance on Aboriginal assistants and the fallibility of sight records in earlier times. Beyond that, the illumination has extended into two areas hitherto seldom explored. One is the passions that drove field ornithology. On his north Queensland expedition, Jackson was paid to collect eggs, which he did with diligence and dedication. Yet he was passionate about both his enterprise and the birds themselves, expressing heartfelt love for their songs and beauty alongside ardency in his egg-collecting exploits. This leads into my second point, concerning the continuities between birding now and then. Although birders today might be horrified by certain things Jackson did, they will recognise others as things they do themselves. The pleasure Jackson took in watching, listening and listing are much like those enjoyed today, and his quest for rare and extraordinary avian encounters parallels that of modern twitchers. Professional collector though he was, Jackson was also a birder of a bygone age.

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Endnotes

[1] The Papers of Sidney William Jackson, National Library of Australia, MS 466, hold four diary volumes covering his 1908 north Queensland expedition, all in box 3 of this collection. Chronologically, they span 9 June to 25 October 1908 (item 126), 28 October to 21 November 1908 (item 128), 22 November to 15 December 1908 (item 129) and 16 December 1908 to 19 January 1909 (item 130). All four diary volumes are paginated in a single numerical sequence, from p.1, 9 June 1908, to p.462, 19 January 1909. For referencing purposes in this article, I treat the diaries as a single work, designated Jackson 1908-09.

[2] 'Robbing' was the usual word Jackson himself used for taking eggs from nests.

[3] The Yidinji are the traditional owners of the land on which Jackson camped and did most of his collecting. Possibly, some of the Aboriginal people with whom he interacted came from neighbouring groups such as the Ngadjon-ji or from further afield, since colonisation had already displaced many people.

[4] Underlining in quoted passages replicates underlining in Jackson's handwritten diaries.

[5] Most of the names in Jackson's bird list have since been changed. They are, in the same sequence as that in which he gave them: Chowchilla (*Orthonyx spaldingii*), Tooth-billed Bowerbird (*Scenopoeetes dentirostris*), Rainbow Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus moluccanus*), Black-faced Monarch (*Monarcha melanopsis*), Barred Cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina lineata*), Noisy Pitta (*Pitta versicolor*), Grey-headed Robin (*Heteromyias cinereifrons*), Eastern Whipbird (*Psophodes olivaceus*), Green Oriole (*Oriolus flavocinctus*), Australasian Figbird (*Sphecotheres vieilloti*), Victoria's Riflebird (*Lophorina victoriae*), Black-eared Catbird (*Ailuroedus melanotis*), Pigeons (unspecified), Yellow-throated Scrubwren (*Sericornis citreogularis*), Yellow-spotted Honeyeater (*Meliphaga notata*) or Lewin's Honeyeater (*M. lewinii*), Bower's Shrike-thrush (*Colluricincla boweri*), Eastern Koel (*Eudynamys orientalis*) and Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascinans*).

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