

Observers Club. Des had heard about me and invited me to join him on one of his bird walks. He was an excellent and a patient teacher. He was also very fit and a strong walker! Des took me on my first walk to Tortoise Head and showed me the swamps inland from Fairhaven (The Shag, Grebe Lake, etc.) and his favourite place for watching Lewin's Rails at Tankerton Creek. He taught me how to distinguish the calls of the various bush birds and how to tell one migratory wader from another.



Clump Lagoon, January 1995. Photo: Meredith Sherlock

After our family moved to Koala Lands we began to venture further afield so that Des could “fill in the gaps” before his ten-year survey expired. Dad would drop us off at Mt Wellington, or further east, and we would walk home. We had our first visits to the Barge Landing and “Blue Gums”, where we were delighted to find a Sea-Eagle’s nest, possibly the same one that John Seebeck had discovered and photographed in 1967. After we moved to Avalon, Des and I came across Ram’s Island on one of our long coast walks in January 1974. This tiny spot was soon recognised as a significant high-tide wader roost and an important nesting site of the Fairy Tern.

When his ten-year survey came to an end, Des concentrated on finding out more about significant species. We walked around Mt Wellington on dark Spring nights, while Des made the calls of Powerful Owls, hoping to attract one. (The species has never been recorded on the island, and is unlikely to be, as it preys on possums.) We

spotlighted every hollow tree, hoping to see an Owlet Nightjar (also never recorded on the island). We bush-bashed through low wet heath, searching for – and finding – King Quail. We counted Pelican and Fairy Tern nests in the colonies each year. We waded chest-deep in flooded swamps counting Ibis, Spoonbill and Cormorant nests, and slogged through kilometres of wet saltmarsh in winter looking for Orange-bellied Parrots. We had a lot of fun!

Des and I formed the Friends of French Island in 1984, and we also led many outings on the island for bird watchers and field naturalists. Des introduced me to a world of amazing birds. It’s hard to believe that he has gone.

CHRIS CHANDLER

*[This is an edited version of a longer draft sent by Chris from Brazil. Ed.]*

**I first met Des** at FOFT’s inaugural meeting in 1984. In the years that followed, I can say without hesitation or exaggeration, Des changed and enriched my life.

Our monthly project days were a joy and a revelation as Des led us over the island, showing us all of its natural delights. He was Patience personified – even allowing a non-birdo like me to follow his lead, never tiring of my inability to recognise any bird smaller than a pelican.

My failure was certainly not due to any lack of communication from Des. The dear man proved on more than one occasion capable of talking under water! He was also confident of his ability to sense the presence of snakes, even as one lay coiled listening attentively between his boots.



A rare sight! Photo” Marjorie Wallace