

NIVEN LIBRARY

Percy FitzPatrick Institute

The ornithological collection at the Fitztitute began life without a library, without a name, without a librarian – and comprised journals and books that the Institute did not own. They belonged to the South African Ornithological Society (SAOS), as BirdLife South Africa was previously known. The Fitztitute, having housed the collection and benefited from its use since 1960, was appointed its official curator by the SAOS in 1978. The SAOS holdings of the Niven Library came about through exchanges for *Ostrich* between 1930 and 2003, and its sister publication *Bokmakierie* between 1950 and 1995. Many of the books in the library were received as copies for book reviews published in *Ostrich* over the years.

From the outset, the SAOS had a clear vision for the acquisition of material in order to build a library in support of local ornithological research. At one point there were 434 exchange agreements in place. This represented a considerable investment by the SAOS, which printed and posted this number of copies of either *Ostrich* or *Bokmakierie* to partners around the world. The most energetic developers of the exchange agreements (and consequently the Niven Library collection) were John Cooper, SAOS Honorary Librarian from 1971 to 1992, and Joan Wolhuter, SAOS secretary for 15 years during this time. These exchanges not only represented a significant saving for the fledgling institute, but also enabled academic ornithology to benefit from the published findings of global research.

Times have changed since the days when organisations published their own research. Today many mainstream scientific ornithological journals, including *Ostrich*, are no longer produced by their parent organisations but instead by large publishing houses. This has led to the demise of exchange agreements and the necessity for expensive subscriptions in order to support academic ornithology. In addition, the publishing houses have undertaken projects to digitise the historical content of these publications, often at additional expense to the researcher. Subscriptions are typically



Niven Library

PETER RYAN

either to current content with a cut-off date in the 1990s and, at additional cost, a subscription to archival content dating back to the inception of the journal. Because many of the BirdLife South Africa journals in the library are archival, local ornithological researchers are saved the expense of subscriptions to archival content. Ornithological research has also benefited from the generosity of Africa Geographic (Pty) Ltd, which donates more than 20 copies of each issue of *Africa – Birds & Birding* to organisations around the world in exchange for their ornithological publications.

Visiting international researchers from Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe and the Americas are astounded by the global coverage to be found in the Niven Library; in many cases these are the holdings of BirdLife South Africa. As a registered member of the South African interlibrary loan system, the Niven Library regularly sends copies of articles to ornithologists around the country.

The BirdLife South Africa collection in the Niven Library has achieved the goals visualised by its far-thinking initiators back in the 1930s – and many times over. The collection is a credit to BirdLife South Africa and a priceless ornithological resource for present and future research.

The Niven Library is open on weekdays from 08h30 to 16h30 and is really worth a visit if you are a keen birder or have a question that cannot be answered by Google. This is BirdLife South Africa's research library and all members of the organisation are welcome to make use of the services offered. Tel. +27 (0)21 650 3305 or e-mail fitzlib@uct.ac.za

MARGARET KOOPMAN
NIVEN LIBRARIAN

