

James Andrew (Jim) Bravery, 1896–1975: miner, soldier, farmer and an outstanding field ornithologist on the Atherton Tablelands, far north Queensland

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Abstract

Observers using field glasses, not shotguns, made pioneering contributions to regional ornithology in the 20th century, but their lives and influence have received little attention in Queensland. James Andrew Leslie ('Jim') Bravery, a young coal miner from south-east Queensland, was interested in birds and conservation by age 14, although he never collected eggs and no other family members were naturalists. After serving in WWI, he moved to the Atherton Tablelands as a soldier-settler and farmed there for the rest of his life. The most probable influence on his early development as a field ornithologist was the 'new curriculum', which introduced nature study to Queensland primary schools for his last four years of education, at ages 9–12. The nature study movement encouraged children to observe wildlife for themselves, and to form a personal commitment to nature. After recording birds and their behaviour on the Atherton Tablelands for nearly 40 years, at age 60 Bravery joined ornithological societies and began corresponding with leading naturalists including A. H. Chisholm and K. A. Hindwood, who encouraged him to write. Bravery's articles, particularly his 1970 signature paper on birds of the Atherton Shire, have attracted more than 1000 citations in published literature and continue to provide a baseline for studies of birds and their conservation in the region.

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Introduction

Observers using field glasses, not shotguns, made pioneering contributions to regional ornithology in the 20th century, including in Australia (Robin 2001; Davis 2015; Noske 2017). However, the lives and influence of field ornithologists who were primarily birdwatchers, rather than collectors, have received little attention in Queensland. James Andrew Leslie (Jim) Bravery (1896–1975) was "considered by both Australian and overseas experts to be the world's leading authority on the bird life of the Atherton Tableland", to quote his obituary in the regional daily *Cairns Post* (Anon.

1975). Less floridly, prominent journalist and naturalist A. H. Chisholm at first described Bravery as "a bush birdman" (Wakefield 1961: 163), but by 1973 Chisholm acknowledged Bravery and Mrs 'Billie' Gill of Innisfail, as "our chief practitioners" of ornithology in northern Queensland (Chisholm 1973: 73). In 2006 the Queensland Naturalists' Club recognised Bravery as one of 76 notable Queensland naturalists of the preceding century (Horton 2006). This seems an extraordinary achievement for a young coal miner who enlisted as a WWI soldier at age 21 (Fig. 1), then worked



Figure 1. Jim Bravery, SERN 6775, ~1917.
Photographer E. Norton Collins, South Norwood, London. Courtesy M. Muoio.

from 1919–1975 as a leasehold farmer on the Atherton Tablelands in far north Queensland (Scambler 2020).

As documented in this article, Bravery was born in 1896 in Korumburra, Victoria, where his father, a coal miner from Queensland, briefly worked. The family returned to south-east Queensland in 1898. Bravery showed a strong interest in birds by age 14 at Ipswich, and later near Warwick and Killarney on the Darling Downs (Fig. 2). After WWI he moved to the Atherton Tablelands, far north Queensland, as a soldier settler. Unlike many amateur ornithologists in the early 20th century, he never collected eggs, and there is no evidence of birding interests in other family members (Mason & Pfitzner 2020; A. Leinster, M. Muoio personal communications). Yet he recorded the birds he saw, and their behaviour, even during gruelling volunteer service on Cape York Peninsula from 1942–1945 during WWII, and throughout his farming life on the Tablelands (Scambler 2009, 2020; Bravery Archive). At age 60, in 1956, Bravery took his first steps

towards writing. He began expanding his notes on local bird species, initiated correspondence with Chisholm and others, and in 1957–1958 joined three organisations, of which he remained a member for the rest of his life: the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU), the Bird Observers Club (BOC), and the North Queensland Naturalists Club (NQNC) (Anon. 1957, 1958, 1970). Land use on the Bravery properties, Bravery's views on conservation, and his extensive engagement with birdwatchers and other naturalists in his later years, will be discussed elsewhere. In this paper I consider factors which may have inspired Bravery's life-long dedication to birds and his decision to begin writing at age 60. I also review his working methods in the 'writing years' and his contributions to ornithology, culminating with his signature paper on birds of the Atherton Shire (Bravery 1970).

Methods

To document Bravery's family background, education, residence and activities I searched electoral rolls, school records, births, deaths and marriages and other materials in Ancestry (2019), newspapers digitised in Trove (NLA 2019), Queensland State Archives (QSA 2024) and Bravery's notebooks, letters, and annotated copy of Cayley (1958). The notebooks and copy of Cayley are held in a numbered series in the Bravery Archive, Special Collections, James Cook University Library. Insights gained across multiple items in the Bravery Archive are not referenced, but hereafter specific items are cited by book number, and (if an annual diary) by year. Copies of Bravery's letters to A. H. Chisholm and K. A. Hindwood were provided by the State Library of NSW, and Hugh J. Lavery provided letters from his personal archive.

I searched Trove and published literature for information about the curriculum during Bravery's school years, and for reports of natural history activities in Ipswich and near Warwick from 1880–1917, with particular reference to birds. I also searched membership lists for the RAOU, naturalists' clubs, schools of arts and similar organisations. To assess the level of natural history collecting occurring around Bravery in his early years, specimens collected from 1880–1917 within a radius of 20 km from Ipswich and Warwick-Killarney, an area of ~1260 km² at each location, were identified from Atlas of Living Australia (ALA 2023).

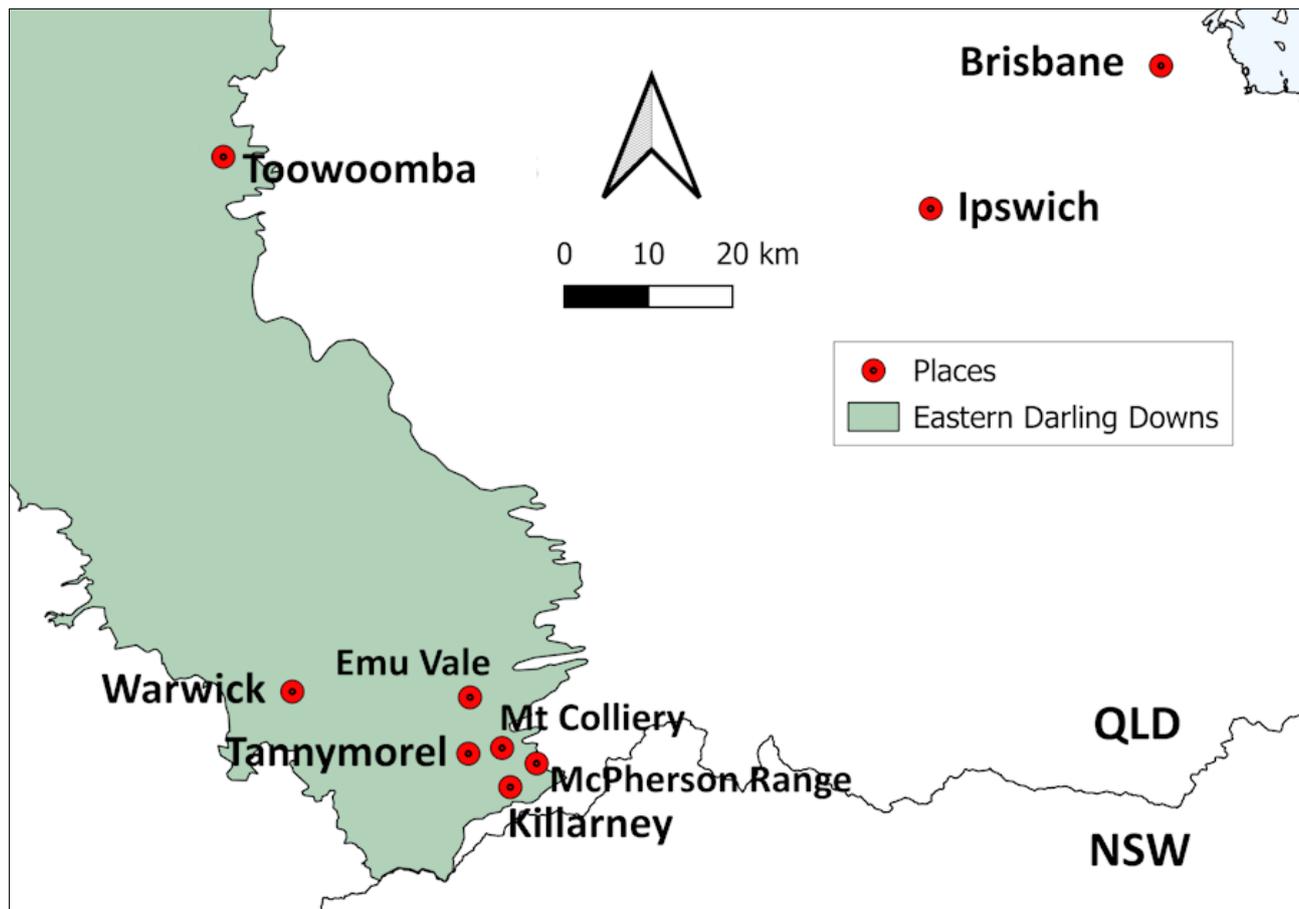


Figure 2. Places in south-east Queensland mentioned in the text.

The family also lived in the Maryborough district (not shown on map), ~220 km north of Brisbane, when Bravery was aged 2–4 years. Source for the Eastern Darling Downs Bioregional sub-region: Australian Government (2025). Map generated in Quantum GIS 3.34.11 (QGIS 2024).

To explore Bravery's observations, working methods and contributions as a field ornithologist, I reviewed his publications, notebooks, and letters. A literature search (excluding field guides and general bibliographies) identified citations of Bravery's works, and authors who acknowledged his data or assistance. Citations of Lavery *et al.* (1968) were excluded to avoid double-counting of Bravery's breeding observations. Bravery also contributed data to surveys that were apparently not published, and community bird counts, which are not included in these results. In the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* ('HANZAB': Marchant & Higgins 1990, 1993; Higgins & Davies 1996; Higgins 1999; Higgins *et al.* 2001, 2006; Higgins & Peter 2002), the total number of citations of Bravery's work was determined by searching the accounts for all species included in his publications. Citations were grouped under the topic headings used by

HANZAB, e.g. habitats, movements, distribution and population. Bravery's notebooks and other sources were used to identify species he added to the Atherton Shire list after 1970, and to review doubtful identifications. Details of specimens collected by Bravery were sourced from ALA (2023) and the literature. Locations in south-east Queensland mentioned in the text are presented in Fig. 2. A map showing locations on the Atherton Tablelands, including the Bravery farm and the boundary of the (then) Atherton Shire, can be found in Scambler (2020). Bird common and scientific names follow BirdLife Australia (2024). The use of apostrophes in club names follows the practice of each club. Quotations are verbatim except where ellipses show omitted text, and square brackets indicate my additions.

Results and Discussion

Early life in Ipswich and the Darling Downs, and interest in birds

Most of Bravery's early life was spent in south-east Queensland. His father, George Bravery (1865–1956; see Appendix S1 for vital dates of persons mentioned in the text), migrated to Queensland from Surrey, England, in 1886. He was a coal miner for the rest of his working life, at first in the Maryborough district ~220 km north of Brisbane, where he married a local girl, Alice Allen (or Allan), in 1893. Their first child, George Allen, was born there in 1894, but in the following year they moved to Korumburra, Victoria, where James Andrew Leslie (Jim), was born in March 1896. Three daughters were born from 1898–1901. Based on electoral rolls and the children's school records (Ancestry 2019; QSA 2024), the family moved back to Maryborough in 1898, then in July 1900, when Bravery was four, they settled in Ipswich (27°36'S, 152°45'E; Fig. 2). The town was a coal mining centre 39 km by rail from Brisbane, with a population of ~11,000 (Pugh 1907, 1912). In 1902, George Bravery was declared bankrupt (Anon. 1902), and his wife deserted the family, leaving five children aged from 18 months to eight years (Ancestry 2019).

Primary school was compulsory to age twelve (Logan & Clarke 1984). From 1901–1908 Bravery studied at Dinmore, Bundamba and Blackstone State Schools (all within 7 km of Ipswich), where most pupils were the children of coal miners, and he was the only one of the five siblings to progress through all years of primary education (Anon. 2014; QSA 2024). He played junior soccer in the winter of 1910 (Anon. 1910a), but there is no information about other clubs he may have joined. The family lived at Blackstone from 1904–1910, then close to the centre of Ipswich until mid-1912 (Bravery 1912; Ancestry 2019; QSA 2024). Although census records reported very few minors in employment in Queensland at this time, especially in mining (Bowden & Stevenson-Clarke 2010), there would have been enormous pressure on Bravery and his brother to start earning as soon as they left school, to help support their three young sisters. From 1910 underground mining was restricted to those aged 16 or over, but younger boys could work above ground at the mines or in businesses such as sales or deliveries (Anon.

1910b). However, it is not clear whether Bravery was so employed.

Contrary to Horton (2006), Bravery developed an interest in birds early in life, not only after he began farming on the Atherton Tablelands, as is clear in his comment when he added the Australian Owlet-nightjar (*Aegotheles cristatus*) to his Atherton Shire list in 1963. He wrote: "I had not observed this 'Fairy Owl' since I was fourteen years of age near Ipswich SQ over fifty years ago" (Bravery 1970; Book 2, 1963). This indicates a well-developed involvement in birdwatching by age 14, as although the species is widespread in Australian woodlands, it is not easy to see: it is small (maximum length 25 cm), nocturnal, and roosts in hollows by day (Higgins 1999).

In mid-1912, when Bravery was 16, the family moved to the small settlement of Tannymorel (28°17'S, 152°14'E; Fig. 2), 7 km from Killarney in the south-east Darling Downs, where he, his brother and their father all worked at the Mount Colliery mine (Ancestry 2019; NAA 2019; QSA 2024). The family was closely connected with the community in the regional town of Warwick (e.g. Anon. 1914a), ~30 km by road or rail from Tannymorel, with a population of ~6,000 (Pugh 1912), so travelled there often. Bravery saw the Condamine River in times of flood, and as a mere trickle in drought (letter to Chisholm 24/03/1971). His well-developed knowledge of birds was clearly shown in his first year on the Darling Downs, when he recorded a colony of Bell Miners (*Manorina melanophrys*) in the McPherson Range, and Red Wattlebirds (*Anthochaera carunculata*) near Emu Vale and Killarney (letter to Hindwood 29/01/1962). He also noted declining numbers of Australian Bustards (*Ardeotis australis*) in the district, caused (he believed) by introduced Red Foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) (Bravery 1967a, 1968). In upland rainforest near Killarney and on the MacPherson Range he saw Regent Bowerbirds (*Sericulus chrysocephalus*), Paradise Riflebirds (*Lophorina paradisea*), and "plentiful" Albert's and Superb Lyrebirds (*Menura alberti* and *M. novaehollandiae*) (Cayley 1958, Bravery Archive; letter to Chisholm 26/04/1960).

Nature study and the 'new curriculum', 1905

It remains unclear how Bravery acquired his knowledge of birds at an early age, but from 1905 a major change in Queensland primary education aimed to create a positive environment for

children’s engagement with nature. In 1904 the Queensland Secretary (Minister) for Public Instruction, A. H. Barlow, directed the Department of Public Instruction to implement progressive, child-centred methods of education in all state primary schools (Meadmore 2000). The new syllabus began in January 1905, when Bravery was at Blackstone State School. It was largely imported from the program in New South Wales, and incorporated ‘nature study’, with elements of agriculture, botany and biology (Kass 2015). Children were encouraged to observe nature for themselves (Leach 1905, 1909). Queensland schools used the text book *Nature Studies in Australia* (Gillies & Hall 1903) and in Maytown, on the Palmer River goldfields, far north Queensland, a committed teacher “directed his pupils to the study of birds in their own district, the result being some thoughtful and original compositions” (Anon. 1904: 2). The first 19 (of 37) chapters of the textbook were on birds, including identification (Fig. 3), migration, nesting and behaviour. Nature study taught elementary science, but was also “a platform for aesthetic appreciation and emotional

identification with nature” (Kass 2015: 72). Nature study featured in the monthly *Queensland School Paper*, issued free to all students from 1905, which was also read “round the dining table” by family members (Shirley 1905: 3). An annual issue about birds appeared from 1910, although the Queensland Gould League of Bird Lovers was not formed until 1916 (Robin 2001, 2002). In 1911, when Bravery’s two youngest sisters were still at school, the Minister (K. M. Grant) arranged for a copy of Leach’s *Australian Bird Book* to be sent to every school in Queensland (Anon. 1911a; Leach 1911). Australia’s first field guide, it included 78% of Queensland birds, promoted conservation, and linked natural history with recreational bird-watching (McGregor 2022a).

However, although some teachers and inspectorial staff welcomed the changes to Queensland primary education, the most senior bureaucrats in the Department strongly opposed the new curriculum, and teachers long established in previous ‘learning by rote’ methods were ill-prepared (Meadmore 2000). The available sources suggest that Ipswich was not an encouraging

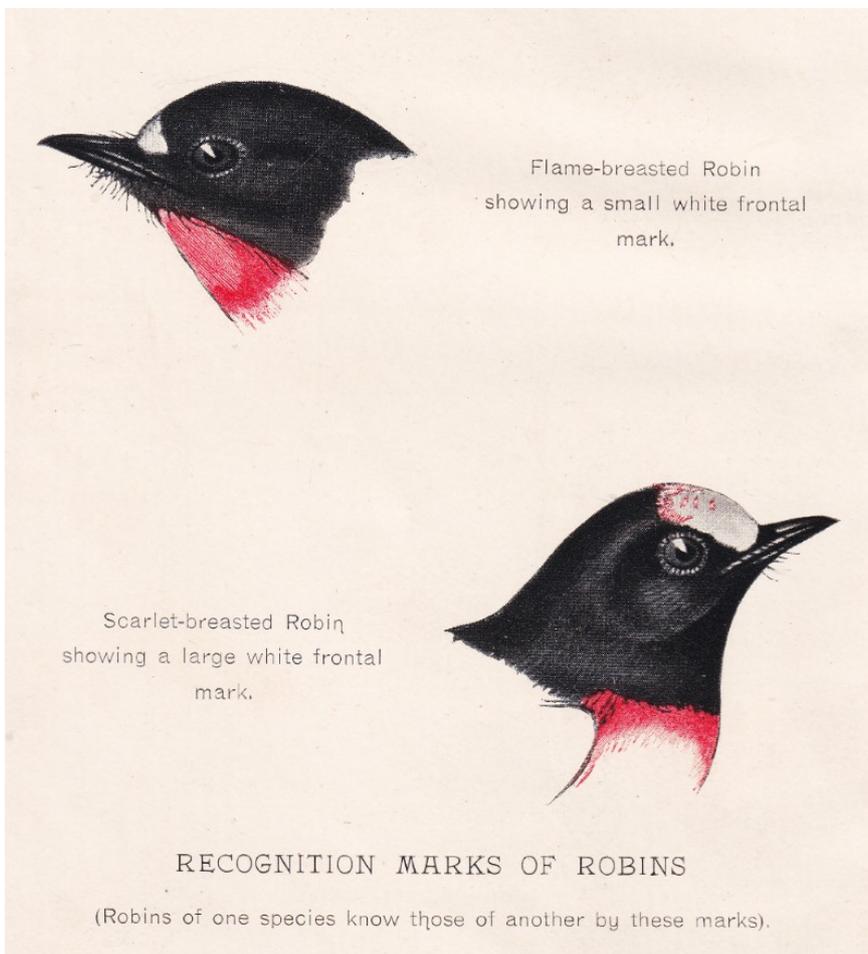


Figure 3. ‘Recognition marks of robins’: part of Frontispiece, *Nature Studies in Australia* (Gillies & Hall 1903).

environment for the new system. The headmaster and two assistant teachers at Blackstone during Bravery's school years were long-term departmental employees, and I found no evidence of their involvement in natural history activities (Anon. 2014; NLA 2019; QSA 2024). Arbor Day had been celebrated in Queensland schools since the 1890s, but the sports, picnic and other activities at Blackstone school on Arbor Day were indistinguishable from those at the end of year breakup, except for the planting of eight trees (Anon. 1903, 1910c). A senior Ipswich headmaster, C. A. H. Watson, had joined the Royal Society of Queensland on a proposal by John Shirley, a leading Departmental proponent of the 'new education' (Anon. 1900; Shirley 1905; Meadmore 2000). However, Watson apparently remained committed to the earlier philosophy of education (e.g. Watson 1908). Teacher training in Ipswich seems to have been equally unpromising. Ipswich Technical College was requested to give a series of lectures on nature study for school teachers, to support the new system (Anon. 1905a). The principal, R. A. Wearne, was a pioneer in geology education in Queensland (Hill 1981) and travelled to New South Wales to view the "almost revolutionary" changes in state education there (Anon. 1905a: 11). However, he saw "no reason to radically alter" the College's teaching of its subjects, which included botany and geology classes (mostly for teachers) on Saturdays (Anon. 1905b: 2).

Nature study was perhaps most likely to be implemented in the way the reformers envisaged in small schools, provided the teachers were sufficiently prepared (Meadmore 2000; Kass 2015). One District Inspector (on the Darling Downs, rather than in Ipswich) reported, approvingly (Gripp 1907: 2):

In one little school the local bird life had been closely studied. The children knew the birds; how, when and where they built their nests; the number, size and colour of the eggs they laid; and, more pleasing than all, they had been taught to treat the little creatures with the utmost kindness.

Apart from the new school curriculum and the *School Paper*, Bravery would have had some exposure to nature study news through the press. Leading newspapers had campaigned strongly for the new education system, including nature studies

(Meadmore 2000). Bravery's father read newspapers: a family photograph (c. 1900: Ancestry 2019) shows him reading a broadsheet, and some were available in the reading rooms of even small local facilities, such as the Blackstone School of Arts and Mines (Anon. 1905c; Beddoe 2003). The main Ipswich newspaper was the tabloid *Queensland Times* (and its predecessors), which – as demonstrated in this article – regularly carried stories on schools and education. In 1911 Bravery's father was the sales agent for the paper in his local district of Ipswich (e.g. Anon. 1911b), while still working as a coal miner. From 1905, the widely circulated *Queenslander* introduced a nature column and saw the nature study movement as democratising science (Anon. 1905d: 13):

...for the future, so long as it shall prove of interest, we propose to devote a column to what the new scholastic scheme calls Nature Study...when all our children have been trained to observe Nature intelligently, the intellectual standard will have been raised to a height we can scarcely anticipate, and science, instead of being the exclusive property of a few, will be the heritage of all.

In summary, by age 14 in 1910, Bravery had developed a keen interest in birds which reflected the aims of the Queensland Government's natural history curriculum. During his school years (1901–1908) he may have been influenced by information in the *School Paper*, but there is no evidence of his actual experience with the curriculum or mentoring by a specific teacher.

Naturalists in Ipswich and Warwick-Killarney, 1880–1917

There is also little indication that young Bravery's interest in birds was instilled by local scientists and naturalists active in Ipswich. Between 1880–1917, they were primarily interested in botany and geology, including fossils (Skertchly 1908; Dowe 2017; Rix 2022). Of 520 biological specimens from the area, 499 (96%) were plants or fungi (ALA 2023). Five were birds, notably the type specimen of Eastern Mangrove Gerygone (*Gerygone levigaster cantator*) (Weatherill 1909). Earlier, Diggles (1875) had identified insects in the stomach contents of a Barking Owl (*Ninox connivens*) shot at Ipswich by a Mr. Jameson, who presented a "fine collection of stuffed birds and preserved insects" at the Ipswich exhibition (Anon. 1877: 10), but his

specimens cannot be located in any collection. In December 1906, to the cheers of geology and botany students at the Technical College, principal Wearne – who (as above) had seen no reason to alter the College curriculum to support the teaching of nature study – proposed a meeting to form a Field Naturalists' Club (Anon. 1906). Numbers of teachers and other residents attended the first meeting, and one enthusiastically read excerpts from Gilbert White's (1789) *Natural History of Selborne* (Anon. 1907). However, the Club did not form an integrated group with a range of interests, as had the Queensland (Field) Naturalists' Club, based in Brisbane (Marks & Cribb 2006). Instead, Wearne (the founding President) preferred to maintain the *status quo* by continuing an existing program of separate excursions for botany, geology and photography (Anon. 1907). There are no further newspaper accounts of this Club's activities, but in 1910 Wearne was reported as greeting RAOU conference delegates as they passed through Ipswich Railway Station, on behalf of the Club (Anon. 1910d). Wearne was also President of the West Moreton Literary and Scientific Club formed in 1908, with 50 members; it held monthly lectures, but only the first dealt with natural history (Queensland snakes: Anon. 1908a) and subsequent meetings were on 'literary' subjects. Apparently no members of the Queensland (Field) Naturalists' Club nor the RAOU lived in the district during these years (Holland 1908; Anon. 1905e, 1916).

Bravery's later regular use of text books (see below) may have developed in his school years, but the resources available to him are unknown. The Ipswich School of Arts library contained Diggle's (1865) *Ornithology of Australia*, Campbell's (1900) *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds* (a gift of the Queensland Premier) and in 1911 (hot off the press), Lucas and Le Souëf's *Birds of Australia* (Anon. 1866, 1901, 1911c). The last was a well-illustrated large format book, covering most Australian birds, and cost 1 guinea (21 shillings) (Anon. 1911c, d; McGregor 2022b). An annual family ticket to the reading room and library also cost 21 shillings (Anon. 1911e), which was cheaper than purchasing the *Queensland Times* alone (6d a week, 26 shillings over 12 months). However, the library may not have been accessible to Bravery, as until 1911 the family lived 5–7 km from the city. Moreover, the School of Arts management was apparently aware that the subscription cost could

be prohibitive for struggling coal mining families. A scheme financed by donations had paid the annual fees for "bright pupils from schools in and around Ipswich...much appreciated by many of the boys and girls to whom they had been awarded", but it was abandoned when donations ceased (Anon. 1911f: 7) and there are no records of the scholarship holders.

The scientific and naturalist community of the Darling Downs may have provided Bravery with more opportunities to pursue his interest. Two future directors of the Queensland Museum, R. Hamlyn-Harris and A. Heber Longman, lived in the main regional city of Toowoomba in 1908 (Anon. 1908b), and the Darling Downs Teachers' Association joined both the RAOU and the Toowoomba Naturalists' Club (Anon. 1905e, 1908b). It is unclear if residents in Warwick-Killarney were directly involved in natural history activities in Toowoomba, 100 km to their north. However, in 1909 Warwick formed its own Field Naturalists' Club (Anon. 1909). In 1910, 26 new Queensland members joined the RAOU: nine were on the Darling Downs, including three in Warwick (Anon. 1911g). Of particular interest is architect Conrad Cobden Dornbusch, a keen birdwatcher, a founding member of the Warwick Field Naturalists' Club, and a long-term RAOU member (Anon. 1909, 1940; Wigan *et al.* 1938). He was apparently not an egg collector (Mason & Pfitzner 2020). This surge of interest in the RAOU was the product of a high-profile conference in Brisbane (Anon. 1910e), after which delegates passed through Ipswich (as above). They then visited Warwick and Toowoomba, where they were met by welcoming committees from the respective local Field Naturalists' Clubs (including Dornbusch in Warwick). W. H. Dudley Le Souëf gave an illustrated public lecture on ornithology in both towns (Anon. 1910d, f).

It is highly likely that interested leading citizens on the Darling Downs (like Dornbusch) owned copies of books such as Lucas and Le Souëf (1911). However, access to resources for a young naturalist like Bravery was no better than in Ipswich, and local interest in birds did not extend to collecting activities. The library of the Warwick School of Arts, founded in 1865, included the 29-volume *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chisholm 1910). It handled more than 20,000 book loans each year, mostly fiction, and no natural history books were

listed among ~1,500 annual non-fiction loans (Anon. 1913, 1914b). In 1905 Warwick Technical College offered courses in nature study for teachers, but by 1910 the courses were no longer held (Anon. 1905f, 1910g). Reports in local newspapers on birds in the area covered the protection of ‘useful’ insectivorous birds (e.g. Tryon 1914) and culling of ‘pest’ species, including 300 ‘Chillawongs’ (Pied Currawong, *Strepera graculina*) at Killarney (Anon. 1915). Most museum specimens collected from 1880–1917 in the Warwick-Killarney area (N = 237: ALA 2023) were plants or fungi (180, 76%) and insects (30, 13%). There were only eleven bird skins, all common species.

In summary, while living on the Darling Downs aged 16–21 (1912–1917), Bravery explored new habitats, observed new species and discussed birds with people he met (Bravery 1967a; letter to Hindwood, 29/01/1962). However, there is no evidence of his actual engagement with the natural history community active in the region during this time.

The move to the Atherton Tablelands and becoming a writer

Bravery enlisted in the First Australian Imperial Force in 1917, returning to Tannymorel in July 1919 (Anon. 1919). After his discharge in August (NAA 2019), he moved to Tolga in far north Queensland, where in 1920 he was granted a soldier-settler block (Anon. 1920; Bravery 1968). As he had done on first arriving on the Darling Downs, and despite the hard-working life of a small-scale maize farmer (Gilmore 2005), he immediately explored the surrounding area. He made a difficult climb of ~4,000 feet to mountain rainforest near Atherton in 1920, and in the following year “first met the Tooth-billed Bowerbird” (*Scenopoeetes dentirostris*) (letters to Chisholm 10/03/1958, 23/07/1958). Leach’s field guide – the only one available – was problematic for bird identification and did not even mention some of the birds Bravery reported from near Warwick, or the Tooth-billed Bowerbird, until after 1923 (Leach 1926; McGregor 2022a). So how did Bravery identify them? It is probable that he had unknown mentors, in Warwick quite possibly C. C. Dornbusch. When Bravery arrived on the Tablelands in 1919, Yungaburra farmer (and fellow WWI veteran) W. H. (Bill) Coleman was collecting birds’ eggs, as he had done since a boy in NSW

(Mason & Pfitzner 2020; ALA 2023), and he may have helped Bravery identify birds. However, Bravery was already proficient in the task by this time.

In 1923 Bravery married Mary Cecilia Healy and their only child, James Leslie, was born in 1924. They farmed leased properties near Atherton until after WWII (e.g. Anon. 1945), then from the 1940s–1975 Bravery and his son leased two adjacent properties on Mazlin Creek, Tolga (‘the Bravery farm’: 17°14'S, 145°30'E). They shared workloads in dairying and cropping, and Bravery continued to observe birds, bird behaviour and habitat change in the local area. In 1956, on turning 60, he decided to consolidate and extend his personal observations to compile an annotated list of all birds in the (then) Atherton Shire (Bravery & Orrell 1958; Bravery 1961; Scambler 2020). At this time he also began his wide engagement with other naturalists and birdwatchers.

Despite advances in farm machinery and technical advice from government bodies, dairy farming and cropping on the Tablelands still posed serious challenges (Gilmore 2005). Nevertheless, an increase in Bravery’s personal income probably enabled him to expand his role at this time. While he did not accept money for taking people birdwatching (Book 10, 1973–74), at age 60 he became entitled to a war service pension by right of service alone (Harrison 1995). Based on Bravery’s notes (e.g. Book 14) this was approximately 38% of average weekly earnings in Queensland (ABS 2020), and this increase in regular income would have covered the costs of memberships (including journal subscriptions), new field guides and postage. Over time, it would also allow him to buy new binoculars: he had 8 × 30 binoculars in 1961 (Book 17), and replaced them with an 8 × 40 pair in 1969 (Book 6, 1969). Bravery watched birds constantly while working on the property, but he needed to pay for fuel to visit other birding sites, sometimes experiencing “dripping rain leeches ticks and foggy binoculars” (Book 10, 1973–74). Travel costs, and the commitment of running a dairy, meant that Bravery rarely travelled beyond the Tablelands, the regional city of Cairns and nearby coast. Exceptions included driving with his wife to Georgetown, 310 km south-west of Atherton, in 1968 (Book 18, 1968). His other long-distance trips – to Valley of Lagoons south of Atherton in 1959, to Cape York

Peninsula in 1965 and 1966, and the Big Tableland near Cooktown in 1969 – were almost certainly funded by companions (Books 4, 12 and 13; letter to Hindwood 26/10/1969). By 1964 his son was doing the major share of the cropping work on the property (letter to Hindwood 09/08/1964) which allowed Bravery to visit birding sites more often, although still mainly between morning and afternoon milking at the dairy.

In his 'writing years' Bravery kept field notes in pocket notebooks, and one from 1968 survives (Book 18; Fig. 4). In the evenings he sat at an old roll-top desk, which he otherwise kept locked (M. Muoio personal communication), and wrote diary entries, notes on species, and drafts of articles, mostly in school exercise books. A comparison of the 1968 notebook with that year's diary

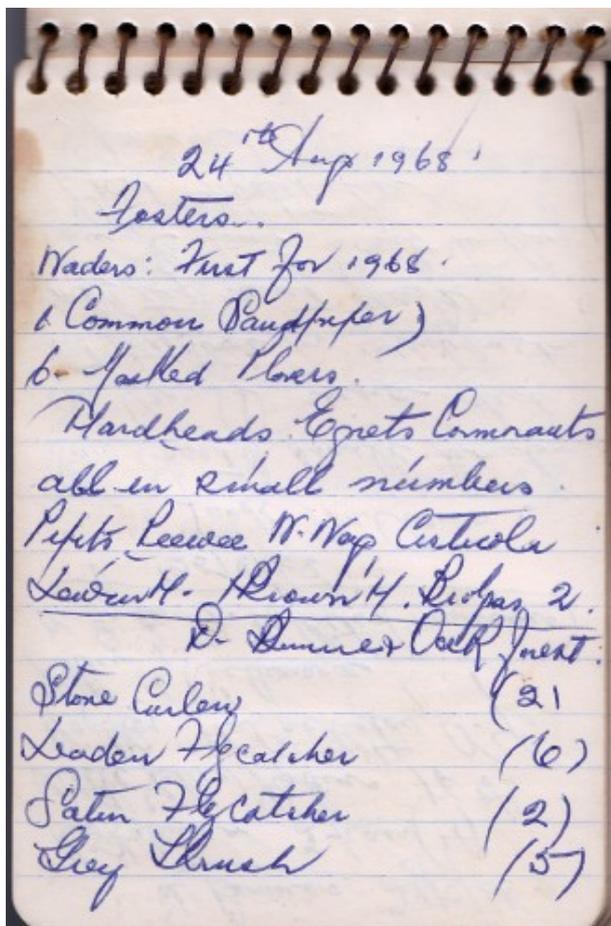


Figure 4. A page from Jim Bravery's pocket field notebook showing records from a visit to Fosters' Farm ('Pelican Point': 17°11'S 145°33'E) and adjacent woodland on 24 August, 1968. (Book 18, Bravery Archive, Special Collections, James Cook University Library).

This survey was not transcribed into the 1968 diary, but a survey at the same site on 31 August, was.

(Book 5) shows that not all field notes were entered. As well as selected bird and other sightings, Bravery recorded correspondence, visitors, opinions on various issues, and descriptions of habitats. Each diary included a cumulative annual list of birds observed on the Bravery farm, and of nesting in the Atherton Shire. He wrote detailed descriptions of birds from observations and accidentally-killed specimens, and notes on bird calls. He entered details of advice given on identification issues by Allan McEvey (Museums Victoria), J. D. McDonald and Ian Galbraith (Natural History Museum UK [formerly British Museum (Natural History)]; NHMUK), Shane Parker (NHMUK and later South Australian Museum), Hugh J. Lavery (Fauna Branch, Department of Primary Industries), Julian Ford (Western Australian Museum) and Keith Hindwood (on waders).

Bravery also made notes from journals on taxonomy, foods of native birds and the history of ornithology. Chisholm and Hindwood sent copies of papers published in *Emu* before Bravery joined the RAOU, and Lavery provided papers from Department of Primary Industry publications. Bravery transcribed long sections from borrowed text books on butterflies, history, minerals and vegetation of northern Queensland, and noted the names of local indigenous groups and the location of their country (Book 7, 1970). Bravery's (known) personal library is listed in Appendix S4, including a number of books given by people he had guided. He owned field guides by Cayley (1953, 1958) and Slater (1970, 1974). He also consulted Jackson (1909), Bourke and Austin (1947) and the *List of Birds Occurring in North Queensland* (NQNC 1949), but he was critical of a CSIRO (1969) index of Australian birds, which he believed omitted "over a dozen species which are known to frequent N Queensland especially migratory species" (Book 10, 1973–74). Like other Australian field ornithologists (McGregor 2024), Bravery greatly admired R. T. Peterson's *Field Guide to North American Birds*, a present from an American couple he had guided on the Tablelands. "I received this excellent guide on 23 March two days before my 78th birthday. All species covered very well indeed. Colour plates and text could not be faulted" (Book 10, 1973–74).

Bravery was willing to change his views based on new evidence: "It is surprising how often a stranger will turn up and upset the general laid down areas

of distribution. I am elastic regarding distribution and many times I have seen species supposed not to frequent the far north" (Book 17, note dated 1962). He originally believed that the Golden Bowerbird was "unable to mimic" (Bravery 1970), but in October 1971 he took Harold Pollock to tape their calls (Book 8, 1971):

... although I did not think this species was a good mimic before I now change my opinion and this bird is a very excellent mimic indeed. Calls beside his own varied assortment were Bower Thrush Crimson Rosellas Little Treecreeper and a Northern Warbler.

In a typically thoughtful diary entry (Book 13), Bravery rejected suggestions of Trumpet Manucode (*Phonygammus keraudrenii*) occurring on the Tablelands (Chisholm 1961). He had seen and heard them on Cape York Peninsula during WWII and at Iron Range in 1966 (letter to Hindwood 29/01/1962; Book 4, 1966) but had never recorded them locally; he believed observers had probably misidentified Black Butcherbirds (*Melloria quoyi*) (see also Frith 1994). Despite persistent enquiries from Chisholm and the enthusiasm of his friend Sharland (Olsen 2007), Bravery was so sceptical of reports of Paradise Parrot (*Psephotellus pulcherrimus*) on Cape York Peninsula that he offered a bottle of Scotch to anyone achieving the first authentic northern observation (letter to Chisholm 12/07/1967).

Contributions to ornithology

Between 1958 and 1974 Bravery wrote 30 articles (Appendix S2), published in the *North Queensland Naturalist* (13), *Emu* (9), *Australian Bird Watcher* (4), *Victorian Naturalist* (2), and *Queensland Bird Notes* (2). Those in the *Victorian Naturalist* were initially sent to Chisholm, who forwarded them to the journal (Wakefield 1961). Most of Bravery's articles (23, 77%) can be described as short anecdotes, with six longer notes and one substantial paper – his most seminal work, *The Birds of Atherton Shire, Queensland* (Bravery 1970, discussed below). A note written in 1965 on the Little Grassbird (*Poodytes gramineus*) was never published, because then editor of *Emu* Jack Hyatt lost the original and Bravery apparently had not kept a copy (Book 3, 1967). He later wrote, "I have not received any *Emus* so far this year and I don't get any replies...from J Hyatt" (letter to Chisholm,

01/05/1968). Bravery appreciated processes at *Emu* under the new editor, Stephen Marchant:

Had a re-typed short communication from S Marchant of Uniform Swiftlets which was an object lesson in how to conserve space without detracting from the value of the paper (Bravery 1971; Book 8, 1971). [He posted the manuscript to Melbourne, Victoria on 02/03/1971 and received the revision back from Marchant 14 days later.]

I estimated that Bravery's publications were cited 1,010 times to the end of 2023. Most citations of his work (80%) were of Bravery (1970) on the birds of Atherton Shire, but articles on the Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) (Bravery 1969), Wet Tropics Horsfield's Bushlark (*Mirafrja javanica athertonensis*) (Bravery 1962) and Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus optatus*) (Bravery 1965, 1967b) also attracted multiple citations. Most of the 844 citations of Bravery's works in HANZAB were on habitat, movements and distribution (Fig. 5), especially in relation to honeyeaters, cuckoos, gerygones and scrubwrens. Bravery contributed information or data to 37 publications by others, including historical records, and new survey data on numbers, movements and feeding, to a study of Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*) (Book 8 1971; McKilligan 1975), and to BOC swift surveys (Book 4, 1966; Book 5, 1968; Book 7, 1970; Tarburton 2014). In 1974 he compiled updated breeding records for a revision of Lavery *et al.* (1968), published 12 years later (Lavery 1986).

Bravery was frequently critical of scientific collecting and was reluctant to collect live bird specimens (Orrell 1975; letter to Chisholm, 12/07/1962; Bravery Archive). However, he was aware of the limitations of contemporary field guides and the value of study skins in separating similar forms (e.g. Book 12, on Cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina* species), and he looked forward to the findings and insights of taxonomists. In 1957 his regular correspondent Allan McEvey persuaded him to collect specimens for a taxonomic review of the Horsfield's Bushlark, and the eight skins Bravery collected between January and March 1958 (ALA 2023; Appendix S3) included the holotype of the Wet Tropics subspecies (Mayr & McEvey 1960; Schodde & Mason 1999; Fig. 6). Bravery collected plant specimens as part of his investigation of Tablelands habitats, and sought identifications from local botanists (e.g. Book 14).

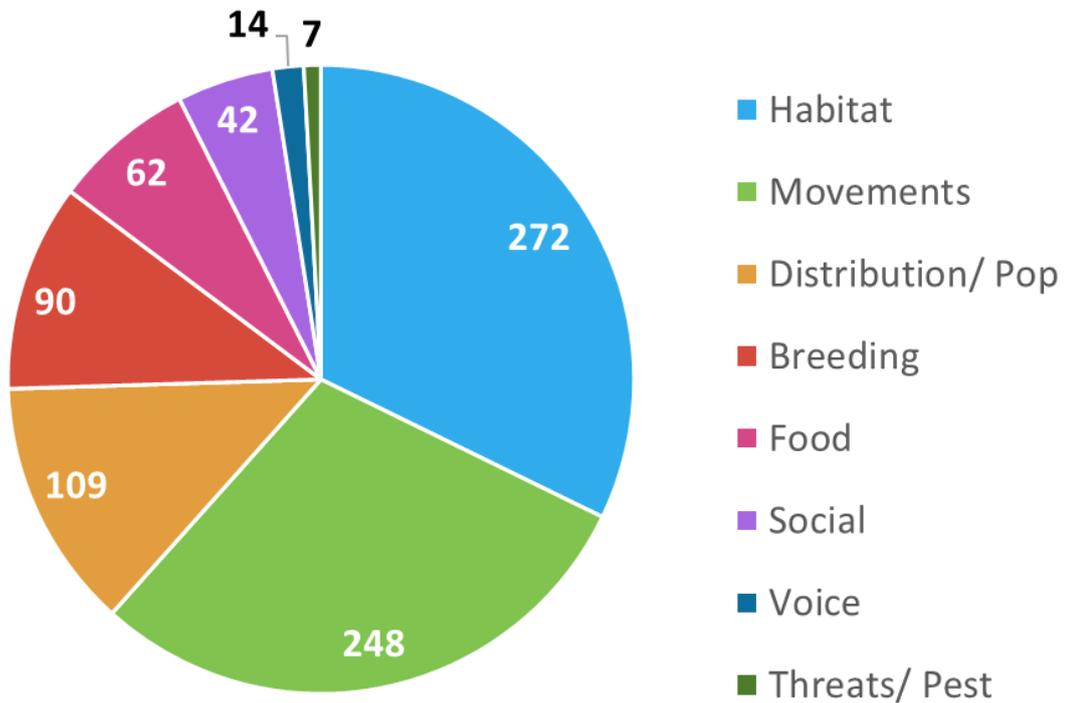


Figure 5. Numbers of citations of Bravery's writings in the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB)*, by topic (N = 844).
 Excludes citations of Lavery *et al.* (1968) (see Methods). Pop = population, and Threats and Pest Status are combined.



Figure 6. Holotype of *Mirafrja javanica athertonensis* (Wet Tropics Horsfield's Bushlark).
 Museums Victoria B7046, collected by J. A. Bravery in March 1958. Photographer David Staples, courtesy Museums Victoria (CC BY 4.0).

His 16 plant specimens now held in collections include examples of the undescribed 'Gossia sp. Green Bark' (Myrtaceae: B. Hyland 25370RFK) taken on the family farm in 1972. This taxon, first collected by Dr. Hugo Flecker near Kuranda in 1939, is restricted to the Wet Tropics bioregion and is yet to be fully investigated (ALA 2023; AVH 2024).

The seminal 'Birds of Atherton Shire, Queensland'

Bravery's (1970) signature paper in *Emu* contained a list of 314 species and their status, distribution and habitats in the Atherton Shire, based on his personal observations from 1950–1969. Six of these species were introduced, and Bravery considered that three others were probably aviary escapes. For ten species he augmented his own notes with records by other observers (some of which were from beyond the Atherton Shire). Successive drafts show that Bravery began this major work by writing an account of one half to a whole page (~90–150 words) for each species, but space restrictions reduced this to ~35 words per species in the final article. He drafted background texts on history, community and industries, geology, climate and vegetation. Some drafts, including the birds listed, covered other areas of north Queensland he had visited. However, whether as a personal decision, or after advice from others, Bravery returned to his original plan of concentrating on the area he knew best, the Atherton Shire. He sought comments on early drafts from Lavery, P. A. Bourke, local birdwatcher Bruce Cook, and others before submitting the manuscript. *Emu* editor Marchant required changes, but accepted the paper:

I had to retype my paper 'Birds of the Atherton Shire' and also curtail it considerably. I will be soon sending it back for final approval. Perhaps I should not growl as others have done. At least they didn't knock it back altogether...the Rufous Songlark made it 317 [see below] species for the Shire which is good considering it is only 245 sq miles in area. All distances are now in metres, kilometres which made it a little difficult also. Glad it is now completed. (letter to Chisholm, 10/09/1969)

At last my paper has been published in the "Emu" and due to lack of space is now reduced to more or less just a bird list... [with] another

six pages I am sure the paper would have been more interesting. (letter to Hindwood, 05/07/1970)

The paper covered 314 species, rather than 317, as Bravery's inclusion of the rarely sighted Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) was rejected, and he had treated two subspecies as full species. The shortened form of the species' accounts in the published paper excluded many details contained in Bravery's draft manuscripts, including his behavioural observations, and sometimes led to a lack of clarity. For example, Chisholm's (1963) description of Golden Bowerbird (*Prionodura newtoniana*) nesting was based entirely on notes from Bravery, who organised and financed the excursion and photographs (letters to Chisholm 19/12/1961, 15/02/1962). In 1970, as noted by Frith and Frith (1998), Bravery named a nest tree species without citing Chisholm (1963), but his original draft (Book 13) did, in fact, cite Chisholm. The editor presumably considered that to save space, it was valid for Bravery to use his own original observation without attribution.

Bravery was perplexed by the 'Herberton Honeyeater' (Nielsen 1996). Currently classified as Fuscous Honeyeater (*Ptilotula fusca*), it also has features of Yellow-tinted Honeyeater (*P. flavescens*), and Bravery wrote many pages of notes on this issue, changing his mind several times. He ultimately listed both species for the Atherton Shire. Despite Ford (1986: see below) the correct status of this population is still not resolved (e.g. Fisher & Fisher 2024). After publication, some readers queried the presence of Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo (*Cacomantis castaneiventris*), but Bravery received confirmation of its occurrence from other observers including CSIRO scientists (Book 9, 1972; and see Pavey 1991). Debus and Czechura (1992) reviewed all Queensland records of Square-tailed Kite (*Lophoictinia isura*) and accepted Bravery's for the Tablelands. Their decision was based primarily on the quality of available field guides, but the accuracy of Bravery's records for this species is supported by his field descriptions and subsequent records (e.g. Book 6, 1969; Marchant & Higgins 1993).

However, Bravery also included five species in his Tableland list that have since been comprehensively rejected. His mistaken record of Yellow-legged Flycatcher (*Kempiella griseiceps*) was discussed in detail by Scambler *et al.* (2021), who

concluded that there was no evidence of its occurrence on the Tablelands, and that sightings (including Bravery's) were most likely of juvenile Northern Pale-yellow Robins (*Tregallasia capitonana*). Bravery listed both Scarlet and Red-headed Honeyeaters (*Myzomela sanguinolenta* and *M. erythrocephala*), through confusing the females, when only the Scarlet is present. He also confused Large-billed with Mangrove Gerygones (*Gerygone magnirostris* and *G. levigaster*), when only the former is known to occur on the Tablelands. He listed Northern Scrub-robin (*Drymodes superciliaris*, restricted to Cape York Peninsula), which he had seen at Iron Range with Michael Sharland in 1966 (Sharland 1970; Book 4, 1966). His records on the Tablelands may have been from sightings of Grey-headed Robin (*Heteromyias cinereifrons*) in poor light, and influenced by the (incorrect) distribution given in Cayley (1958), which included the Atherton Tablelands. Bennett (1985) rightly rejected Bravery's proposed northern range extension for Black-breasted Button-quail (*Turnix melanogaster*) (Sharland 1959; Bravery 1970). Bravery may have been misled by the species' (incorrect) inclusion in the list of north Queensland birds south to 22°S, published by NQNC (1949) with assistance from a leading figure in the RAOU, H. M. Whittell. Ironically however, it appears that Bravery had correctly identified several Black-breasted Button-quail seen close up, feeding on crushed grain at the dairy. His detailed description was confirmed by McEvey, and Bravery subsequently discovered that a neighbour had been breeding quail species in an aviary (Book 10, 1973–74).

After his death, Bravery was caught in the crossfire of a disagreement between Julian Ford and Richard Zann over the distribution of forms of the Black-throated Finch (*Poephila cincta*) (Zann 1976; Ford 1986). Ford castigated Bravery as 'prone to error', citing the finch, the Black-breasted Button-quail, and the (as yet unresolved) 'Herberton Honeyeater'. This seems rather ungracious: although Ford was sceptical of sighting data (Davies 1987) he actively sought records from amateurs, including Bravery (e.g. Ford 1975). Moreover, Bravery regularly corresponded with Ford and had informed him more than ten years earlier of the aviary escapees identified as Black-breasted Button-quail (Book 10, 1973–74).

Bravery never published an update to the 1970 Atherton Shire list, but commented in his

notebooks that the common Dusky Honeyeater (*Myzomela obscura*) had been accidentally omitted (Book 8, 1971). He also added four species, and provided notes on their identification: Red-necked Crake (*Rallina tricolor*), Australian Spotted Crake (*Porzana fluminea*), Eastern Grass Owl (*Tyto longimembris*) and Atherton Scrubwren (*Sericornis kerri*) (Book 7, 1970; Book 8, 1971; Book 10, 1973–74). More controversially, Bravery claimed to have sighted the vagrant New Guinean Uniform Swiftlet (*Aerodramus vanikorensis yorki*) over the family farm in Tolga; this was finally accepted by Schodde (1997) after considerable debate (Bravery 1971, 1973; Schodde & McKean 1972).

Conclusions

How Bravery became so involved with birdlife by age 14 remains an intriguing mystery. Hugo Flecker (1947) believed that small children were naturalists by instinct, but were discouraged because teachers and parents urged them towards 'more worthwhile things'. Natural history was in the air during Bravery's boyhood, as evidenced by the founding of numerous local societies, but in this period these tended to be the province of social elites (Hutton & Connors 1999). Yet, despite the preference of the educational establishment for the *status quo*, technical students and some teachers in Ipswich showed enthusiasm for natural history, and Bravery's lifelong careful observation and respect for birds mirror the schooling admired by Inspector Gripp on the Darling Downs. Thus, perhaps his experience as a child of the 'new education' enabled Bravery to meet Flecker's (1948) criteria for a naturalist:

Naturalists are of course nature lovers...but naturalists undertake an immensely greater and far more interesting study, to seek out the origins of their object of biological interest, their affinities...how they live, how they work and a thousand other especially interesting features...

Bravery's errors were few, but obvious, as they involved supposed records of species far from their verified areas of distribution. He can be seen as a competent, conscientious observer, struggling at times with lack of quality aids to identification (Scambler *et al.* 2021), as discussed by McGregor (2022b) for all observers using field guides before Slater (1970, 1974). Bravery's problems can also be seen as deriving partly from over-respectful reliance on the views of his mentors. He felt strong

personal loyalty to field ornithologists that he admired, especially Bourke, who helped review his manuscripts, and Chisholm, Hindwood and McGill, the three editors of the Cayley (1958) revised edition. They had all supported his quest for knowledge and efforts to write, but many of their revisions to the text of Cayley (1958) exacerbated the then prevalent conflation of Cape York Peninsula and the Wet Tropics (as noted by Scambler *et al.* 2021). This was compounded by the editors' (and Bravery's) unquestioning acceptance of Bourke's WWII records (Bourke & Austin 1947).

Bravery saw himself as an observer, an ornithologist, and a student, always learning. He occasionally used the old term 'birdman' or the 1950s Australian term 'birdo', but never 'birdwatcher', despite its adoption by the BOC in the initial name for their journal in 1959: to him, all serious observers were ornithologists. Like many natural history observers and collectors (Robin 2001; Dowe 2017) Bravery operated on the fringes of science, but he was accepted into the world of collegial ornithology. This could not have happened without his long and careful recording of birds on the Tablelands and his eagerness to share that knowledge and learn from others. Bravery's signature work on birds of the Atherton Shire can be seen as a substantial contribution in the observational 'regional list' genre, published by *Emu* from its earliest days. By the time he died in 1975 the publishing of such lists was being replaced by ecological studies and a focus on individual avian life histories (Keast 1994). Yet Savage and Crane's (2020) contention of learnings from 'antique ornithology' is well-evidenced by the extensive citations of Bravery's work in HANZAB, and his records – even from some of the anecdotal notes – continue to provide valuable baselines, e.g. for species' action plans (Garnett & Barker 2021).

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Supplementary file

A supplementary pdf file accompanies this paper on its web-page. It contains:

- Appendix S1: Vital dates for persons mentioned in the text;
- Appendix S2: Publications by J. A. Bravery;
- Appendix S3: Specimens collected by J. A. Bravery; and
- Appendix S4: J. A. Bravery's library.

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