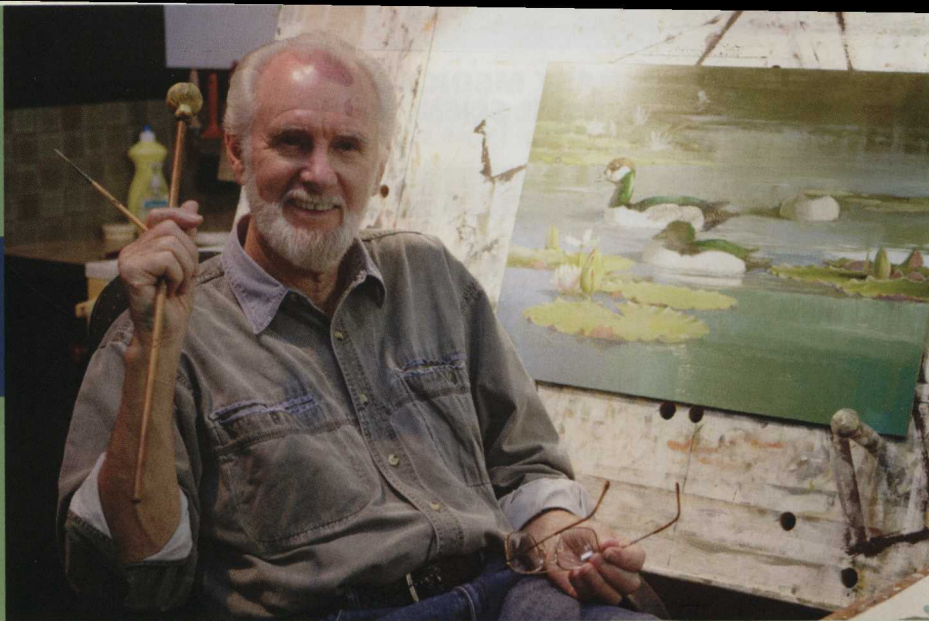


Remembering WILLIAM T. COOPER

Vale

Photo by Sarah Scragg
William T. Cooper OA
1934–2015



The death of William (Bill) T. Cooper, who died peacefully at his rainforest home in far north Queensland on 10 May 2015, aged 81 years, brought a sad end to the highly successful Joseph Forshaw–William Cooper publishing partnership of more than 40 years. His passing occurred just a few weeks after the publication of their final project, *Pigeons and Doves in Australia*, a beautifully presented book that maintains the exceptional standard of their books.

Bill Cooper and his wife Wendy worked for many years as a unique artistic team—Bill’s meticulous attention to detail of habitat and surroundings combined with Wendy’s botanical knowledge and skill in identifying food plants have been the ingredients that made William T Cooper bird illustrations unique. During their long partnership Wendy also wrote three botanical books including *Fruits of the Australian Tropical Rainforest* (2004) featuring 1,230 illustrations and 2,440 species in the text!

Bill Cooper left school at 15 and was almost a self-taught artist. It was fortuitous that he was befriended by Sir William Dobell who advised him not to attend art school but to develop his own style—initially he painted landscapes and seascapes.

The first book of the Forshaw-Cooper team was *Parrots of the World* published in 1973. It was written to cater for the needs of ornithologists, institutions, naturalists and aviculturists and featured almost 500 birds: ‘magnificently illustrated in colour by William Cooper, whose recent work has ranked him among the world’s leading bird painters.’

My first awareness of the Forshaw-Cooper partnership was 47 years ago when visiting a parrot breeder who had just obtained the first edition of *Parrots of the World*—he was really excited and kept it on display in the lounge room! The second quarto size edition was first published in 1978.

Other books by the Forshaw-Cooper team include *The Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds*, *Australian Parrots* (second edition 1981), *Kingfishers and Related Birds*, *Turacos* and the revised and enlarged third edition of *Australian Parrots*. All books feature Bill’s outstanding illustrations, complemented with Joe’s research skills as author.

His biography by Penny Olsen, *An Eye For Nature—The Life And Art of William Cooper*, was published last year. It is the perfect avian bookshelf companion for Forshaw-Cooper books.

In 1992 the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, USA, presented Bill with their gold medal for ‘artistic endeavours and life’s work which have contributed to mankind’s better understanding and appreciation of living things’. He was the first Australian recipient in its 190-year history. In 1994 he received the Order of Australia (OA) for his contribution to art and natural history.

Bill Cooper was respected for his modesty and good humour and especially worldwide for his illustrative role in the outstanding 20th century author-artist bird team.

With his passing, the worlds of conservation, natural history, botany, birds and art have lost one of their finest advocates. David Attenborough once described William T Cooper as: ‘Australia’s greatest living scientific painter of birds—he is possibly the best in the world.’

Graeme Hyde

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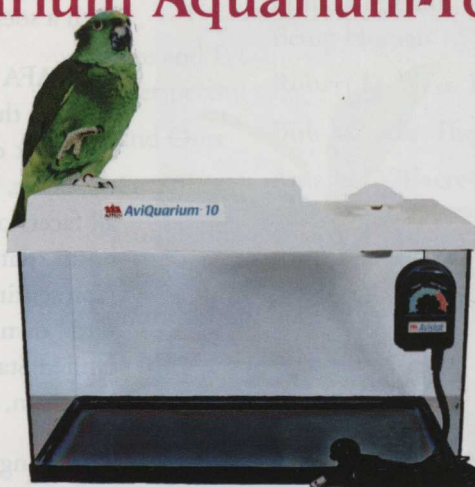
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