





(Photo by Guido COMASINI - 1996)

William John Plant of Maitland, NSW - Australia, died on 20 October, 1996. This remarkable poultry fancier, amateur researcher and historian was born on 3 May, 1921. Three years in high school were followed by work in engineering and three years on a technical college course. From 1939, interrupted by army service during World War II, he operated as amateur radio station. In 1965, in conjunction with his son David, he started to breed Pekin Bantams and they became members of the NSW Pekin Bantam Club. It was from this time that an interest in fancy fowl, and the domestic fowl generally, took on a progressively more important role in William's life.

As breeders of Black Pekin Bantams, Bill and David Plant became Club Grand Champions on many occasions. William Plant served as Club Secretary and Newsletter editor (since 1974). This led ultimately to his co-editing *The Australian Pekin Bantam* (1993). The intriguing combination of interests in Pekin Bantams and short-wave radio provided the basis for his investigations and research into the origins and history not only of this variety, but into that of other varieties and the domestic fowl and poultry generally. While he wrote many articles for the poultry press on the history and development of varieties of domestic fowl and other poultry species in Australia, his increasing passion became the origin and evolution of the domestic fowl.

Some of the results of William Plant's research were published privately, including *Chicken Bone Recoveries* (1984) [and essential supplement (1985)] and *Gallus Species - Jungle Fowl*. Had the author lived longer these were intended to form part of a comprehensive treatise that would have embraced the origin of birds together with the evolution, history and distribution of the domestic fowl. Some of his findings are cited in *Poultry Breeding and Genetics* (1990).

To gather the information he needed, Mr Plant consulted a great many leading poultry scientists and obtained information from numerous museums, universities and institutions in many countries. It became apparent that the extensive correspondence that had accumulated could itself be of value. Bill Plant collaborated in the plan to combine this material in a book, *Chattering on Gallus*, that is published posthumously.

Although Bill Plant was apologetic over his lack of academic background and for any consequent deficiencies in presentation, his wide ranging investigations and research were carried out with thoroughness and great enthusiasm. Indeed, as he followed in the tracks of ancient domestic fowl he was like an indefatigable bloodhound, with the results related as a thrilling detective story. In spite of suffering impaired sight, the fruitfulness, dedication and clarity of vision of this scholar were striking and could be envied by many: who might be considered to be better qualified. Bill Plant's philosophy was one of continuous learning. He eschewed the idea that he had become an authority, linking this term with the cessation of learning. All those who had the good fortune to know this remarkable man will regret his passing.