

In Memoriam



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IN MEMORIAM: JOHN WARREN ALDRICH, 1906–1995

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John Aldrich was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on 23 February 1906, and went to the Providence public schools. He developed a broad interest in natural history at an early age, being stimulated by his mother, a kindergarten teacher, who introduced him to nature books. His interest was strengthened by Harold L. Madison, Director of the Park Museum in Providence, an Associate (= member) of the AOU. As a high school student, John taught nature study at the Rhode Island Boy Scout Camp in summers. John was President of his class at Classical High School, and manager of the school's football team in his senior year. Also in that year, 1923, John published his first paper, a note in *Bird-Lore* on the occurrence of the Mockingbird in Rhode Island. That paper is a literary gem, showing that his skill in writing developed as early as his knowledge of birds. His early interest in football continued as well; he was a devoted fan of the Washington Redskins in his later years.

Remaining in Providence, John attended Brown University where, among other accomplishments, he was a member of the swimming team and set a school record for the 200-yard breaststroke. He majored in biology and graduated with a Ph.B. in 1928. One of his instructors at Brown was Herbert Friedmann, later a colleague at the National Museum of Natural History, who taught him to prepare study skins of birds. While at Brown, John spent summers as a nature counselor at Camp Chewonki in Maine.

Leaving Brown, John went to the then new Buffalo Museum of Science, where he served as a museum aid and biological assistant. While at the Buffalo Museum, he joined with Gardiner Bump, Harold Mitchell, and James Savage in forming the Buffalo Ornithological Society. (About 40 years later, Harold Mitchell was the leader of the Local Committee when the AOU met in Buffalo in 1970, in John's second year as President.) Also in the

time at Buffalo, John met a young art student from Jamestown, New York, named Roger Tory Peterson. Roger's enthusiasm and knowledge led John to recommend him to fill his vacated position at Camp Chewonki.

In 1930, John accepted a position as biological assistant in charge of bird work at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, where his former Providence mentor Harold Madison was the Director. John worked under the guidance of Harry C. Oberholser of the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey, who was retained as a scientific consultant in ornithology by the Cleveland Museum. In Cleveland, a friend suggested that John might get a room at the house where he boarded. Another resident of the house was Louise Kendall, a student in the School of Library Sciences at Western Reserve University. In June 1933, John and Louise eloped to Niagara Falls, where they were married.

John dedicated himself to building up the museum's bird collection. He did field work and published papers on birds of Ohio, Michigan, Wyoming, Ontario, Newfoundland, and Panama. He later felt that exposure to the sun in those field days was responsible for numerous skin cancers. While in Cleveland John attended Western Reserve University where he earned an M.A. in Biology in 1933 and a Ph.D. in 1937. He was a student of S. Charles Kendeigh, from whom he absorbed a solid background of the ecological principles of Victor Shelford. This established the interest in ecological life histories of birds that persisted throughout his career. His doctoral dissertation was on the ecological succession and community dynamics of the swamps and bogs of northeastern Ohio. In 1937, when he received his degree, John was made Curator of Ornithology at the museum. Another lifelong friendship developed in Cleveland was with W. Earl Godfrey, a



JOHN WARREN ALDRICH

(Photograph taken in November 1994)

postdoctoral student at Western Reserve who frequented the museum.

John was appointed to the position of "Ornithologist" in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, successor of the Bureau of Biological Survey, upon Oberholser's retirement in 1941; Oberholser moved back to Cleveland to take up the slack as Curator of Birds at the museum. John, Louise, and their children, Betsy and Jane, moved to a home in Alexandria, Virginia. They lived there until 1959, when they moved to a home on Lake Barcroft, Fairfax County, Virginia. They were gracious hosts to many of the ornithologists who visited the National Museum over the years.

John's duties included the curation of the Fish and Wildlife Service collection of bird specimens at the National Museum of Natural History, and field investigations related to regional surveys of the United States and its territories.

The identification of feathers and bones of birds for the FWS and other agencies, in connection with law violations and bird-aircraft collisions, was one of his responsibilities. He was called on often to serve as an expert witness in court cases requiring the identification of birds. Working with him in this, starting in 1948, was Roxie C. Laybourne, who developed techniques for identifying feathers by microscopic analysis. When a plane at Logan Airport in Boston ingested several Starlings in 1960, causing a crash that killed most of those aboard, the flimsy bird remains were sent to John. He turned them over to Roxie, who thereafter did all of the bird-strike identifications and eventually those relating to law violations as well.

Because of the conditions during World War II, most of the offices and staff of the Fish and Wildlife Service moved to Chicago in 1942. The staff

of the Section of Biological Surveys, however, remained in Washington at the National Museum or at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Refuge (now Center). The functions of those at the museum were reduced largely to the curation and study of the collections. Fieldwork was limited during the war, but John initiated a program of surveys of breeding and wintering bird populations in a variety of local habitats. One of his first assignments, with Stanley G. Jewett, was the revision and updating of an old manuscript on the birds of Washington State by Walter P. Taylor and William Shaw. Many of John's publications in the next dozen years, until the book on the birds of Washington came out in 1953, were devoted to studies of geographic variation in birds of the northwestern United States.

In 1947, John was made Chief of the Section of Distribution and Migration of Birds of the FWS, succeeding Frederick C. Lincoln. This section included the national bird banding program, the bird distribution and migration record carding and mapping program, field studies of bird populations, and migratory game bird studies, along with systematics and curation of the museum collection. He earned a reputation as a just and fair supervisor, polite and reserved but strict on rules and meticulous on details. In 1949, John and Robert E. Stewart studied bird populations relative to a spruce budworm outbreak in northern Maine. In a classic study, they attempted to eliminate or to reduce drastically the bird numbers on a 40-acre plot of spruce-fir forest. From a censused population of 148 territorial males, 302 adult males were taken in a three-week effort, while densities of most species were reduced to about 20% of the original figures. Their efforts revealed, for the first time, the existence of a large, surplus floating population of unmated males that invaded the area as rapidly as the original males were eliminated.

In 1951, the mammal investigations of the FWS were joined with the similar bird research program, all under John's supervision, as the Section of Distribution of Birds and Mammals. In this period, emphasis was placed on bird-population and ecology studies and the administration of the bird banding program, which was expanding rapidly. John's own research was divided between bird-population studies and bird systematics oriented toward better understanding of population segments or races, to permit more intelligent management and conservation. John be-

came well known for his studies of Sandhill Cranes and Canada Geese. He reviewed geographic variation of North American galliforms and the Mourning Dove in relation to major ecological areas. A byproduct of those investigations was publication of a map of the "Life Areas" of North America based on climax vegetation. In this period, John successfully initiated efforts to integrate the FWS collections of birds and mammals with the parallel collections of the National Museum, previously, by long tradition, maintained as distinct units.

Also in 1947, John assumed the editorship of *Audubon Field Notes* (later *American Birds*), just months after it was separated from *Audubon Magazine*. One objective of this was to coordinate the volunteer cooperator studies of bird distribution and populations presented in *Audubon Field Notes* with the FWS research projects in those fields. He served as Editor until relieved by Chandler S. Robbins in 1951, but remained on the editorial board until 1985.

In 1957 a major reorganization of the FWS led to the elimination of the Section of Distribution of Birds and Mammals, with redistribution of its responsibilities, and to John's appointment as Staff Specialist for Distribution, Classification, and Life History Studies in the Division of Wildlife Research. John continued to maintain his office with the Bird Section of the FWS Bird and Mammal Laboratories in the Division of Birds at the National Museum. Among John's duties as Staff Specialist was participation in developing an endangered species program including responsibility for preparation of the bird portion of the Service's *Rare and Endangered Wildlife of the United States* in 1966, the first "Redbook." That became the basis for the original official Department of the Interior list of endangered species that was included in the Endangered Species Protection Act passed by Congress in 1966. John also headed the U.S. delegation in negotiations for a migratory bird treaty with Japan, in 1968 and 1969. In December 1967, the Department of the Interior conferred its Distinguished Service Award on John for "outstanding scientific contributions in ecological and taxonomic research."

John retired from the FWS in June 1972 but continued with the agency as a retired annuitant for 14 months. At that time, Louise retired from her position as Librarian of the National Association of Broadcasters, where she had worked since their children were grown. In retirement, John

continued to study birds at the museum as a Research Associate of the Smithsonian Institution. He spent much of his time studying morphological variation of widely distributed birds correlated with ecological aspects of various parts of their range. Major studies completed after his retirement were of the Song Sparrow and the American Robin. These studies were logical extensions of his interests as reflected in his systematic writings of many years.

John was a member of many scientific and conservation organizations, beginning with the one he helped organize in Buffalo in 1929. He joined the AOU in that same year, becoming an Elective Member in 1941 and a Fellow in 1947. Of all the professional societies, John was most active in the AOU. He was chairman of several committees and a member of the Council for several years before his election to the presidency in 1968. John was greatly amused when a resolution adopted by the AOU during his presidency filtered down through the FWS to him to draft a response. He later chaired the important ad hoc Committee on Scientific and Educational Use of Wild Birds whose report as a Supplement to *The Auk* in 1975 was one of the first responses to the tightening of policy and regulations on collecting permits. John was also President of the Biological Society of Washington, the Washington Biologists' Field Club, and the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia. He also belonged to the Cooper and Wilson Ornithological Societies, the American Society of Mammalogists, the Wildlife Society, the National Audubon Society, and the Cosmos

Club of Washington, to name a few. John donated his journals to the FWS offices with which he was associated in the museum as long as he was in the Washington area. Much of his personal ornithological library was donated to George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.

John and Louise left their Lake Barcroft home, where they had extensively grown flowers, trees, and shrubs (mainly azaleas), and moved into an apartment in 1983. Louise's health failed, and she suffered a long, painful illness with osteoporosis and diabetes. She died in September 1985. John continued to come to the museum regularly to continue his research on the American Robin until 1988, when he moved from the Washington area to Tucson, Arizona. There he was close to his daughter Betsy (Elizabeth Hanson) and her three grown children, Chuck, Jim and Kristy, a loving, closely knit family, and not too distant from his other daughter, Jane Katyryniuk, who lived in California. John greatly enjoyed rides in Saguaro National Monument and visits to the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, and 4-wheel-drive jeep trips to the mountains around Tucson with grandson Chuck. John's health declined gradually, particularly affecting his balance. In the months before his death he had problems with circulation in his legs. While still in recovery from those problems, he died of a stroke on 3 May 1995.

This memorial relies heavily on an autobiographical sketch that John deposited in the AOU Archives. I appreciate comments and suggestions from many of John's friends and colleagues and his daughter Betsy.

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IN MEMORIAM: BEATRICE WETMORE, 1910-1997

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Bea Wetmore, Guarantor of the American Ornithologists' Union, died unexpectedly but peacefully in her home in Silver Spring, Maryland on 1 March 1997, at the age of 87. She was born Annie Beatrice van der Biest Thielen on 11

January 1910 on the island of Curaçao. Conversant at least in Dutch, English, Spanish, and Papiamentu, the patois of the Dutch West Indies, she served as secretary/translator for various entities of the Dutch government in Washing-