

BIOGRAPHY OF
ALLAN R. PHILLIPS 1914-1996
ROBERT W. DICKERMAN

About 3:30 PM on 26 January 1996, Allan Robert Phillips died of cancer at his home in San Nicolas de los Garza, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. All of his immediate family were present. Since World War II Allan had been the preeminent ornithologist of the southwest; since the 1950's the preeminent ornithologist of Mexico; and arguably, one of the most important alpha taxonomists in ornithology of the 20th Century.

The Phillips saga in the New World began in 1834 when Allan's great, great, great-grandfather John Daniel and his wife Mathilda moved from London to New York. There they established the Phillips estate, which occupied an area which today would stretch from 34th to 42nd Streets and from 5th Avenue to the East River. They had four sons and seven daughters. Their oldest son was Lewis John (born 1831) and their seventh child was Sarah (born 1840). The latter married Isaac Kuhn and bore a daughter Gertrude (born 1866), who married Lewis' son David (born 1861). David and Gertrude had six children, of whom Robert W. (1891-1943), Allan's father, was their fourth.

By the time Robert came of age the family's fortune, though still sizable, had through inept management shrunk to a shadow of its original size. Robert was a manager and took over the reins of the family's L. J. Phillips Real Estate Co., which was New York's first management company for real estate owned by others. Under his management the company survived the crash of 1929, although it wiped out a large portion of the remaining Phillips fortune. Nonetheless, Robert was able to raise his family in style.

Robert married Alma Josephi in 1913 and Allan was born 25 October 1914 in New York City, the oldest of three children. (George was born in 1918 and Ruth in 1922). Robert was handsome, charming, socially active, and a golf player; Alma was a concert-level pianist, active in the intellectual and musical (N.Y. Symphony) life of the city. His parents separated, and Alma married William X. Forster ("Uncle Will"), first violinist of the symphony. Allan's half sister Marjorie, affectionately known as "Midge," was born in 1929.

Allan spent his early summers at a family place in Jackman, Maine (then rented, but later purchased and still in the family) and was there introduced to birds and other wildlife by his mother. By the age of 5 birds became the focus of his life, and he soon began compiling lists of those he had seen. One of his sister Ruth's earliest memories was of him admonishing his mother not to let the maids clean his room for fear they would disturb his papers (a trait that lasted his entire life!).

Allan attended the Horace Mann School (then) for Boys, (then and still) one of the foremost private schools 1920-1931. It was there that his photographic memory came to fore as illustrated by his obtaining his school books for the year, reading them at once, and thence never carrying them to school again—a foreshadowing of the incredible memory that characterized his adult years. Because



FIG. 1. ARP on eve of departure from England to Omaha Beach, 8 June 1944. *Photo by Ralph S. Palmer.*

arranged to have Allan's duties transferred. Soon Allan was very "up" collecting birds for survey purposes, most or all of which he preserved, adding another chapter to the knowledge of the Okinawa avifauna. There are at least 6 of his fall 1945 Okinawa specimens in the Canadian Museum of Nature and 20 in the Delaware Museum of Natural History.

Allan's field catalog (to be archived, along with his correspondence and systematic notes at the University of Arizona library) is a historical document. The first entry, ARP 1, was a Pygmy Nuthatch collected on San Francisco Mountain near Flagstaff, 13 August 1933, when he was 19 years old. Subspecific identifications among the first specimens are noted to have been made by JG (Joseph Grinnell) or HCO (Harry C. Oberholser). The JG initials are scattered up to entry 123, and HCO is last entered after specimen 804, a Horned Lark collected in 1940. There are a few identifications initialed AJvR [A. J. van Rossem], and a few AHM [Alden H. Miller]. There is a hiatus in his main catalog from 16 September 1940 to 11 November 1946, but he entered 87 specimens taken in the Ithaca, New York vicinity between 22 August 1941 to 28 May 1942 in a separate catalog.

His main catalog (through ARP 2892, entered 17 October 1952) was in a standard 8" by 10-1/2" ledger. After that specimen, probably due to the influence of

of his young age at graduation (16), and problems with asthma, Allan was sent (his choice) to the Fresnal Ranch School in Arizona's Baboquivari Mountains southwest of Tucson for a year of maturation. There he met Randolph (Pat) Jenks, and the seed was sown that changed the ornithology of the Southwest. During that time, Allan's mother and stepfather moved to Arizona and soon bought the house at 113 Olive Road, a half block north of the University of Arizona. This became Allan's home address until 1957 when he moved to Mexico City.

Allan entered Cornell in the fall of 1932, took a year out to attend the University of Arizona (1933-1934), and returned to Cornell to receive his BA in February, 1936. Although only an undergraduate, he was included when "Doc" (Arthur A. Allen) invited graduate students to his home. Doc liked to give oral quizzes, such as "Who named the Mountain Plover?" Not surprisingly, no one could match Allan in giving sharp and precise responses!

He returned to Tucson in 1936 and received his MS from the U. of Arizona in June, 1939. His thesis was entitled "*The Faunal Areas of Arizona Based on Bird Distribution.*" He then reentered Cornell in 1940 and received his PhD in September, 1946 in spite of time out for military service during World War II.

Allan was small in size, slight and wiry. He was called up for the draft three times—only to be rejected three times because he weighed less than 100 lbs! Finally, when the Germans poured into France, the Army took everyone and he served therein from 1942 to 1945 (and hated almost every minute of it). During his training Allan became fed up with some inept officer and called him, undoubtedly correctly, an explicit anatomical part. He was then court-martialed, stripped of his corporal's rank, and put in the brig. Using his cigarette ration as a bribe, he obtained pencil and paper from the guards and from memory wrote the first draft of his PhD thesis (on the birds of Arizona). Where he could not remember exact information, date, page number, or a specimen reference, he left a blank or one of his now-famous cryptic annotations. He mailed these penciled drafts to his mother, who with the help of Lyndon L. Hargrave, typed the manuscript in at least triplicate (two carbon copies are extant). The typed draft has 392 pages; this allowed him to return to Cornell to use their library facilities to fill in the blanks, and complete his PhD less than a year after being discharged!

He was sent to England to prepare for the Normandy invasion. Although still technically in the brig, he had the freedom to roam. Consequently, on 6 March 1944, he salvaged a Greenfinch and collected bird bones of two columbid species on the beach at Wollscombe on 8 April. On 8 June 1944 he left England for Omaha Beach. By amazing coincidence, the commander of the landing craft tied up near Allan's was a Cornell graduate-school friend, Ralph Palmer, who photographed Allan on the evening of 7 June (Fig. 1). Allan was in Normandy until December 1944.

After a brief respite he was sent to Okinawa in preparation for the invasion of Japan. He was there from April to November 1945, where he encountered Sgt. Frank Cassell, another Cornell graduate colleague who was in charge of the Malaria Survey Unit on Okinawa. Frank wrote that he encountered a "very down" Corporal Phillips (he had regained his stripes). Frank, through contact with the island's Communicable Disease Center, which was worrying about Japanese encephalitis,

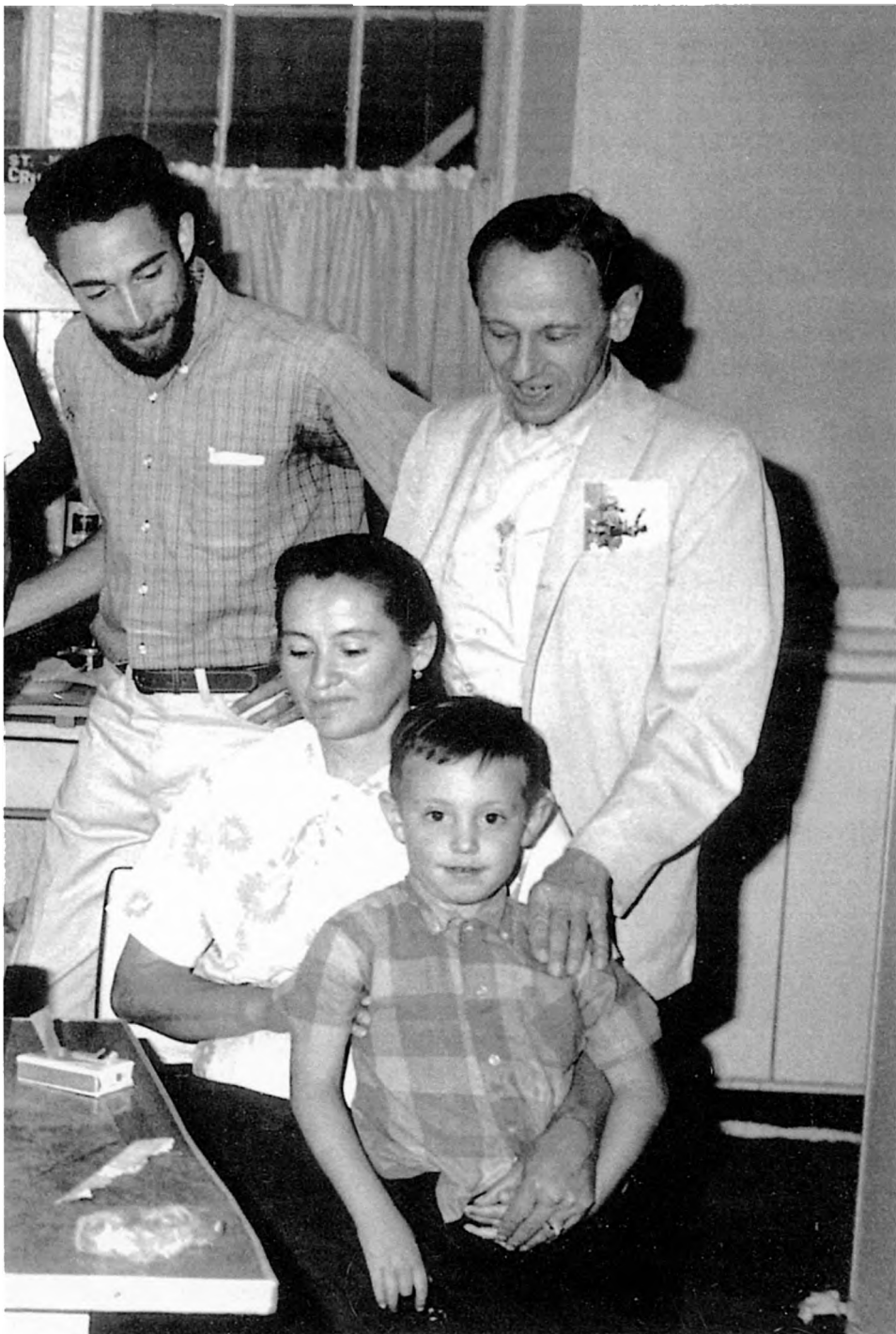


FIG. 2. Allan, Juanita, and Eddy Phillips with Amadeo Rea, the first time they met, September 1968.
Photo by R. Roy Johnson.

the author, he switched to 8-1/2" x 11" loose-leaf notebook paper with entries running across two pages. His last entry in that catalog was 11496 on 4 June 1988. However, he also had three other numbered series: "C" 11 December 1977 to 26 May 1993 (486 entries); "M" 11 January 1974 - 16 February 1974 (33 entries), and "X" (for skeletons) 8 July 1961 - 28 May 1976 (388 entries). For a while he kept a catalog of the birds in his own collection, cross-referencing them to his field catalog; however, after the first few years when many of his specimens were deposited in the Museum of Northern Arizona or other collections, he retained all of his material and then dropped the ARP collection catalog.

The list of names of fellow collectors or preparators (Table 1) found in his catalog reads like a who's who of Cornelian, Southwestern, and later, Mexican ornithology. Those of his close friends and mentors, Lyndon L. Hargrave and Gale Monson, appeared in 1939, the year he received his Masters Degree. Dr. George Miksch Sutton entered Allan's catalog while in Arizona in the spring of 1940, the trip on which he did the sketches which he gave to Allan and which were published in "The Birds of Arizona."

In August 1963 Amadeo M. Rea, soon to be ex-Franciscan, arrived to teach at St. John's Indian School on the Gila River Reservation near Phoenix. By November he had accumulated specimen records and was advised to contact Allan, but was warned that Allan was a stickler for precise data (a case of coals to Newcastle)! Three of those records went immediately into the galley of "The Birds of Arizona"; and a lifelong mentor/colleague/disciple/friend bond was formed (Fig. 2). They corresponded for years and finally met in person in September 1968. Amadeo entered Allan's catalogue 23 December 1970. There is no question that Amadeo is Allan's ornithological progeny. I would cite three examples: a) the innumerable references to Allan's works in Amadeo's important "Once a River" (Univ. Ariz. Press 1983); the parallel density of data crammed onto their respective bird labels; and the absolute *deja vu* I had when, in San Diego in 1993, Amadeo swung open his garage door —and there, crammed with tiers of specimens cases laden with piles of papers covered with newspaper, I was standing in front of the metal garage at 113 Olive Road back in 1953!

Allan's first foray into Mexico was a trip to Sonora with A.J. van Rossem 20 April to 7 May 1947. He went alone to Sonora 25 December 1951 to 1 January 1952, and again with the author 20 December 1952 to 2 January 1953. On that trip, to be able to skin a few more birds after dark and circumvent the cold air drainage down the river bottoms, we heated rocks in the fire, and then rolled them under the card table; we put a blanket over our knees with our feet on or near the rocks, and drank hot tea laced with tequila. Later the somewhat cooler rocks went into the sleeping bags.

It was on that trip that I was exposed to Allan's full and extensive repertoire of humorous and/or sardonic verse! He could sing/recite the wittiest or most biting of Gilbert and Sullivan's songs; entire epic poems, and especially the choice shorter ones of Will Cuppy. In each he was wont to paraphrase, and to substitute the names of his favorite targets of the moment!

Allan's first extensive Mexican trip (and the seminal one that seeded his thinking about moving) was 5 November - 2 December 1952 to Nayarit with Lewis

TABLE 1
COLLEAGUES WHOSE NAMES APPEAR IN ARP'S FIELD CATALOG
AS COLLECTORS OR PREPARATORS OF SPECIMENS.

Note there was some selection by the author in names here included.

William X. Foster	1 January 1938	J. Stuart Rowley	7 June 1961
Lyndon L. Hargrave	12 February 1939	Warren Rook	31 August 1961
Game Monson	17 June 1939	Juana Farfán B. * ¹	27 January 1962
Fred W. Loetscher	14 July 1939	Juan Nava S.	3 September 1962
Milton A. Wetherill	2 August 1939	Santos Farfán B. * ²	11 October 1962
George M. Sutton	10 June 1940	Ticul Alvarez	3 November 1964
Warren M. Pulich	2 December 1946	William Lopez Forment	7 February 1965
A. J. van Rossem	10 March 1947	Abraham Ramírez V.	14 January 1966
Lewis D. Yeager	26 February 1949	Dan A. Tallman	26 January 1967
James A. Monro	5 January 1951	Peter Hubbell	2 May 1968
Robert W. Dickerman	30 January 1952	R. Roy Johnson	28 May 1969
Joe T. Marshall	13 July 1952	Max C. Thompson	25 December 1969
Robert M. Mengel	4 November 1953	Richard C. Crossin	29 December 1969
Jane S. Mengel	4 November 1953	Stephen W. Eaton	26 February 1970
Dwain W. Warner	3 March 1954	Amadeo M. Rea	23 December 1970
Kenneth C. Parkes	20 April 1954	Jon C. Barlow	12 May 1971
J. Dan Webster	3 September 1955	Mario A. Ramos	1 May 1972
Mont A. Cazier	14 December 1955	Ross D. James	29 April 1973
Abe S. Margolin	26 December 1955	Alejandro Phillips F. * ³	27 April 1973
J. R. Werner	20 April 1956	Robert Phillips	20 May 1974
J.M.S. Simpson	20 April 1956	Charles A. Ely	15 January 1975
J. William Hardy	10 May 1956	Edward Phillips	4 June 1975
Bernardo Villa R.	4 August 1956	Bryan Phillips	14 November 1975
William George	30 September 1956	Aldegundo Garza de León	7 December 1975
James T. Bialac	30 September 1956	Armando Contreras B.	24 May 1976
William J. Schaldach	28 July 1958	Andrés M. Sada	8 May 1983
Louis J. Petite	4 April 1960	John S. Weske	28 November 1985

*¹ now Juana Farfan Bautistade Phillips

*² brother-in-law

*³ stepson

D. Jaeger, an Arizona friend who had moved to Tepic. Several factors, other than the potential for very exciting research, were also involved. Allan had a pittance of an income from family money; to many of us, he was "independently poor,"—but he lived "modestly" (and that is being generous), spending every cent beyond that for his ornithological research; his income would go farther in Mexico. The University of Arizona was then in an expansive phase, and it was obvious that it was a matter of time before they would demand the block of 133 Olive Road. Each spring when the olive trees lining the street bloomed, Allan had to leave Tucson for other parts due to his allergies. And finally, but perhaps this was a rationalization, he felt that his work in Arizona was largely done.

Dwain W. Warner (another Cornellian colleague) stopped by Tucson with

his family in March 1954, enroute to a sabbatical in Mexico City, and invited Allan to visit them there. He did, spending 11 May to 3 July with Dwain in parts of central and western Mexico he had not seen. Dwain recounts a trip with Allan flying in a light plane along the then inaccessible parts of the coast of Nayarit. Allan had his notebook open, and with one hand was recording ecological notes dictated by Dwain while holding an air sickness bag in the other. He just could not look down!

Perhaps most importantly, he met Dr. Bernardo Villa R. and they developed a deep respect and friendship that was to last a lifetime. Bernardo was the mammalogist at the Instituto de Biología in Mexico City, and Allan had an invitation to make that institution his academic home. So when push came to shove with the University of Arizona, the decision was made. Between his 1954 visit and the 1957 move, the Instituto had moved from the Casa Cristal in Chapultepec Park to a new building on the edge of the Universidad Autónoma de México campus on the raw lava flow of the Pedregal. There was plenty of space for his collection, which even then contained more birds from Mexico than did the collection of the Instituto.

Allan bought a house in Colonia de los Águilas, then at the western fringe of Mexico City. It had two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, an eat-in living room, kitchen and garage downstairs, and a standard small maid's room with primitive facilities in the corner of the back yard. The people from whom he bought the house recommended as a caretaker a person who had recently had a baby, and with one slightly older child needed a place to stay—and who was a good person. The “baby” turned out to be twin girls, and the mother, Juana Farfán Bautista, an incredibly wonderful woman, entered Allan's life. Softspoken Juanita was a pragmatist, a manager, a make-doer; just the person he needed to run the domestic side of his life, and it was not many years later that her name started to appear in his catalog! They were married and Juanita became J. F. B. de Phillips; they had three sons, and Allan adopted Juanita's children.

Robert was born 12 November 1961, Eddie on 19 August 1963, and Bryan 28 October 1969. Allan maintained for years a skeletal diary, notes on the weather, very terse statements of what he did that day, and mostly between-trip bird observations. On the 13th of November the entry reads “...to see Juana and *boy* [*italics mine*] with Epi...” On Eddie's birth date the entry is “... to hospital but Juana asleep (*boy* [*again mine*] born 18:00±) so on to Instituto...” Eddie's name was not mentioned until the 9th of September! It seemed incredible to those who knew Allan well, but he took parenting seriously—no one would have predicted that. Because of the boy's interest in soccer (Alejandro, Juanita's second son, is now a world-class referee), Allan had a favorite soccer club that he followed in the newspaper and on television! Hers or his, they were all theirs, and they minded their P's and Q's—sometimes feeling that Allan was a bit hard. But when we were all together at the end, they were unified in their tremendous love and respect for “Popi,” as well as in their support for their mother!

The political and intellectual atmosphere at the Instituto de Biología waxed and waned during the period 1957 - 1974 when Allan was there, largely depending on the caliber of the director, a direct political appointee. The deterioration of the situation at the Instituto, combined with the worsening of the atmospheric pollution in the Valley of Mexico—and Allan's increasing sensitivity to cold—drove him to

the decision to move to warmer San Nicolas de los Garza near Monterrey. He became associated with the Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon in 1973 where he met regional ornithologist Armando Contreras-Balderas. He also taught briefly at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo in Morelia (1979 and 1988) and maintained contacts with colleagues and students throughout Mexico.

Very important in the last two decades of Allan's life were his friendships with Andrés M. Sada, wealthy businessman interested in birds and conservation, and with Aldegundo Garza de León, who had a large collection of mounted birds and who was the founding father of the Museo de los Aves in Saltillo. Allan served on the governing board of the museum, and they all shared many a regional collecting trips. From his library, Allan gave the museum several dozen standard regional references, as well as the three major systematic series, that had been his daily references. He also gave the museum six collection cases and a number of bird specimens.

There are few (perhaps no) collections in North America that do not contain specimens annotated in his handwriting. He was a Research Associate of the Denver Museum of Natural History, the Delaware Museum of Natural History, and the (then) Canadian National Museum of Natural Science. At Denver he went over the entire collection, curating it specimen by specimen. He had spent the summer of 1935 at the Smithsonian reviewing records from Arizona, and he returned there to spend 1 August to 30 November 1987 working on material for "Known Birds, Part II."

Because of World War II, Allan worried about the large east coast museums' vulnerability to attack. Also conscious of the destruction of invaluable ornithological collections in Europe, and having an extremely low opinion of politicians of any ilk, he sought other depositories for portions of his collection. The Delaware Museum of Natural History has well over 12,000 specimens from Allan's collection. That collection is not fully computerized, and the number of birds taken by the several collectors who worked for Allan can not be determined at present. Delaware has by far the largest number of Allan's type specimens (see pp. 211-235). In addition, about 6500 specimens were deposited in the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa, although very few type specimens are included in that number.

John Hubbard has done a fine job of summarizing Allan's contributions to ornithology. I will conclude this with a slightly paraphrased quote from a Cornell colleague of his: "Allan, you were a much needed gadfly; ornithology was improved by your barrages. Those of us who had the privilege of being in the field with you carried away new standards of skill and zeal." The same can be said by anyone who worked with or near Allan. We would be lesser ornithologists—and people—without his influence.