

IN MEMORIAM
JOHN NICHOLS AND HAROLD B. WOOD
By Rev. Garrett Detwiler

Today we feel a need to pause during the transaction of the business of our Annual Meeting so that some consideration may be given to the outstanding contributions to science made by two of EBBA's members who passed away since our last Annual Meeting.

It is entirely fitting and proper that we do this for, in the passing of Mr. John Nichols and Dr. Harold B. Wood, two eminent men were lost to the sciences in general and to bird-banding in particular. Here, indeed, were two men who, in their never-ending search for more knowledge about the intriguing fields of science all about them, did much to raise bird-banding out of the category of a hobby and give to it a dignity all its own among the sciences.

Strangely enough, these two men came to bird-banding from two widely separated fields of endeavor. Mr. Nichols, a Harvard graduate, was trained in ichthyology and herpetology, being interested, therefore, in cold-blooded vertebrates; while Dr. Wood had dedicated his life to the practice of medicine and applied himself to the study and care of warm-blooded vertebrates of the human variety. Yet both of these men met and were interested in a common avocation which was considerably different from the vocation that they had chosen as their life's work.

It would be futile to attempt to reckon the full contribution of any life to any cause that it might have espoused and it would be doubly futile, if not entirely impossible, to estimate the contribution of two such men as we are considering today. Here time has a way of appraising such lives and through its strange alchemy, it evaluates them for what they are really worth.

Nevertheless, when one considers the lives of dedicated individuals, it is not surprising to find much to which one can point in the way of accomplishments. This was never more true than it was in the case of Mr. Nichols and Dr. Wood.

As charter members of EBBA, we are indebted to these men for their foresight in forming an organization that has made no small contribution to ornithology and conservation.

John Nichols distinguished himself as Curator of Modern Fish at the Museum of Natural History in New York City in which position he served, off and on, for a period of 50 years. However, he was equally reknowned for his interest in, and study of, birds as a hobby with particular study being made of shorebirds. He was a prolific writer and, aside from being the founder of the magazine "COPEIA", which deals with ichthyology and herpetology, he contributed many articles to "THE AUK", "BIRD BANDING"

and "EBBA NEWS". Inasmuch as he travelled extensively, he was privileged to continue his studies of bird-life in many places throughout the world.

Dr. Wood, on the other hand, in the midst of busy public health work, found relaxation and sheer enjoyment in bird-banding and in the study of birds that one might observe from the office window. These studies he shared with others by writing many formal papers for "THE AUK", the "WILSON BULLETIN", "BIRD BANDING", "EBBA NEWS", and other publications. Dr. Wood also wrote a "HISTORY OF BIRD BANDING".

His interests expressed themselves in studies made of the homing instincts of Cowbirds, colony banding of Barn Swallows, Bank Swallows, and Black-crowned Night Herons. He also devoted considerable time to the study of growth bars of feathers. With Dr. Wood, banding was not an end in itself but only a means to an end, for he was always justifying his studies by saying, "I wanted to find out if... and what... and how... and why and why and why..." He was a bander with a purpose.

If we learn anything from lives similar to the lives of these two past Presidents of EBBA, it is that "he who in the love of nature holds communion with her visible forms, she speaks a various language".

One also finds that, for a preacher, it is difficult to give any consideration to such lives without indulging in a bit of moralizing, for here were two men of humble spirit who found so much enjoyment in their simple studies of the wonders of nature all about them. This was reflected in their relations to their fellow men and it made them a joy to know and to number among one's friends.

Truly it will be difficult to realize that they will not walk among us again, but it is not difficult to believe that our lives are the richer for having known them more or less intimately.

So, of them, we can say, even as James Whitcomb Riley said of one very close to him,

"I cannot say, and I will not say
That he is dead. He is just away.
With a cheery smile, and a wave of the hand,
He has wandered into an unknown land,
And left us dreaming how very fair
It needs must be since he lingers there.
And you -- O you, who the wildest yearn
For the old-time step and the glad return --
Think of him faring on, as dear
In the love of there as the love of here;
Think of him still as the same, I say;
He is not dead -- he is just away."
