



SETH H. LOW

## SETH HASKELL LOW (1911-1962)

Seth H. Low was born in Quincy, Massachusetts on May 31, 1911, the descendant of a long line of Lows who founded a shipping firm which became famous in the days of the clipper ships. He graduated from Milton Academy and Harvard University and was interested in birds from the days of his boyhood.

His earliest banding days were spent at the Austin Ornithological Research Station on Cape Cod where he worked with Dr. Oliver Austin, Jr. and Dr. Maurice Broun during the summers of his years at Harvard.

After he graduated he continued working at the Austin Station for some time and then took an examination for a job as Manager of Wildlife Refuges for the Federal Government. He had become interested in living in the West when, as a boy, he spent his summers at a ranch in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. His first assignment in February 1936 was the Arrowwood Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota. There, he met and married Ann Riebe. Part of the Arrowwood Refuge had previously been a part of Ann's father's ranch since the early territorial days before North Dakota became a state.

Later he managed the Des Lacs Refuge and the Lostwood Refuge near Kenmare where he met and interested the Gammells in birds. Mrs. Gammell tells me that she "didn't know a pigeon from a widgeon until Seth Low came along". Seth left people inspired with an interest in birds and banding wherever he went during all of his life.

In March of 1941 Seth Low was transferred to Salt Plains Refuge at Cherokee, Oklahoma, a brand new refuge he was to develop. He was there for almost seven years, except while on military furlough, and it was there that his children, Seth Thomson and Margaret Lucille, were born. During his service with the Army he was with the 120th Evacuation Hospital in Europe which was the unit that went into Buchenwald and cleaned it up.

In January of 1948 he moved with his family to Maryland, bought the farm at Unity, and was in charge of the Federal Bird Banding Office until August 1954, when he began doing research on waterfowl records, an undertaking which occupied him until his retirement in the spring of 1961. In 1957, while supervising a banding program in the West, he discovered the Flathead Valley in Montana and had bought a ranch in Mission Canyon, intending to live there upon his retirement.

Throughout the time he lived in Maryland, Seth was very active in both the Maryland Ornithological Society and the Eastern Bird Banding Association, and at the time of his death he was President of the Maryland Ornithological Society and of its Baltimore Chapter, and a councillor of the Eastern Bird Banding Association serving as past president. He was also a member of the Board of Governors of both the Montgomery

County (Maryland) Citizens Planning Association and the Rock Creek Watershed Association. He held an annual "open house" at his farm in Unity, which was attended by scores of M.O.S. members as well as many banders from out of state.

No one knows how many birds Seth may have handled while working with and teaching others, but Banding Office records show that, during his lifetime he banded over 62,800 birds of 242 species. Of these, 18,539 were banded at the Des Lacs Refuge and 1842 at Salt Plains. Most of the remainder were banded at his home in Unity or at Cape May, New Jersey, where he operated an Operation Recovery station each year.

Seth Low was a patient teacher and was always interested in helping new banders and others who were interested in bird study or conservation. He also was a fighter - standing up for what he believed to be right and proper at all times, even sometimes at great odds and at disadvantage to himself. It may have been this fact that so endeared him to the many banders who came under his influence. He was erudite and conscientious in his work - and contributed many fine papers and articles to various ornithological publications. Of these, one of the best known is "Banding with Mist Nets" published originally in Bird Banding (Vol. 28, No. 3) and subsequently published in England as a reprint which has now become a classic and a collector's item.

While in charge of the Banding Office, Seth streamlined many procedures and was able thereby to speed up the processing of recoveries. The Banding Catalog, a central index to band numbers, originated by Seth, is one of his principal contributions to this work.

All who knew him have mourned that the malignant tumor that took him so swiftly prevented his return to and enjoyment of his Mission Canyon home. However, we also remember the words of William Wordsworth,

"The good die first,  
And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust  
Burn to the socket."

Lord Byron said much the same thing in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,

"Heaven gives its favourites - early death."

Seth H. Low died on March 30, 1962, and bird banding lost that day one of its best known and most beloved members.

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