

Arthur Augustus Allen
(1885-1964)

In 1923, Eastern Bird Banding Association was formed, following a meeting held in New York City, and the first President of the new organization was Arthur A. Allen, then Assistant Professor of Ornithology at Cornell University. He was EBBA's President from 1923-1925. The sudden death of Arthur Allen, on January 17, 1964, recalls to our minds how very much is owed to this great ornithologist by bird banders as well as by those in most other branches of ornithology.

An active bander himself for many years, Dr. Allen encouraged the use of bands by many of his students as an aid to carrying on their investigations. In recent years he had discontinued banding, but he maintained an interest in the work being carried on by others, always wanted the latest news from my own station when I arrived at the office each day, and read with interest his issues of EBBA News.

His well-known text, The Book of Bird Life, contained a section on banding in the first edition, published in 1930, and this was brought up to date and expanded in the revised 1961 edition. The vivid description of his waterfowl banding activities and the thrills he experienced make good reading for any birder. At one time Cayuga Lake abounded in diving ducks each winter, and Dr. Allen's work with these birds added much to the knowledge of our waterfowl, their populations and their movements. In the '20's and '30's, when he was doing most of this work, he usually walked from his home to the lake, twice daily, to set and tend his traps, no matter how cold nor how bitter the wind off the lake.

His story of the banded Tree Sparrows that returned to his home four successive winters was one of the first published accounts of birds returning to the same winter location, year after year.

Not widely known is the fact that he was the first to band bats. An article, describing this project and contributing to the knowledge of migration and homing in bats, appeared in the May, 1921, issue of the Journal of Mammalogy.

Under Dr. Allen, W. K. Butts was one of the first to use colored bands in connection with his studies of Chickadees, Nuthatches and several other species in the mid-'20's.

Some other noteworthy Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology research projects which have involved banding and marking, under Dr. Allen's direction, have included the studies of Black Ducks by Dirck Benson, Chimney Swifts by Pauline James, Arctic Terns by Oscar Hawksley, Starlings by Brina Kessel, Bobolinks by Elizabeth Kingsbury and Tree Sparrows by A. Marguerite Heydweiler. Undoubtedly more ornithological

information came out of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology, under Arthur Allen's teaching and direction, than from any other single source, and banding aided in many of the studies.

There has been and there will be much written about "Doc" Allen, from all points of view. The chronological facts of his life have been detailed elsewhere. Suffice it to say here that he was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1885 and retired from active teaching at Cornell, as Professor of Ornithology, in 1953. When the Laboratory of Ornithology acquired formal status as a University Department the next year, and moved into the Headquarters building at Sapsucker Woods in 1956, he was first its Co-Director and then Honorary Director. His 'retirement' was, if possible, filled with more activity than his actual teaching years. With his death has come the end of an era. Today's ornithologist is a specialist. Gone is the day when one could know practically everything in the field, and with the death of this great man has gone some information, possessed by him but not published. However, much of his knowledge will live on, in the teachings of his students and his friends. One could not talk to Doc for five minutes without learning something. Known for his photography perhaps best of all, he also will be remembered for the information he accumulated during his lifetime and passed on, in the classroom and in informal conversations. To arrange to get the pictures he did, required a knowledge of the birds' habits and behavior. To sit in a blind, eight and ten hours a day, week in and week out, resulted in an intimate acquaintance with the bird such as few have ever had. At the Laboratory of Ornithology, we are asked every conceivable type of question. Almost never has there been a question Doc could not answer. Sometimes he refreshed his memory from some reference, to which he could turn instantly, but usually the answer was in his mind, perhaps learned from his reading, but more often from actual observation and experience.

His ornithological career had many facets. He was thought of, in recent years, as concerned chiefly with living birds, and it is often overlooked that the large and famous Cornell collection of bird skins was built up under his direction, and with his active help in past years. Many skins bear his labels. Plumages of many juvenal waterfowl were first described by Dr. Allen, from birds he raised. His 'firsts' have been listed so many times that it hardly seems necessary to repeat them: rearing of Ruffed Grouse in captivity, finding the nest, eggs and young of the Bristle-thighed Curlew, recording the songs of wild birds, photographing many species for the first time in color. These are just a few of the ways in which he pioneered and are things for which he will be remembered.

Acknowledged as one of the greatest scientists of his or any generation, in the true sense of the word, he will also be remembered by countless thousands for his kindness, his gentleness, his generosity, his inspiration to all who talked with him. In his lectures, all over

the country, he reached the young and old -- and appealed to all. By his writings he taught the important and oft-neglected lesson that it is not necessary to use technical terms and complicated sentences to put across a point or to indicate one's knowledge of the subject. In American Bird Biographies, as in his Book of Bird Life, scientific facts are presented in a way that a child can understand, an intelligent adult can appreciate. Teachers who took his summer school course returned to classes with eyes opened to a new world, to which they, in turn, introduced their own students. He wanted everyone to learn to use ears and eyes, out-of-doors, and he made it all so appealing that everyone responded. He was never too busy to stop his work, to answer with a smile the most foolish question, or to respond with apparent pleasure and interest to a description of some trivial experience related to him by someone who had just met him. He drove himself unmercifully, to finish a job -- but he never drove others. In his university position, he never summoned anyone to him -- he went to them, and this was typical of his consideration for others.

Sapsucker Woods, and the Laboratory of Ornithology, is a fitting memorial to him. Those of us who worked with him and loved him were made happy, daily, by seeing his happiness over the view from his office window in his years of so-called retirement. He loved life and all it had to offer. Familiar sight at his desk, just off the observatory, with pencil, or camera or binoculars in hand, his retirement was as rich in work and productivity as one could wish. His death came while he was involved in half a dozen projects, and with many more in the planning stage.

The Laboratory is not the same without him, but it is filled with his spirit, and, with the help of all who believe in the principles and ideas for which he lived and worked, its program will go on.

An Arthur A. Allen Memorial Fund has been set up in Cornell University to receive contributions from those who wish to honor the memory of this great ornithologist and man. It is hoped that, in this way, the future of the Laboratory of Ornithology, carrying on the work to which he had dedicated his life, may be assured. Checks may be sent to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, marked for the Arthur A. Allen Memorial Fund.

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