

## ELISE M. DICKERSON (1910-1969)

Bird banding in America lost one of its foremost proponents, and the Eastern Bird Banding Association lost one of its foremost members, and one who had a great deal to do with its character and growth, when Elise M. Dickerson passed away suddenly on June 16, 1969.

Those of us who had the privilege of being her friends scarcely need read further; we know already the irreparable loss we have sustained.

Elise was born on April 19, 1910 in Durham, North Carolina, and was brought up there. The delight of speaking with her was enhanced by the trace of southern accent she never lost. She finished her education at Greensboro College and then at the Coombs Conservatory of Music in Philadelphia. Subsequently she was leader of mezzo sopranos in the Duke University Choir.

She and her husband Stanley Dickerson settled in South River, New Jersey. In 1949 they moved to Spotswood, N.J., in a relatively rural area near New Brunswick, where her and her husband's interest in birds developed. In 1962 they moved to their present home near Somerville.

Stanley Dickerson tells me that they became interested in birds gradually, being exposed to the abundance of birds in Spotswood, but that the particular catalytic occasion was the beautiful sight of a number of American and Snowy Egrets perched in trees at the side of the lake adjoining their home. Stanley bought Elise a bird book, she bought him a pair of binoculars...and they were incurably infected with birds.

Bird banding came soon afterwards; by the time of the EBBA meeting in 1955 at Hawk Mountain, Elise and Stanley were EBBA members and pioneers in the use of mist nets.

It was at that EBBA meeting that the idea of Operation Recovery was first put forth, by James Baird if I remember correctly. Elise Dickerson took up the cudgel and was one of the first to lead an Operation Recovery station - Island Beach, which has been the first and foremost O.R. station, first under Elise's direction and then, since 1965, under Mabel Warburton who retired as director after the 1968 season.

Notwithstanding her claims that she "couldn't tell one bird from 'tother" Elise ran IBOR with a firm but ever friendly hand, and developed it into the enormous operation that it is now. She was willing to learn from visiting experts but always exhibiting her meticulous care and her ability to manage quantities of sometimes temperamental banders.

After retiring from directing Operation Recovery at Island Beach, to resume similar activity at the Dickersons' second home on Block Island, Elise maintained similar high standards and continued to add to ornitho-



Elise Dickerson...shown banding, and at EBBA meetings...doing some of the things she enjoyed best. (Photos from EBBA files, by various contributors.)



logical knowledge, at the same time developing able banders on Block Island who are now in a position to continue her work there.

And yet, her greatest contribution may not have been the constant activity she maintained in banding in the field, great though it was; but her indefatigable performance as Treasurer of the Eastern Bird Banding Association.

She was elected Treasurer at the annual meeting in 1956 and held this office to the day of her death. But to consider her merely as Treasurer is to limit the understanding of her participation in the activity and growth of the Association. She did not only keep books; through her unceasing energy and endless correspondence she was not only Treasurer but general overseer of operations and public relations agent, and as such had a very large part in the growth of EBBA from a relatively static organization of 200-odd members in 1956 to a growing and vital association of 700-plus members in 1969.

To many of you who read this, Elise Dickerson was the personification of EBBA. She was the person with whom all new members, and many old ones, had personal contact. She made new members feel welcome, as if to a small intimate club, and yet kept up voluminous correspondence with other organizations in this country and abroad, making the Eastern Bird Banding Association well known far beyond its geographical boundaries.

At the same time she showed special concern for each inquiry whether from a new bander or one from a foreign land; she welcomed any person with new ideas, old ones, problems or complaints; her hospitality was boundless to all who came to exercise the mutual interest in ornithology. She was a strange mixture of efficiency and kindness.

All of these accomplishments are pale by comparison to her accomplishments as a person; she and her husband raised a fine family of three sons and a daughter, and she left countless friends who do not know how to accept the idea that she is gone.

Our best consolation can be found in the words of the minister who expressed it so well at her funeral in the village of Pluckemin, New Jersey...

"Thank you, God, for the life of Elise Dickerson, born a child of thy creation, sustained as a daughter of thy kingdom, matured as an heir of thy household.

"We are grateful for thy gifts to her that allowed strength of will and zest for life. For ears tuned to the majesty of music, for a voice that sounded the beauty of the human song; for joy in the riches of creation and pleasure in the wonders of

nature, for eyes trained for the sight of birds, and for a mind and hands skilled in the science of their life, we give thee thanks.

"For her continued faithful relationship as a daughter, for the gifts of life she gave to her family as a wife and mother, for the treasure she developed in friendship, we praise thee..."

EBBA - and the lives of her family and of her friends - will never be the same.

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