

example, the Robin and the Song Sparrow parallel each other pretty well from 1936 to 1942, but in 1922 they are far apart and in 1926 close together. A certain amount of the irregularity may be due to faulty observation. One cannot always be in the field at just the right time and place to hear the first singing of a particular species. One may conclude, however, that weather conditions from year to year determine the variations in the times that birds begin to sing, and that, in general, the effect is the same on different species that begin their singing at about the same time.

REFERENCES CITED

BICKNELL, EUGENE P.

1884-1885. A study of the singing of our birds. *Auk*, 1: 60-71, 126-140, 209-218, 322-332; 2: 144-154, 249-262.

DWIGHT, JONATHAN, JR.

1900. The sequence of plumages and moults of the passerine birds of New York. *Annals N. Y. Acad. Sci.*, 13: 73-360.

SAUNDERS, ARTHUR A.

1929. Bird song. New York State Museum, Handbook 7: 1-202.

1935. A guide to bird songs: I-XVIII, 1-285. (New York.)

WEAVER, RICHARD LEE

1940. The Purple Finch invasion of northeastern United States and the Maritime Provinces in 1939. *Bird Banding*, 11: 79-105.*Fairfield**Connecticut*

GEORGE WILLETT (1879-1945)

BY HARRY HARRIS

Plate 5

ON the point of achieving the most distinguished honor within the power of organized American ornithology to bestow, George Willett, First Vice-President of the Union, Editor of the 'Ten-year Index to The Auk,' and Fellow since 1939, was taken by death on August 2, 1945, in his sixty-seventh year.

To those who knew intimately this wise and genial character it seemed inevitable that his superior, though utterly unconscious, talent for leadership combined with a sure instinct for avoiding wrong judgments should have marked him for advancement in his chosen science. His genius for friendship, his warm human sympathies free from all prejudice, his searching and judicious appraisements of men and motives, and his constant and unequivocal sincerity were among the personal qualities that led his colleagues in the Cooper Ornithological Club to view him in the light of a paternal and al-

ways dependable guide. His generosity in all things and his shrewd understanding of human nature contributed to his success as a teacher. He was saved from any trace of egotism by a penetrating sense of humor. A quiet dignity never deserted him.

He was born in Hawkesbury, Ontario, Canada, May 28, 1879, the first of three sons of George Willett, an ordained minister of the Congregational Church, and Hannah Theodosia (Hill) Willett. He received early schooling in Cowansville, Quebec, whither the family had moved in his infancy, and later for a short time in Eaton Corner, Ontario. When his father's ministerial duties called him to Redlands, California, George, in his tenth year, was taken to live and to continue his primary schooling in that favored spot. Bringing from the rural Canada of his boyhood an already deeply implanted love for wild nature, especially for bird life, he was to find in the new environment conditions ideal for his steady growth in ornithology. The early beginning of his life-long devotion to the science was influenced and given direction by two potent factors peculiar to that period, namely, 'Nests and Eggs of North American Birds' (fourth edition, 1889) by Oliver Davie, and 'The Oologist,' a monthly trade journal published by Frank H. Lattin.

Further moves by the family took George to San Luis Obispo where he entered high school and where he found sea birds and Condors accessible, and to Whittier where he enrolled in Whittier College. A student of his huge proportions and initiative could not, of course, fail to make the football team, nor could an oölogist of his push and determination fail to gather in several sets of the Raven eggs then to be found in the near-by hills. By the mid-nineties he was gleaning a rich harvest of oölogical treasure, and at least one life interest was firmly established.

Shortly before the war with Spain, George had left home to seek his fortune in the orange groves of San Bernardino County where he had entered the California National Guard. Failing to see service with this unit, he enlisted in the United States Infantry and was on active duty in the Philippines during the Aguinaldo campaign. It is not surprising that he utilized the opportunity here to do some collecting.

At the termination of his military service he worked for a few months on the police force in Manila after which he returned to California. The year following his return he served for a time as recorder in the United States Geological Survey.

In 1904 he began eight years of police duty as a member of the



G. W. Willett

Los Angeles force. He brought to this employment many qualifications that soon won him recognition and promotion, as he could be relied on in any strenuous emergency to act with speed, strength, cool judgment and, if necessary, pugilistic finesse. For years he presided over Chinatown at a time when the tongs were often in open conflict. The crafty denizens of this district had great respect and admiration for Sergeant "Willie" and learned they could rely on his friendship and fair treatment as long as they remained on his side of the law. The dispatch with which he closed up gambling in this area, and the part he played in taking a box of set dynamite from the hands of a murderous fanatic at police headquarters are matters of record. The latter incident, recently recalled in the Los Angeles press, won him an official citation for bravery. In early 1905 he married Miss Anna Wells and a year later he was presented with George, Junior.

His entry into police work, with the added responsibility of a family to support, could well have marked the end of his ornithological ambition, but it marked, instead, the period of his real awakening in the science. He joined the Cooper Club and found himself surrounded by kindred spirits of high caliber, and began at once to carve out a unique niche for himself in the bird world. His spare time was spent in the field, usually with some Club enthusiast, in the accumulation of notes and specimens, and he was learning his way around in the literature. The Davie era was over; the epoch of Coues's 'Key' and Ridgway's 'Manual' had dawned with great promise. As time progressed, Willett and his friends ranged farther afield until by 1910 a considerable portion of southwestern California west of the mountains, including the Channel Islands, had been covered. Enough new material was thus assembled to warrant its summary in a separate publication, and George assumed the responsibility of its compilation. This digest, 'Birds of the Pacific Slope of Southern California,' published by the Cooper Club in 1912 as No. 7 in its Pacific Coast Avifauna series, proclaimed the arrival of a new major figure on the ornithological horizon and won for its author the reputation of possessing sound judgment, discretion and perspicuity.

The time had now arrived when the pull of ornithology could no longer be resisted and the break with law-enforcement routine was at hand. After first qualifying as a Federal Civil Servant and receiving his appointment in the Bureau of Biological Survey, the big police officer bade farewell to his Oriental charges and resigned from the force four months after the appearance of the paper mentioned.

George, now thirty-three years old and at the peak of his immense physical powers, was destined to become well acquainted with the rich Alaskan field. His first assignment was to the Sitka region. He returned from there to join a winter survey in which Alfred M. Bailey, now Director of the Colorado Museum of Natural History, took part. Mr. Bailey writes: "After spending a few days in Honolulu, during which time we destroyed eleven wagonloads of wings and feathers taken by Japanese poachers on Laysan, we sailed for that famous island where we arrived on December 22. We remained here three months collecting for the Survey and making a strenuous effort to exterminate the rabbits which were threatening vegetation.

"It was here that George's interest in shells was first aroused, and it was here also that he collected the first of the Hawaiian warm-water seals. Later we visited Pearl and Hermes Reef where we found the breeding colony. About this time he got a bad case of arsenical poisoning which gave him a difficult time, and to add to his misery he mutilated one hand in an encounter with a shark.

"We sailed from Laysan on March 10, and after considerable collecting on other islands were off Necker on the 19th where George indulged in one of his prodigious feats of strength and endurance. Necker is extremely precipitous, and the waves were rolling thirty feet up on the cliffs. It was impossible to get a boat close enough to land, so Willett took off all his clothes except his shoes and his helmet and allowed the waves to shove him up on the cliffs. He missed his hand-hold three times and dropped in the waves, but finally made it. When he came off he had the only egg so far taken of the Necker Island Tern, safely rolled up in a handkerchief and balanced rather precariously under his helmet."

The next few years Willett devoted to routine Government business in connection with bird refuges and bird protection, returning from Alaskan assignments each winter to resume inspection and patrol duties at various points in the west. This class of work proved to be a virtual continuation of his duties as a municipal peace officer with the compensating advantage that it took him into the wilds where bird life was concentrated, and where ample and continuous opportunity was offered for a steady flow of original contributions to the periodical literature.

Field work, hunting and trapping, recording data accumulated as a result of keen and intelligent observation, and above all the collecting of specimens for his own use constituted the breath of life for this indomitable spirit. It was inevitable that he should run

afoul of the Survey rule providing that no private collecting by the personnel is permitted at any time and that all material taken is Government property. To George this was unjust and intolerable, and he could not honestly bring himself to view it otherwise. He was unhappy, disappointed and frustrated under what he considered a dictatorial and unwarranted restriction.

The end of World War I found him in training for an officer's commission. On his release from this service he found remunerative employment as Federal Game Warden of the Los Angeles area, and thus again had occasion to recall that "a policeman's lot is not a happy one." After enduring the confinement a few months he resigned.

George Willett's life provides an outstanding example of what real enthusiasm for bird study can do to a determined man. He decided on the desperate measure of returning to his beloved Alaska as a free lance. The alluring certainty that he would be the master of his own time for study and collecting in a teeming environment beguiled him into the belief that it would not be impossible to support his family by salmon fishing and fur trapping. There would, at least, be no winter food shortage with an assured supply of frozen venison and other wild meat hanging in the wood shed, and he was soundly advised of other problems that faced him.

After about two years' trial of complete independence, during which time he waged a more or less successful battle with wild nature in various mainland and off-shore regions, the need for more dependable returns impelled him for the last time to take up his old successful specialty of law-enforcement. In 1921 he was accepted as a Deputy U. S. Marshal, first in Craig and later in Ketchikan, Alaska, and for the next four years he was busy with official routine to the near exclusion of his chief interests.

Being once more a single man, George found his ideal mate in Ora Alta Bellah, of Ketchikan, in 1925, the last year he was to spend in government work. After a trial at fox farming and a trip to the Aleutians in the interest of the Alaska Game Commission, the last move to Los Angeles was made at the end of 1926.

Two months after his arrival he was called to the staff of the Los Angeles Museum and began, in his late forties, the most productive period of his career. He brought to the Museum, as Ornithologist and Mammalogist, ripe experience and mature scholarship which united with his native personal charm and indefatigable industry to equip him for outstanding success as a museum official and teacher.

That George Willett was endowed to command universal respect, no less than to attract loyal friendships, is testified by several associates. Dr. Louis B. Bishop, part of whose large collection of birds had for years been stored in the Los Angeles Museum under Willett's care, recently said: "Willett was one of the finest men I ever met. He was a careful and conscientious ornithologist and conchologist, and a fine and able man. It was as a man I valued his friendship most."

The Director of Los Angeles Museum at the time of George's death, Mr. Roland McKinney, said: "The Museum has lost one of its most valuable staff members in the passing of George Willett. He was not only nationally recognized and respected as a scientist, but he was also admired for the warm human qualities he possessed, which endeared him to all who knew him. The memory of such a man will always serve as an inspiration to those he has left behind to carry on the significant work to which George Willett was devoted."

Dr. John Adams Comstock, Associate Director of the Museum in charge of Science, who was George's immediate supervisor, had this to say: "One phase of George Willett's character which particularly impressed me was emphasized by the respect and affectionate regard in which he was held by the young people who studied under his guidance. For a considerable number of months prior to his death the Science section of the Los Angeles Museum was conducting classes in museum techniques for high school students, and a large number of these young people came under his influence. It was particularly noticeable with his students that a profound impression was made on them, not alone as a result of the quality of his instruction, but even more as a reflection of his integrity, keen sense of humor, and deep understanding of human nature. That sort of inspiration will carry on in future generations as an ever widening circle of influence. It is the sort of immortality that I believe scientific men choose to contemplate."

Dr. Alden Miller early came under George's influence. He says: "Some vivid memories will ever attach to the name of George Willett. To me, as a youngster visiting at Cooper Club meetings in the Los Angeles Museum, he seemed to typify the Club and all its interests in birds. Just what it was that made such a forceful impression I am not sure. Perhaps it was the deep voice which I admired or the tales of adventure along the rugged Alaskan coast. But also I suspect it was the contagion of the group drawn to him by his sincerity, good humor, and lack of any touch of that self-importance which so easily becomes affixed to men of poise and striking stature.

"George Willett thought a lot, somewhere beneath the surface; and the counsel that stemmed from this was given carefully and in conservative vein on matters scientific and personal. He could always be counted on for editorial advice or for some chore of indexing or for looking up specimens and references. Ever patient and tactful, he accomplished much by these means; and the method never dulled but only well implemented his zeal for the things he believed in. Support for conservation, defense of the scientific collector, and a sane approach to nomenclatural changes were special objectives of his later years."

Mr. W. Lee Chambers, to whom *Pacific Coast Ornithology* is so greatly indebted for his long years of devotion to the handling of its vital fiscal problems, enjoyed a close friendship with George for over forty years. He says: "The possession of so many superior qualities put George Willett in a class by himself. I always deeply respected his strength of character no less than his great physical strength and dauntless courage. His innate honesty in scientific as well as personal matters was so deeply rooted that his outspoken defense of truth and justice as he saw it could always be depended on. This trait may have led, on at least one occasion, to his being misunderstood. George was altogether the right sort of a man."

It was on his arrival in 1927 to accept his last post that the present writer met George, and for a few years saw much of him. It is a grateful memory to have been accepted to friendship with a man so entirely free of any form of duplicity, or so well informed in ornithology and its literature and withal so modest and unassuming. He seemed never to find it expedient to emphasize another's fault, but rather than speak ill he preferred silence. His good nature and quiet humor and his consideration for others were dominant traits. The only excess he allowed himself was the pleasure of work. This writer has long been of the firm belief that George was of the same fiber and quality of character as another well-known man of the west who said, "I never met a man I didn't like."