



Arthur Holmes Howell
1872-1940

IN MEMORIAM: ARTHUR H. HOWELL

VIOLA S. SCHANTZ¹

ARTHUR Holmes Howell, born in Lake Grove, New York, on 3 May 1872, was the son of Elbert Richard and Ann (Judson Holmes) Howell. At the youthful age of 15, he graduated from the Brooklyn High School, in February, 1888, and spent the rest of that year at Lake Grove, Long Island, New York. There, together with his grandfather Richard Oakley Howell, the young Howell took a large part in operating the farms both of his grandfather and his father.

In January, 1889, he moved to New York City and obtained an office position with a small broker on South Street. If he missed the pleasures of farming at this time he was, in any event, remunerated at the impressive level of three dollars a week! A little later, on 18 November 1889, he was hired as a stock clerk, at the greatly improved rate of six dollars a week, by Jennings' Lace Works, New York City; he remained with that firm in various capacities until 1894. Howell was also employed, for a period of five months during the winter of 1894-95, as a business secretary for the Brooklyn Men's Christian Association.

The interest in natural history, and especially in birds, that was to occupy so much of his adult energy became evident soon after he entered high school and, in 1885, became acquainted with Joseph A. Hopkins.

Their principal hobby on Saturdays and holidays in those times was the hunting of birds' nests and collecting eggs. Howell seems to have collected his first set of eggs (of the Great Crested Flycatcher) in June of 1885 and became seriously interested in collecting as a result of opportunities made possible by a summer spent on his grandfather's farm on Long Island. In the spring of 1888 he tried to develop the art of mounting birds, but this was one in which he never became proficient.

On 15 December 1888, he made his first study skin, and the following spring began to form a collection of these less esthetically rewarding but far more useful specimens. About this time he became acquainted with William Dutcher, and on the latter's invitation started to attend the meetings of the Linnaean Society of New York where he met many local naturalists. By 2 March 1892, he had been elected Secretary of the Society, an office he held for two years. During his incumbency he put in a great deal of time arranging and cataloguing the pamphlets in the

¹ Shortly after Arthur H. Howell's death, his colleague and friend Viola Schantz prepared a notice for the *Journal of Mammalogy* (vol. 21, pp. 385-388, November, 1940), of which Mr. Howell had been editor. The present article is a somewhat revised version of Miss Schantz's earlier tribute.

Society's library, an activity which doubtless helped greatly in preparing him for the years ahead.

Howell joined the American Ornithologists' Union in 1889. The annual meeting in that year was held in New York City where he met Harry C. Oberholser. The two became well acquainted later, when in 1894, Mr. Oberholser lived for a period of nine months in Brooklyn, New York. It was then that Mr. Oberholser took a civil service examination for a position in the Department of Agriculture and received his appointment in the old Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy, at Washington, D. C., on 1 February 1895.

In the spring of 1895, Vernon Bailey, veteran biologist of the aforementioned Division, needed a field assistant and Oberholser suggested his Brooklyn friend. Thus the young Howell received a temporary appointment in May, 1895, and was sent into the field to assist Bailey in northwestern Montana. For four months the two men camped together in Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, after which Howell traveled alone in Colorado, Idaho, and Utah, returning home in November of that year via Washington, D. C.

In May, 1896, Howell received a second appointment, of six months, in the Division of Biological Survey, as it had come to be known on 25 April 1896 (later, on 3 March 1905, becoming the Bureau of Biological Survey). At the end of this period he received a permanent appointment, at first as a special assistant, with the agency he was to serve until his death. During the first few years his work consisted of the preparation of scientific study skins and curating the collection of mammals.

As time passed Howell's activities became more varied, and, as is well known, he eventually became one of America's outstanding ornithologists and mammalogists. He was elected a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1930. He remained actively interested in research, despite various administrative responsibilities, from 1896 through the several decades until he became eligible in May, 1940, for voluntary retirement. This, characteristically, he eschewed. His position at this point was that of Senior Biologist, Division of Wildlife Research, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior (this service having superseded the old Biological Survey on 30 June 1940). It was while at his desk in this capacity that he was stricken on July 9, 1940, with a cerebral hemorrhage. He passed away at Emergency Hospital, Washington, on July 10, and funeral services held in Washington's First Congregational Church on July 11 were attended by many federal officials, associates, and friends. Interment took place at Fort Lincoln Cemetery.

Arthur H. Howell served the United States Government continuously

for 44 years, publishing approximately 80 major papers and books on birds and mammals, an output resulting in part from more or less extensive field work in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, and Texas. Among his better known ornithological works were *Birds of Arkansas* (1911), *Birds of Alabama* (1924), and *Florida bird life* (1932), the last an outstanding contribution and a model work of its kind and day. Other important ornithological works were a number of papers devoted to the relationship of birds to the cotton boll weevil, and there was a long series of major contributions to mammalogy, including the descriptions of some 83 species and subspecies and revisions of numerous genera, published in eight numbers of the *North American Fauna* series of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. These revisions include two genera of skunks, the harvest mice, marmots, flying squirrels, pikas, chipmunks, ground squirrels, and Arctic hares.

In common with others of his generation, Howell was a self-made naturalist who achieved international repute, a distinction he bore with grace and modesty. Working beside him for many years, I found him a man of exemplary character, thoughtful, and ever ready to share his scientific knowledge with his colleagues of every rank [The editor, in this connection, well remembers Howell's replies—informative and courteous far beyond the necessary minimum—to his own doubtless naive queries and remarks concerning boyhood observations in Florida].

Howell's greatest enthusiasm may well have been for the work connected with *Florida bird life*. It was in Florida in February, 1918, that he discovered the Cape Sable Sparrow, *Ammospiza mirabilis* (Howell), described the following year (*Thryospiza mirabilis* Howell, *Auk*, 36: 86, January 5, 1919, Cape Sable, Florida) and, with the possible exception of Sutton's Warbler (*Dendroica potomac*), the last valid species to be discovered in North America north of Mexico. Some of Howell's strongest friendships were formed in the course of the Florida work, one of them with the well-known resident naturalist Donald John Nicholson, whose collaboration was invaluable in the work. I have recently corresponded with Mr. Nicholson (March, 1962) concerning their acquaintance and he has provided me with a rich store of reminiscences—too long for inclusion in full—of their days afield, friends, discoveries, and even their arguments. Although Nicholson was approximately 21 years younger than Howell, they got along famously together, he recalls, noting that: "I greatly admired his skill in marksmanship, shooting on the wing small birds with unerring deadliness, rarely missing a shot. Howell was a keen naturalist and alert and fast with a shotgun."

Amiable and cooperative by nature, he could also be fast on occasion with his tongue, as drolly indicated by the following:

One day Howell wanted to go to Florida City on the coast, and he asked me to drive his Ford car. As we drove along a very poor paved road full of holes, going rather fast, an especially deep hole caused such a bump that Howell hit the wooden cross-beam and this caused him to remonstrate. He cautioned me to go slower. This I promised him. But it was not long afterwards that I forgot myself and began to drive fast again, and this time I hit a worse bump throwing Howell with considerable force against the top beam, striking his glasses and giving him a severe bump. This was just more than Howell could stand and he bawled me out unmercifully . . . he did not mince words when something displeased him.

Among other honors and affiliations Howell was, as already stated, a Fellow of the A. O. U., a member of the Baird Ornithological Club, Cooper Ornithological Club, American Society of Mammalogists (editor of the *Journal of Mammalogy*, 1938-40), Biological Society of Washington, a corresponding member of the Linnaean Society of New York, and a member of the Rhode Island Avenue Suburban Citizens' Association of Washington, D. C. He had been interested in choral work and was an organizer of the Biological Survey Group of Friends of the National Symphony Orchestra. A contributor to various religious activities, he was also a member and ardent supporter of the First Congregational Church in Washington, D. C.

He married Grace Bowen Johnson of Washington on 20 June 1900. For many years the Howells resided at 2919 South Dakota Avenue, N.E., in Washington. They had three children, Ruth Alden (Mrs. Stanley Walker), Elizabeth Caroline (deceased 1946), and Elbert Jerome. Mrs. Howell passed away on October 10, 1942. Surviving him also is one granddaughter, Mary Patterson Howell, daughter of Elbert Jerome.

2475 Virginia Avenue, N.W., Washington 37, D. C.