



HERBERT LEE STODDARD, 1889-1968

(Examining chufa tubers, a favorite Wild Turkey food, on his plantation, "Sherwood" at Thomasville, Georgia, about 1957.)

IN MEMORIAM: HERBERT LEE STODDARD

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HERBERT L. STODDARD was not only an outstanding ornithologist, he was also a great naturalist whose interests in his environment were as broad as his horizons. Tied to no particular academic school of discipline, his keen and inquiring mind was free to roam the whole gamut of the interrelationships of all living things, but his special emphasis was on ornithology. His accomplishments in his field and his mode of life stand out as worthy examples to career men who aim to apply their ornithological knowledge to the betterment of our living space in our trying times.

In the case of such a complicated yet simple man, the biographer's problem is to find the key to "just what made him tick." His career is the more remarkable because he had no college degree and his academic training did not go beyond high school. He was self-taught and self-educated so superlatively that he was offered a full professorship by a great university and the directorship of one of our important natural history museums. His most outstanding single contribution was his classic work, "The Bobwhite Quail" (1931), one of the most important and thorough studies in wildlife management ever published. Often called the "Bobwhite Bible," this monumental work is a must for all those concerned with applied ornithology and the ABCs of ecology. For it the A.O.U. awarded him its coveted Brewster Medal in 1935.

His recent (1969) "Memoirs of a naturalist" presents a comprehensive account of his professional life, a bibliography of his 65 published works, and casually mentions many of the honors that came to him. A memorial building is dedicated to him at the Brookwood School, Thomasville, Georgia, and at the Tall Timbers Research Station near Tallahassee, Florida, a laboratory bears his name engraved in stone. He listed the positions he held during his career as follows in "American men of science": assistant taxidermist, Milwaukee Public Museum, 1910-13, associate taxidermist, 1920-24; taxidermist, Field Museum, 1913-20; cooperative agent, Bureau Biological Survey, 1924-30; director, Cooperative Quail Study Association, 1930-43; consultant, upland game and forestry management, 1943-61; and vice-president, Tall Timbers Research Station, 1961-72.

He joined the A.O.U. in 1912, rose up through its membership to become a Fellow in 1936, and served two 3-year terms on the council, starting in 1947 and 1952. He cherished his association with this distinguished group of colleagues, and considered his Fellowship among his highest and most important honors.

Herbert was born in Rockford, Illinois, on February 24, 1889, the second son of Herbert A. Stoddard and Helen Eugenie Wallace Stoddard. His father died soon after Herbert Lee was born, and when he was four his mother remarried and the family moved to unsettled central Florida, where he spent his young boyhood. The family returned to Rockford when he was eleven, and four years later he went to work on a farm in Sauk Prairie, Wisconsin, near his father's family home, and more important, near the late Ed Ochsner's taxidermy shop in Prairie du Sac.

Stoddard learned taxidermy from Ochsner, who was an intimate of the famous Ringling Brothers of circus fame. It was Ochsner's good fortune to obtain any of their animals that died from old age and other causes at their winter quarters nearby at Baraboo. This was very exciting to young Stoddard, who thus was able to handle specimens for which other taxidermists would literally have "given their eye teeth." He also met preparators from the large museums of both Milwaukee and Chicago, and thus came to the attention of George Shrobsree, chief taxidermist at the Milwaukee Public Museum. Shrobsree realized that here was a rare find, and he lost no time in making overtures that later resulted in Stoddard's employment at the museum.

Herbert's interest in taxidermy gave him an opportunity to work closely with birds and mammals and was a logical approach to a more intimate study of natural history. During his spare time as Ochsner's apprentice, he read the works of Carl Akeley and Hornaday and other famous museum collectors and preparators. He hoped that some day he might go to some of the far-off places he dreamed of and read about as a member of one of the expeditions sent out by the great natural history museums. He later met Akeley, whom he considered the most accomplished taxidermist-naturalist who ever lived, and they became good friends.

Herbert was keenly aware that big-game hunting and collecting exotic birds in the fever-ridden tropical jungles or in the arctic cold required a rugged physique and a clear brain, and that the field naturalist had to be in perfect health. With that self-discipline in mind, he never smoked nor consciously abused his body in any way. He intended to be ready for the call when the big day came, and he disciplined himself to serve that end. During all his years of employment in Milwaukee and Chicago, he stuck to his severe physical regimen, and in the morning walked the hard concrete to work "just to keep fit." The Milwaukee beat was over five miles, and even during the severe winter blizzards he often bypassed the street cars and always arrived at work on time. His walking discipline was the more remarkable because he wore a leg brace after sustaining a bad knee injury while chopping

out a bobcat tree den on one of his early museum expeditions to the Baraboo Bluffs. He often complained about his "squeaky" knee brace if he forgot to oil the joint in the morning and occasionally remarked jokingly that he was going to "have the damn leg cut off."

I first knew Herbert when I went to work as a taxidermist at the Field Museum in 1916. Our association there did not last long, for Stoddard volunteered for the army in 1917. So determined was he to give "the country which had been so good to him" his very best that during his preinduction period, he drilled every morning before work with a broomstick. After World War I, Stoddard and I both ended up at the Milwaukee Public Museum. While in training for his expedition to Bonaventure Island in 1922, he climbed a rope hand over hand every morning upon arrival at work just to harden his muscles for any possible work "over the cliff," and he soon had us all doing it. His expedition work was strictly business with no time limits, and in his opinion anything that distracted a field collector beyond reasonable necessity was taboo. He frowned upon women accompanying museum expeditions, suspecting them as the reason why some costly expeditions ended up with members not talking to each other. Without exception, he was one of the most capable field men I ever knew, and he always brought back the material he went for.

At Milwaukee Stoddard learned a great deal about taxidermy from George Shrosbree, who began his career at the Rowland Ward establishment in London. Herbert's constant aim was always to improve his techniques, and he maintained his standards of absolute perfection all his life. Among his many accomplishments was his very complicated method of mounting the most lifelike reptiles in his day. To do so he had to go rather deeply into chemistry, which he learned the hard way. Fortunately the Milwaukee Public Library and Museum were housed under one roof, and he had an uncanny way of ferreting out the books that could help him. He delved into the chemistry of electroplating, and to my knowledge was the first one to use this method in preparing naked bird nestlings. He developed the use of cork carved to conform to the bird's anatomy and later was the first to use balsa wood for bodies. Never satisfied with the commercially produced glass eyes, he often painted his own. I shall never forget my amazement when, using his knowledge of color chemistry, he applied prussian blue to the reverse side of a glass eye and magically produced the glowing red characteristic of the pupil of a Double-crested Cormorant.

In keeping to his physical regimen, Herbert was very careful of the food he ate, but he usually ate in a hurry at work so he could use most of his noon hour to keep informed and up-to-date on all the periodicals

of the day—particularly *The Auk*, which he always read from cover to cover. While in Wisconsin, he was unquestionably the state's foremost ornithologist at the time, and he hoped someday to produce a complete up-to-date checklist of the birds of Wisconsin. He took great satisfaction in the part he had in the publication of the "Georgia birds," for which his good friend George Sutton painted the bird portraits. Later Herbert gave a fine account of his association with Sutton on many of their expeditions together, and Sutton paid him a most fitting tribute in the introductory chapter of "Memoirs of a naturalist."

I had the rare privilege of accompanying Herbert on most of his trips afield in Wisconsin. Collecting in those days was considerably more rugged than it is today. Neither Stoddard nor the museum could afford an automobile, and the street car was our transportation to the city limits. Beyond that all local travel was by shanks' mare.

Our standard collecting gun was the old Marble's Game Getter, a combination over-and-under 22-caliber rifle and 410-gauge shotgun with a folding metal stock that fitted into its pistol grip. The lower barrel was also chambered to take a 44-caliber bullet for larger game, but the weapon had its limitations. Herbert's own favorite was a 10-gauge "rabbit-ear" or hammerlock shotgun with the old twist Damascus barrels. This was useful for collecting ducks and other large birds, but unhappily blew small specimens to pieces. Herbert's solution was an auxiliary barrel, about 12 inches long, made of an old Springfield rifle barrel milled to fit the breech of his 10-gauge and rebored to take 45-90 cartridges. He hand-loaded the old brass shells with light loads of number-12 shot or dust for small birds. One of the saddest days of his life was the time we returned to Milwaukee and he found his "aux" was missing. We went back to the point where he remembered last seeing it and retraced our steps for hours, all to no avail.

In addition to the 10-gauge, his usual collecting gear was a well-worn leather bag slung over his shoulder, containing his "aux," ammunition, skinning kit, and lunch. He also carried a bag of peanuts, raisins, and a few staples, which he planned to augment with carcasses from the skinning table. Our usual menus would probably revolt a gourmet, but I remember having young Great Horned Owl and crow—and finding both very good.

We were building up the museum bird skin collection for small, portable, habitat exhibits and often returned to base late at night. In those days union hours were unheeded by the true field man, and Herb's motto was "give a full day's work and then some, for a good day's pay." Therefore it was necessary to collect enough material to keep us occupied until bedtime. Leaving any of the day's collecting untended

was a violation of the field man's code, and we prepared small bird skins in 30 minutes or less. Bedtime was midnight or later, and it was hard for me to get into the spirit of "setting up" exercises at 5 A.M.

Herbert's deep loyalty to his friends was in keeping with his general code of ethics. He was a strong advocate of the principle, "Believe nothing that you hear and only half of what you see," but he could be a worthy adversary in defense of a principle right up to the point of straining a friendship if it conflicted with his ideas of honor or loyalty. When he left Milwaukee to work with quail, my contacts with him became less frequent, but he kept in close touch with his good friends through an active correspondence.

He became directly involved with local forestry practices when his work with quail necessitated delving into the whole relationship of the birds to their environment. Some of the techniques he advocated—particularly the use of controlled burning—were in conflict with long-established ideas of forest management. His efforts and persistence in selling his ideas on the use of fire in forest management in the south are well known. His wisdom and forethought are now appreciated by forestry interests, and his ideas are widely applied today.

In his views of maintaining a balanced ecology in quail habitat Stoddard was decades ahead of his time. His insistence on protecting, not destroying, such predators as hawks and owls was rank heresy to the game managers of the 1920s and 1930s, but he stuck to his views and insisted that the principle be maintained on all the plantations he supervised. Much of his time in his later years was given over to consultant work and management of his own Sherwood plantation near Thomasville.

Sherwood was a mecca for his many ornithological friends. Fortunately the old hunting lodge, which later became Stoddard's home, had ample room for his numerous guests—many of whom arrived unannounced—but Herb and his gracious wife, Ada, made all feel perfectly at home. His living room had a large picture window, and the whirr of avian activity at its hollow log feeding tray, always well-stocked with crushed pecans, provided continued subject matter for discussion.

The erection of a 673-foot TV tower in October 1955 (replaced by a 1,010-footer in 1960) on the nearby Tall Timbers plantation signaled the start of Stoddard's last major contribution to ornithology. With the backing of the plantation's owner, H. L. Beadel, Stoddard had the land surrounding the tower cleared and planted to grass, which was mowed regularly. He visited and searched the area at daybreak daily throughout the year for tower kills, except for less than a dozen mornings in June, the one month in which practically no dead birds were found. The

amazing results were published in a series of bulletins issued by the Tall Timbers Research Station, which Beadel founded and of which Stoddard was vice-president. The thousands of birds so salvaged were all put to good use. Many were made into scientific specimens at Tall Timbers; others were given to researchers in many fields and have been the basis for studies on the physiology of fat deposition and utilization, on pesticide content, and similar projects.

Stoddard's contributions to the whole field of natural history are well-documented in the pertinent literature and his published memoirs. In his memoirs he tells about his long friendship with Aldo Leopold, which he regarded as "among the most treasured experiences" of his life. I am sure that the mutual influence the two men exerted on each other was profound. Their writings show the close similarity of their approach to and ideas about ecology. Although Stoddard was not so gifted a writer as Leopold, I feel they both must stand as equals in the modern environmental concept. It is significant that Herb died with Leopold's "A Sand County almanac" in his hand.

Stoddard died on November 15, 1968. After a simple service attended by some of his close friends and his family, he was buried alongside his beloved wife, Ada, on Sherwood plantation. He is survived by his son, Herbert L., Jr., and three grandchildren, Herbert L. III, David, and Marie.

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