

## OBITUARY

CHESTER CONVERSE LAMB, an Elective Member of the A.O.U. and an Honorary Member of the Cooper Ornithological Society, died at Compton, California, 2 March 1965. Born 16 January 1882 in Boston, Chester moved with his family to Tacoma, Washington when he was a small boy, and he spent the rest of his life in the West and in Mexico.

Chester wrote several papers on birds but it was as a collector of scientific specimens that he made his most important contributions. After collecting professionally from 1921-25 he joined the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology as a Special Field Assistant in March 1925, later becoming Assistant Curator of Mammals. He held this position until he left the museum in 1932. In this period he led field trips to Baja California and made collections that formed the basis of J. Grinnell's "A distributional summation of the ornithology of Lower California" (1928, Univ. California Publ. Zool 32) and J. M. Linsdale's "Amphibians and reptiles from Lower California" (1932, Univ. California Publ. Zool. 38).

While employed at the museum, Chester lost the sight of one eye when a piece of metal struck him while he was unpacking a crate of specimens. He took this misfortune completely in stride and continued his very active field career with scarcely a break.

His greatest accomplishment was the magnificent collection of Mexican birds he made for the late Robert T. Moore between 3 August 1933 and 4 June 1955. This collection, numbering over 40,000 specimens and housed in the Moore Laboratory of Zoology, Occidental College, is by far the largest and most important collection of Mexican birds in existence. Chester turned up such spectacular new species as the Maroon-fronted Parrot (*Rhynchopsitta terrisi*) and the Tufted Jay (*Cyanocorax dickeyi*) as well as a veritable host of new subspecies. His material provided a wealth of information on the distribution and variation of Mexican birds and was the most important single source of data for the "Distributional check-list of the birds of Mexico" (parts 1 and 2, 1950 and 1957, Pacific Coast Avifauna Nos. 29 and 33). The value of the collection is inestimable to students of Mexican ornithology as many of the localities represented have been completely altered since Chester visited them.

While collecting for Moore, Chester lived most of the time in Irapuato, Guanajuato. He maintained a steady correspondence with the veteran collector W. W. Brown of Chilpancingo, Guerrero, and he was with Mr. Brown when the latter passed away.

Between 1955 and 1961 he made sporadic collecting trips to Mexico but this period marked a transition to complete retirement in California. In view of his contributions it is most appropriate that Chester had named in his honor four races of birds (*Otus asio lambi*, *Asio stygius lambi*, *Nyctibius griseus lambi*, and *Aimophila ruficeps lambi*), three of mammals (*Myotis yumanensis lambi*, *Perognathus spinatus lambi*, and *Oryzomys couesi lambi*), and a new species of cestode (*Anomaloporus lambi*, from *Streptoprocne semicollaris*).

In 1951 my wife and I spent two months in the field with Chester in Durango and Michoacán. He was a fine field companion, full of good stories, and a picturesque figure—skinning birds in his worn old tent, wearing a green eyeshade, cigarette holder clenched in a corner of his mouth, head tilted slightly to keep the smoke out of his eyes.

Two letters in my files convey something of his spirit. One, dated 29 October

1951, when Chester was nearly 70 years old, reads in part: "I got back yesterday from a camp in . . . Jalisco . . . I sure had a wet and hot and mosquito infested camp. In the 18 days I was there we had four 'tormentas' and besides them it rained two days and two nights without stopping. Two of the 'tormentas' flooded my camp to the depth of 6 inches and for two afternoons I went around barefooted. Finally I worked out a drainage system. It was a fine place for birds . . ." Another letter, written in January 1952 and headed "20 miles east Colima, Col. 2000 ft" describes his first trip following a hernia operation: "Well here I am down in the semi tropics . . . With a little work got the car down beside a nice river. Fine for swimming. Now I am feeling fine. It sure is a relief to be able to run around without one's 'guts' hanging out. Just killed a nice fat armadillo, so will have some good meat for a couple of days."

Chester was one of the last of the old-time professional collectors. Braving frequent hardships and at times danger, these men were true pioneers who opened up great ornithological terrae incognitae. Times have changed, but we should not forget their unique and highly important contributions to ornithology.

Chester Lamb is survived by his wife, Luz, and six children, Chester, Edna, Luz, Lilly, Robert, and Sylvia. I thank Luther Little, Alice Landauer, and John William Hardy for supplying important information used in this obituary.—JOHN DAVIS.

#### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir:

The published first occurrence of the Orange-breasted Bunting (*Passerina leclancheri*) of southwestern Mexico in the United States in Texas (Novy and McGrew 1974, Auk 91: 178-179) is suspect on the following grounds: (1) the species is extremely sedentary, to the extent that it has never been recorded even in appropriate habitat in states adjacent to those of its normal geographic range; (2) the species is a very common cage bird in Mexico and until recent restrictions at least was imported into the United States in large numbers; and (3) brilliance and perfection of plumage are not foolproof clues as to whether a bird, especially a seed-eating fringillid, has been in captivity. Small finches adjust readily to captivity and accept dry food quickly, often within a few hours. Plumage fades only after a few months with inadequate diet. Immediate examination of the claws and toes might have revealed abnormally long claws or irregular growth features as better clues to captive existence. Had the bird been killed and preserved immediately this evidence would have been preserved. (I am indebted to Kenneth Stager for pointing out to me the telltale character of long claws on a specimen of Painted Bunting, *Passerina ciris*, that I shot in southern California several years ago and took to be a wild bird!) Now that the Orange-breasted Bunting in question has been retained in a cage subsequent to capture, examination for signs of previous captivity would be fruitless. Surely the Check-list Committee must reject this dubious record of accidental occurrence.

JOHN WILLIAM HARDY  
Florida State Museum  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Florida 32611