

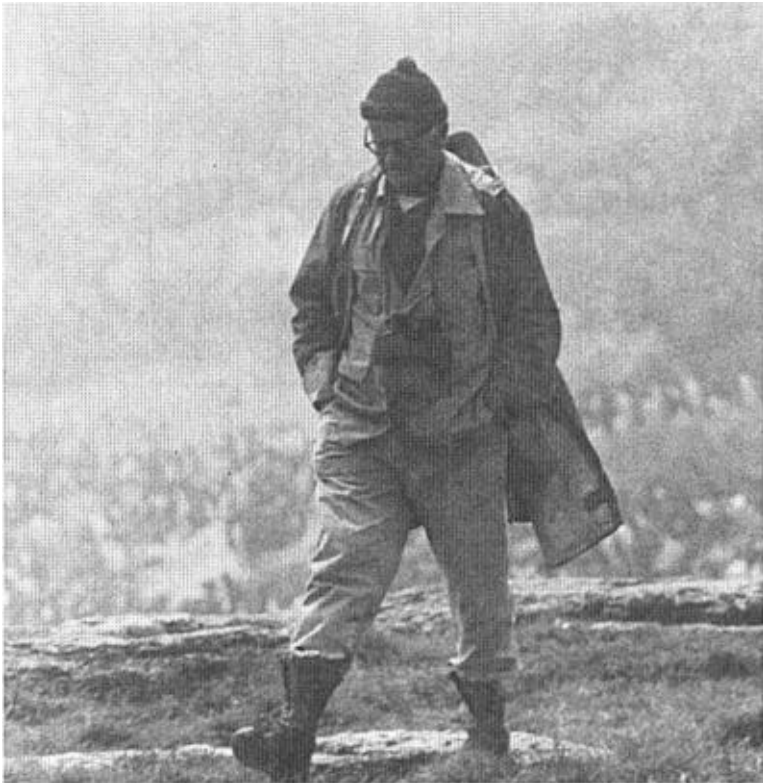
IN MEMORIAM: LESLIE MILLS TUCK

W. A. MONTEVECCHI

*Department of Psychology, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's,
Newfoundland A1B 3X9 Canada*

WHILE pressures for academic specialization appear ever increasing, Leslie Tuck's endeavors are a refreshing inspiration to amateurs and professionals alike. Les was a self-educated naturalist whose interests developed into research studies of scientific excellence.

Born on 22 July 1911 in Shoal Harbour, Newfoundland to Magistrate Caleb and Susan Mills Tuck, Les was one of eight children. He grew up close to land and sea, and his awareness of wildlife began early. As a young man he collected snails, insects, mosses, and bryophytes for the Carnegie Museum. In 1936–1938, he studied biology at Harvard University, where Ludlow Griscom made a deep and lasting impression on him. Owing to financial circumstances, however, he had to return home, where he taught school for the next 3 yr. After this he worked as a photographer for 7 yr at the U.S. Navy Base in Argentia, Newfoundland, and engaged in extensive nature photography.



LESLIE MILLS TUCK, 1911–1979
(a misty walk on Funk Island)

When Newfoundland joined the Confederation in 1949, Les was appointed as the province's first Dominion Wildlife Officer. His attitude toward bureaucracy is reflected in his account of how this came about. An application was filled out by friends who forged his signature. After ignoring a written invitation from the Public Service Commission for an interview, he was telephoned, and as he was the only applicant In actuality, he was the most qualified person for the position and had by this time already published a systematic survey of the seasonal occurrence and abundance of birds in the Argentia-Dunville area (1948, *Can. Field-Natur.* 62: 103–112). For the next 27 yr he remained a proud and dedicated employee of Canadian Wildlife Service.

Animals fascinated him, and besides his continuous bird work he studied wolves, polar bears, caribou, seals, walruses, and narwhals. Public understanding of nature was high on his priority list, and he was constantly preparing newspaper articles and radio programs. In 1950 he founded the Newfoundland Natural History Society, a group very active today, and initiated the first Christmas Bird Counts on the island. He was involved in early studies of bird hazards to aircraft, and was one of the first biologists to raise public awareness about oil pollution. In the early 1940s he began documenting and warning about recurring seabird mortality associated with ships flushing tanks and emptying bilges on the open ocean (1959, *Proc. Int. Conf. Oil Pollution Sea, Copenhagen*).

Throughout the 1950s part or all of each of summer was devoted to study of the reproductive biology of murre, and he visited every known colony of Thin- and Thick-billed Murre (*Uria aalge* and *U. lomvia*) on the Newfoundland and Labrador coasts. Les pioneered marine ornithology in the Canadian Arctic—working on Akpatok Island in Ungava Bay (1954), Digges Island in Hudson Strait (1955), and Bylot Island in Lancaster Sound (1957; see 1955, *J. Fish. Res. Bd. Can.* 12: 781–792; 1959, *Dansk Ornith. Foren. Tidsskr.* 53: 137–154; 1972, *Nature Canada* 1(3): 22–25). During these trips he worked alone, accompanied only by an Eskimo family. In a newspaper account of the summer on Bylot Island he wrote, “Loneliness is probably a relative thing and is caused mostly, I expect, by boredom. I was never particularly lonely because I had my work to keep my attention and something new and exciting was happening every day.”

Though his scientific career began later in life, Les craved field work in remote places. He was 46 in 1957, when he journeyed by dogsled over 160 km of unfamiliar sea ice in Eclipse Sound from Pond Inlet, Baffin Island to Cape Hay, Bylot Island, where he documented the massive colonies of Thick-billed Murre and kittiwakes. He also documented the invasion and spread of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in Newfoundland (1958, *Can. Field-Natur.* 72: 139–144), and in 1960 he and Dr. C. Huntington identified the significance of the massive colonies of Leach's Storm-petrels (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) on the Witless Bay Islands, just south of St. John's (1963, *Proc. XIII Int. Ornith. Cong.*: 701–705).

His prime study area in Newfoundland was the remote, granitic outcropping of Funk Island. The “Funks” held special enchantment for him, and to the amazement of local fishermen he made 10 research visits from 1951–1972 and has logged more time there than anyone before or since. Owing to the havoc it would have wreaked on breeding seabirds, he acted to prevent construction of a lighthouse on Funk in 1964, and was instrumental in having the island protected as a provincial sanctuary.

The murre research culminated in the 1961 publication of “The murre, their distribution, populations and biology—a study of the genus *Uria*,” the first mono-

graph in the new Canadian Wildlife Service Series. The book met with immediate acclaim, including praise from Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, and was selected as the outstanding publication of the year in ecology and wildlife management by The Wildlife Society. "The murre" has stood the test of time and remains the definitive work on these birds.

As the seabird research was nearing completion in the late 1950s, Les began a study of Wilson's Snipe (*Capella gallinago*) that continued for more than 10 yr. These studies took him away from the sea and ice and into the boglands of Newfoundland, Ontario, and northern Manitoba. In winters he often followed the migrant snipe to the southern U.S.A. (primarily the Rockefeller Refuge in Louisiana), Bermuda, Trinidad, Guyana, and Venezuela. This effort resulted in the 1972 publication of "The snipes—a study of the genus *Capella*," the fifth monograph in the CWS series. This book, like its forerunner a decade earlier, also received The Wildlife Society's Outstanding Publication of the Year Award, making Les the only two-time recipient of this honor.

When Les was in the field, his wife, Mary, attended to his correspondence and compiled his voluminous field notes. She also labored with Les over his meticulously written, well-polished manuscripts.

Les's achievements were first formally recognized by the academic community in 1965, when Memorial University of Newfoundland awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Science, a remarkable attainment in lieu of an undergraduate degree. In 1966, CWS promoted him to Research Scientist, and the AOU elected him a Fellow in 1975. Acadia University bestowed an honorary D.Sc. on him in 1977.

Health problems forced retirement in 1976, but work on his life's devotion continued. In 1977, Memorial University of Newfoundland provided a needed opportunity, and he was appointed J. L. Paton Research Professor in the Department of Psychology. Les cherished the position, as evident in renewed enthusiasm for work and continued high spirits, even on days when the stairway to his office seemed a mountain. Almost all his energy was devoted to working on a book he had been planning for some time on an historical and ecological perspective of Newfoundland avifauna. Through a synthesis of sighting and banding data he had compiled over 35 yr (e.g. 1949, *Can. Field-Natur.* 63: 211–212; 1952, *Can. Field-Natur.* 66: 68, 112–113; 1967, *Book of Newfoundland* 3: 265–316; 1968, *Auk* 85: 304–311; 1968, *Bird-Banding* 39: 200–208; 1971, *Bird-Banding* 42: 184–209), he intended to update and modify Peters and Burleigh's (1951) "The birds of Newfoundland." But as he was sharply aware, health and time would be the deciding factors. His standards were too high to rush, and eventually it was evident that he would not complete this final task.

His ease and grace during this period of his life were remarkable. He never seemed pressured by circumstance. He derived fullest pleasure from his work but also enjoyed morning coffee and a chat with old and new friends at the university, ever willing to lend a responsive ear to students. His amazing and humorous field stories gave glimpses of the fabric of his rich and varied experiences. In the last weeks before death he finished a manuscript on the extinct race of the Newfoundland Wolf, which was published posthumously (1979, *Nfld. Quart.* 75: 21–26). A keen observer to the end, he noted the spring arrival of robins from his hospital bed. After 5 yr. of chemotherapy treatment for blood cancer, he passed away on 11 May 1979, courageous in the face of death, as he was in the face of life.

He is survived by his wife (Mary), a son (Wayne), two daughters (Marylin, Car-

olyn), and a number of grandchildren. His extensive library and unpublished materials were bequeathed to Memorial University of Newfoundland, where a scholarship fund has been established in his name and where his unfinished work is being carried on. His bibliography is on file in the Newfoundland Section of the Memorial University Library.

I am very grateful to Mary and Wayne Tuck for their encouragement and information and to Dr. Graham R. Skanes, Head of the Psychology Department, and Dr. Leslie Harris, President of Memorial University of Newfoundland, who, with Dr. Jon Lien, instrumented Les's University appointment and the opportunity for me to play a part in his work. Former colleagues and friends of Les's who also offered helpful suggestions include Drs. A. J. Erskine, D. N. Nettleship, W. Threlfall, and Mr. I. R. Kirkham. President Harris delivered the eulogy at the funeral, and part of this fitting tribute is used to end here.

"To live content . . . to study hard, think quietly, talk gently, act frankly; to listen to stars and birds, to babes and sages, with open heart; to bear all cheerfully, do all bravely, await occasions, hurry never. In a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common. This is to be my symphony."

". . . From the moment of my first acquaintance with Dr. Leslie Tuck, I was conscious of the fact that I had encountered a remarkable personality. Here was that rare phenomenon of a man who in his every word and act displayed a harmony both within himself and in respect of all his relationships—a man who had found his vocation—who loved his work—who was conscious of the purpose of what he was doing and was convinced of the legitimacy of that purpose. Here was a plain, simple man, a man who despised pretension and pomp and ceremony—a man true to his origins displaying that calmly assured self confidence that is the hallmark of the true expert"

"True scientist that he was, he had that gift of being able to see the heart of a matter, the characteristic of seeing through falsehood and hypocrisy, the characteristic of seeing the truth in the beauty of its ultimate simplicity, the ability to see clearly and then to tell plainly what had been seen. And that gift is the greatest that a human can possess. As John Ruskin put it, 'Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see'"