

## IN MEMORIAM: CHARLES HENRY BLAKE

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I will always remember my good friend Charley Blake as one of the most erudite persons I ever knew. Webster's 2nd defines "erudite" as "characterized by an extensive knowledge of a bookish kind," and while Charley was anything but bookish, if the subject was in a book, he somehow always seemed to have read it and knew enough about it to explain it clearly and simply, if a bit bashfully, almost apologetically. An accomplished linguist, he spoke French and German fluently, and he also read Latin, Greek, Italian, Spanish, and a little Russian. An excellent mathematician, he liked to express ornithological problems in algebraic terms (let  $x$  = the chickadee,  $y$  = its habitat,  $z$  = its food) and then develop his argument on the blackboard in a series of complex equations, the more involved and intricate the better.

Charley came by his scholarly attributes and abilities quite naturally. His father, Edwin Mortimer Blake (1868-1955) had a degree in mining engineering from Columbia University, but never practiced that specialty. He and Charley's mother, Josephine St.Felix Wittichen (1868-1940) were both natives of Brooklyn, New York. Edwin's first position was as professor of mathematics at the University of California in Berkeley, where Charley was born 11 June 1901. In 1901 the family moved to Tucson, where Edwin headed the department of mathematics at the young University of Arizona. Charles was named for his paternal grandfather, who led an interesting career as skipper of a clipper ship, until a bout of cholera in India terminated his sea-going and he returned to Brooklyn to become a ship-chandler.

In 1911 the Blakes returned to Brooklyn, where Charles attended public schools, the Adelphi Academy, and then the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he earned his A.B. and Ph.D. degrees in biology and public health. On completing the latter he joined the M.I.T. faculty, and spent the next 32 years there as professor of biology. He taught general biology, zoology, vertebrate anatomy, and phys-

iology, primarily to premedical students, and also did a good deal of student counseling. In 1929 he married Helen Mitchell Lehman of Berkeley. She had attended the University of California for two years, and then the Boston Academy of music. The couple made their home in Lincoln, Massachusetts. They had one child, Sylvia St.Felix, who died at the age of 9 years.

In his early years Charley studied and wrote on a diversity of creatures—ants, termites, coelenterates, and echinoderms, but his principal interest was always in birds, and his favorite hobby was birdbanding. He had an overwhelming interest in museum work, which led to his serving in various capacities in New England scientific circles and societies. For a time he was curator of molluscs for the old Boston Society of Natural History (now the Museum of Science), of which he became a corporate life member. He was on the founding board of the deCordova and Dana Museum and Park in his home town of Lincoln, and he served several terms as an overseer of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard. He was very active in the Nuttall Club and almost never missed a meeting in the old days at Charles F. Batchelder's lovely home on Craigie Street, and later at Wendell Taber's home nearby. He served for some years as its secretary, then as vice president and president. He was also president of the Northeastern Bird Banding Association and a council member of the Eastern Bird Banding Association.

He was a frequent and always welcome guest at our Austin Ornithological Research Station at South Wellfleet, Cape Cod, during its heyday in the 1930's and early 1940's. He was also happy to help with the banding operations both on the Station grounds and at the various nearby tern colonies. During World War II he was a consultant to the office of the Quartermaster General, and he served overseas in New Guinea and Australia for the Office of Research and Development from 1942 to 1945. When things settled down after the war he traveled widely



CHARLES HENRY BLAKE, 1901-1981

(From a photograph taken about 1955)

during summer college breaks in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and the West Indies. In 1955-1956 he went to Jamaica on a Fulbright Fellowship, which enabled him to add about a dozen titles to his bibliography.

In the early 1950's he spent one summer here in Gainesville as an exchange professor, teaching general biology at the University of Florida summer session. At the start of this tour he met with a student complaint that became legendary in the zoology department. After his first lecture a student with a broad southern accent went to the dean's office and asked to be changed to another section under a different professor because he couldn't understand Charley. The dean remonstrated with the student, "Dr. Blake comes highly recommended from the M.I.T. in Cambridge, and I'm sure you'll soon become accustomed to his New England accent." The lad's astonishing reply was, "I'm sorry Dean B., but his accent is not the problem. It's his darned mustache! I'm very deaf and have to lip-read, and I can't see his lips under it!" The request was granted.

In 1957 Charley retired from the M.I.T. and moved to an old farmstead he and Helen bought and restored just outside Hillsborough, North Carolina. Here he put out banding traps, estab-

lished permanent net lanes, and continued banding enthusiastically. He also became deeply involved with local history, a pursuit in which he had dabbled in Massachusetts. He was a founder and first president of the Hillsborough Historical Society. On the board of the Orange County Historical Museum, he was constantly investigating the region's history, genealogy, and cartography, preparing maps of the old country roads, former water courses, and township lines. He left a wealth of material of inestimable value to local historians.

Charles was a prolific producer of short papers in the periodical literature, authoring some 150 titles in the 50 yr between 1926 and 1976. The great majority of them were on birds, and they covered a broad spectrum of subjects, such as various aspects of flight, migration, coloration, plumages, and molts. Banding problems always gained his attention, and he applied his mathematical bent continually to such matters as band wear, leg diameters and band sizes, seasonal bias in trapping, seasonal variation in winglengths, longevity, and analysis of return and recovery statistics. His last formal paper, "Introductions, transplants, and invaders" (*American Birds* 1975: 923-926), is a list of the 130-odd species generally regarded in those

categories in North and Central America, the West Indies, and Hawaii, giving each its English and scientific names, status, and a brief sketch of its distribution.

Charley Blake had a long and gracious life, full of useful accomplishment. Always gener-

ous in sharing his vast store of knowledge with friends and colleagues, his was truly the spirit of the Renaissance scientist. We who were privileged to know him will always treasure the warmth of his memory.

## IN MEMORIAM: EMERSON A. STONER

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Emerson A. Stoner of Benicia, California, Member of the A.O.U. for more than 60 years, died in his 91st year on 9 March 1983. He had retired 25 years earlier as Chief Fiscal Officer of the Benicia Arsenal. He was a Charter Member of the Western Bird Banding Association (1926) and served as its President from 1953 to 1957. He served Point Reyes Bird Observatory as its first Treasurer from 1965 to 1973 and thereafter served on its Advisory Board.

A self-taught natural scientist, Emerson Stoner published more than 225 scholarly pa-

pers and notes in more than 20 regional and national publications. These included no fewer than 11 in *The Auk*, 60 in *The Condor*, 34 in *The Oologist*, and 2 in *Le Gerfaut*. In the late 1970's, Mr. Stoner donated much of his fine collection of bird eggs and skins to the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology.

More detailed accounts of Emerson Stoner's life may be found in the Point Reyes Bird Observatory Newsletter (1983, No. 62) and in the North American Bird Bander (1984, Vol. 9, No. 2).