

## IN MEMORIAM: CONSTANTINE WALTER BENSON, O.B.E.

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Constantine Walter Benson, known to all as Con, died in Cambridge, England on 21 September 1982. He was the last and perhaps the greatest of a long line of British Colonial officials who made major contributions to the ornithology of (former) British possessions; on his death an era of African ornithology came to an end.

Born (1909) and educated in England, he was a fine athlete and a track star at Cambridge. He was completely tireless when tramping through the African bush, as this writer can attest; on safari with him in Zambia in 1965, I wondered why I had trouble keeping up with the "old" man over 20 years my senior disappearing down the track ahead of me.

Throughout his career in the Colonial Service he left a trail of solid ornithological accomplishment. His 20 years in Nyasaland (now Malawi), 1932–1952, resulted in "A Check List of the Birds of Nyasaland" (1953), in addition to numerous papers. This was followed later by the revised and expanded "Birds of Malawi" (1977), coauthored by his wife Molly. A wartime stint in Ethiopia, 1941–1942, produced a large collection of birds, later written up in *The Ibis*. It is said that his collecting gun was fired so often that the Italians refrained from attacking what they considered must be a large force. During his time in Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) he published (with C. M. N. White) "Check List of the Birds of Northern Rhodesia" (1957), and later "The Birds of Zambia" (1971) with R. K. Brooke, R. J. Dowsett, and M. P. S. Irwin. He led the B.O.U. Centenary Expedition to the Comoros in 1958, and later published "The birds of the Comoro Islands" in *The Ibis* (1960). After his retirement to Cambridge he reorganized and published on the bird collection in the University's Museum of Zoology.

At his death he had almost completed (with his wife as coauthor) his manuscript on the Psittacidae for "The Birds of Africa." Constantly exploring and collecting in little-known areas, he discovered 7 species new to science and described numerous races. The number of titles to his credit is close to 400.

On his retirement from the Colonial Service in 1965 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire. Writing to congratulate him, I said I hoped he was being honored for his contributions to African ornithology, but supposed it was for his administrative work. He replied that the British Government took an enlightened view of the value of ornithology and had included his bird work in the citation.

Of the many personal attributes that caused him to be loved and admired by so many, the one that impressed me most was his tremendous spirit of cooperation with everyone working in his field. He was in the purest sense a seeker after the truth. In a profession where many workers vigorously defend territories, he stood out as being the most unterritorial ornithologist I've ever known. He paid scrupulous attention to the acknowledgments sections in his papers, being careful to thank everyone even remotely connected with the project. Such selflessness is the mark of a great man.

Con was buried in the village of Grantchester, near Cambridge, close to his favorite aunt Mary Hughes, who kindled his interest in birds as a child and always encouraged his ornithological work. He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

[Other obituaries have appeared in *Ibis* 125: 421 (1983), *Scopus* 6: 108 (1982), and *Ostrich* 53: 254 (1982).—Ed.]