

IN MEMORIAM: EDGAR BRYAN KINCAID, JR.,  
1921-1985

CHARLES HARTSHORNE

724 Sparks Avenue, Austin, Texas 78705 USA

Edgar Bryan Kincaid, Jr., was a rancher's son who grew up with birds and was encouraged by his mother from the age of six to learn their names. While a high school pupil he assisted L. Irby Davis to record bird songs in Mexico, thus acquiring an interest in birds outside the U.S. After receiving a B.A. degree from The University of Texas at Austin, he traveled the country visiting museums in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles to study bird skins and meet ornithologists, observing live birds as he went. Alaska and Hawaii were included in the tour; he became a member of the Hawaiian Ornithological Society and various other organizations devoted to nature study and conservation.

After working briefly in the Texas Fish and Wild Life Service, he devoted himself exclusively to bird study. He was given the task of "editing" for the University of Texas Press the huge manuscript of Harry C. Oberholser on "The Bird Life of Texas." From 1962 to 1974 Kincaid radically revised, rewrote, and improved the book, becoming for many readers its principal author. The many unique features of the work included range maps with ingenious symbols, invented by Kincaid, that showed at a glance where a species was common or uncommon, the effects of season, and whether the records were of specimens, sightings, or breeding occurrences.

Kincaid knew the birds and habitats of his state virtually county by county. In accuracy I have not known his superior. His direct experience was limited to the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, but his comprehension of the bird families circled the globe. A superb field naturalist, he was also a learned scholar. One achievement on which he prided himself was that he persuaded Roger Tory Peterson to include Hawaii in the 1961 edition of his "A Field Guide to Western Birds." Another tribute to Kincaid is in Peterson's "A Field Guide to the Birds of Texas."

This man had style. Consider one of his self-styled "pontifications": "The two strongest forces in the universe are the condensation of things you don't want and the evaporation of things you do want." Note that under "condensation" environmental pollution was definitely included and under "evaporation" the extinction of species as well as the persistent diminution of their populations. Another example of Edgar's style is the following from his great work, "The Bird Life of Texas" (p. 753): "In the final analysis, many more people are working to exterminate *Juniperus ashei* [without which the Golden-cheeked Warbler is doomed] than to conserve it . . . *Dendroica chrysoparia* and its cedar breaks are unlikely to reach the twenty-first century alive, but then, who is?" Alas, this proved all too prophetic in his own case.

Kincaid apparently never thought of becoming a member of a college or university staff. His father thought that he should not take such jobs away from those who had to make a living. He could have been a superb teacher. As it was, he taught in an informal way some of the best bird observers in the world. Still more regrettable, perhaps, his financial responsibilities as part owner of ranch properties, as manager of his uncle's publications after Bertha Dobie died, and as heir to her estate made him feel that his almost constant presence in Austin was necessary in years when he should have been studying birds in Mexico, or attending meetings of the American Ornithologists' Union.

Medical authorities are still puzzling over his sad terminal illness. We may never know what made "this gentle man," as the preacher at the funeral aptly characterized him, so unable to defeat the enemies of longevity. We do know that many of us have a deeper knowledge of nature than we could have had without him, and a richer experience of the possibilities of friendship.