

IN MEMORIAM: OSCAR T. OWRE, 1917–1990

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If an honorable life is one of integrity, intellectual pursuit, and selfless service to others, then the life of Oscar T. Owre was an honorable one indeed. Although born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 10 October 1917, Bud Owre spent most of his professional life at the University of Miami. However, when he passed away on 9 August 1990, he was back at his cherished Lake Andrusia cabin surrounded by the Minnesota forests, lakes, and bird life that by the age of six had inspired him to his lifelong study of birds. He is survived by his wife Lydia Rose, his daughter, and three stepchildren.

As gauged by any of the usual measures, Oscar Owre left behind a legacy of professional accomplishment, but he was never one to pause to measure these achievements. He was too busy devoting himself to the University of Miami, the Florida environment, ornithology, and his students. He served his university for 38 years as an indefatigable spokesman for academic quality and intellectual honesty, culminating in 1969 in his appointment to the Maytag Chair of Ornithology, which he held until his retirement. He was an early advocate for the Florida environment, member of civic boards, president of the Tropical Audubon Society, board chair of the Dade County Museum of Science, and a founding father of Biscayne National Park. His love of birds was central to his life, starting at the side of his surgeon father. As a decorated Navy Lt. Commander and pilot during World War II, he took advantage of reconnaissance missions to search for Pacific seabirds. He continued his interest in birds, with Josselyn Van Tyne and Robert A. Storer at the University of Michigan, in his explorations of Lake Rudolph (now Turkana), Africa, in his studies of functional anatomy (see AOU Ornithological Monograph No. 6), and in his research on Neotropical and exotic avifaunas. He founded the University of Miami bird reference collection, nourishing it to over 10,000 specimens. Bud Owre, also a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi,

joined the American Ornithologists' Union as a 17-year-old, remaining a member for 56 years and an elected member since 1972.

Oscar T. Owre was, in every classical sense, an ornithologist and, above all, a teacher of ornithology. He had the ability to attract and hold promising talent, guiding young people gently through each stage of their lives with patience, mirth, an insistence on integrity, and an abhorrence for mediocrity. Many of his students are in their professional field today only because of his caring mentorship, which never ended at graduation. How fitting that the Oscar T. Owre Memorial Fund has been established by the Tropical Audubon Society (5530 Sunset Dr., Miami, Florida 33143) to assist undergraduate students in studying ornithology!

Bud noted that a colleague was one who could be counted on to be uncompromising for scientific honesty no matter what the source of his funding. In that statement, Bud confirmed his own philosophy and his own sense of ethics and scientific morality. Perhaps some of Bud Owre's insistence on integrity and accomplishment was in his genes, shared with his uncle, Alfred Owre, dean of the University of Minnesota and Columbia Dental School, and his grandfather, social reformer Jacob Riis. I recently was given a copy of Theodore Roosevelt's memorial to Jacob Riis, which, incredibly, describes his grandson as well: "He had the most flaming intensity for righteousness, but he also had kindness and a most humorously human way of looking at life and a sense of companionship with his fellows." This view of an honorable life of integrity was transmitted through his example to his many friends, his students, and his family to be shared with succeeding generations. It is this legacy, above all, that will be the lasting memorial to his life.

I thank C. Richard Robins, Lydia Owre, and Katie Owre for assisting in writing this memorial.