

IN MEMORIAM: MERRILL WOOD, 1908–1992

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On 22 September 1992, the day before he died, Merrill Wood made his last entry in notes that contained data on molt, color variation, and other characteristics of more than 16,000 House Finches trapped and banded in his backyard in State College, Pennsylvania. Born in Philadelphia on 17 June 1908, he was the son of Dr. Harold B. Wood, a public health physician, and Edith Gray Wood, a musician. As a child and teenager, Merrill shared his father's love of birds, becoming his assistant on 19 July 1927 when his father received a banding permit. For seven years they banded Black-crowned Night-Herons in a rookery near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and together they studied colonies of Purple Martins and Bank Swallows nearby and also at their summer home in Rhode Island.

In 1928, following graduation from William Penn High School in Harrisburg, Merrill spent the summer studying ornithology at Cornell; in the fall he enrolled at Penn State where he earned a B.S. in zoology in 1932. Because jobs were scarce, Merrill continued his education at Lebanon Valley College, where he received a B.A. in education, and at Bucknell University, where practice teaching prepared him for teaching high school biology. He received his teaching certificate in 1933, but returned to Penn State and in 1934 received an M.S. in entomology. He obtained a temporary position as a research assistant in entomology and, on 10 September 1935, became an instructor at Penn State, where he taught introductory zoology and ornithology for the next 38 years. From the late 1960s through the 70s, as many as 100 students took the ornithology course each spring. Merrill led class field trips five mornings a week.

Merrill and his father helped organize the

Eastern Bird Banding Association, Merrill serving as treasurer (1948–56), councilor (1957), and vice-president (1958–59). He was treasurer of the Wilson Ornithological Society from 1959 to 1963. In 1927 he joined the AOU, becoming a Patron in 1986. Merrill and two professors of mathematics, Haskell Currey and William Clark, founded the State College Bird Club, which helped encourage public interest in birds. In 1952 he published *Birds of the State College Region, Pennsylvania*, which he expanded, revised, and in 1958 published as *Birds of Central Pennsylvania*. Further expansion led in 1967 to *Birds of Pennsylvania*, illustrated by Dorothy Bordner. His most influential book, *A Banders' Guide to Determining the Age and Sex of Birds*, appeared in 1969. The book dealt primarily with passerines but included woodpeckers and a few other species commonly captured in backyards. It stimulated close examination of aging and sexing criteria with emphasis on information that the bander could use. For the first time banders had in one volume all of the available information on aging and sexing birds.

On 21 October 1939 Merrill married Helen Croll, a musician, and in due course Merrill Wood, Jr. and Emily Croll Wood were born. Following retirement in 1973, Merrill continued to watch and band birds and to take notes on their habits and distribution in Pennsylvania. In 1986 he received the Distinguished Service Award from the College Alumni Society of Penn State. Throughout his life Merrill Wood delighted in birds, and in discussing them with others. Through his books and his unpretentious enthusiasm he stimulated Pennsylvania's growing interest in birds, his legacy to the future.