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IN MEMORIAM: HENRI ROGER OUELLET, 1938–1999

RAYMOND McNEIL<sup>1</sup> AND W. EARL GODFREY<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Département de Sciences Biologiques, Université de Montréal, C.P. 6128, Succursale "Centre-ville",  
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7, Canada; and*

<sup>2</sup>*Sioux Crescent, Nepean, Ontario K2H 7E5, Canada*



HENRI ROGER OUELLET, 1938–1999

(Photograph taken in 1995)

Henri Roger Ouellet was born in Rivière-du-Loup, Quebec, on 29 January 1938, to Charles Eugène Ouellet and Antonia Dubé. He passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on 9 January

1999 at his residence in Hull, Quebec, at the age of 60. He is survived by his wife, Yvette Testuz, and a son, Alain.

His secondary education began at Externat

Classique in Rivière-du-Loup. There, at the age of 13, his interest in taxidermy and the study of birds was encouraged by Rev. Rosaire Deschênes. Thereafter, both Henri (at age 16) and his friend Raymond McNeil were influenced while at the Collège de Ste-Anne in La Pocatière, Quebec, by Rev. René Tanguay, who taught them how to prepare bird skins for the college museum and thereby had an enormous influence on their subsequent careers. When Ouellet and McNeil applied to the National Museum for summer field employment in New Brunswick in 1957, their skills in the preparation of bird specimens, thanks to Rev. Tanguay, were the main reason the two of them were selected from a long list of applicants. Both had similar employment at Knob Lake and Schefferville in northern Quebec in 1958. Thus began Henri's lifelong association with the National Museum of Canada.

Henri was also influenced by Dionne's *Les oiseaux de la Province de Québec* (1906) and Taverner's *Birds of Canada* (1953). In 1955, Henri's family moved to Quebec City, where he continued his studies at Académie de Québec, a college affiliated with Université Laval. He obtained a B. ès L. (French and history) degree in 1958. In September 1958, Henri enrolled in the Biology Department of the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, where he graduated in 1962 with a B.A. in biology. During the summers of 1959 through 1961, he continued ornithological surveys for the National Museum of Canada. In 1962 and 1963, as a field assistant in ornithology, he surveyed the avifauna of Anticosti Island, resulting in the publication of *Les oiseaux de l'île d'Anticosti, Province de Québec* (Musées nationaux du Canada, Publication en Zoologie No. 1, 1969). Next he translated Godfrey's *The Birds of Canada* from English into French. Following a short period as chief naturalist at Point Pelee National Park, Ontario, he was from 1965 to 1970 assistant, and then associate, curator at the Vertebrate Zoology section of the Redpath Museum, McGill University, Montreal. During those years he conducted summer ornithological surveys in the Monteregian Hills in southern Quebec, the Gaspé Peninsula, and the Saguenay, Lac St-Jean, and Abitibi regions. While at the Redpath, he was enrolled in M.Sc. studies at McGill's Department of Zoology, graduating in 1967. His thesis, *Les oiseaux des collines montérégiennes et de la*

*région de Montréal, Québec, Canada* (Musée national des sciences naturelles, Publication en Zoologie No. 5), was published in 1974. Under the supervision of A. W. Cameron and Peter R. Grant, he began his Ph.D. studies at McGill University in 1967, graduating in 1977 with a thesis on the biosystematics and ecology of Hairy and Downy woodpeckers.

While still working on his Ph.D. thesis, Henri was enrolled as assistant curator (1970 to 1976) of the ornithology section of the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Ottawa. In 1977, he succeeded his mentor, W. Earl Godfrey, as curator of birds and chief of the vertebrate zoology division of the museum until August 1991, when curatorships at the Canadian Museum of Nature were abolished. Most curators thus became research scientists in their area of specialty with only an "intellectual" advisory role regarding the national collections. In 1994, following another disastrous reorganization, most vertebrate zoology scientists at the Canadian Museum of Nature were fired. Henri continued as a volunteer researcher emeritus with access to collections, visiting the museum and library irregularly until his death, but many of his projects remain unfinished.

His main research and ornithological interests were in distribution, zoogeography, and systematics, but he also investigated ecology and behavior. Between 1970 and 1991, he was instrumental in enhancing the development and expansion of the national ornithological collections at the National Museum of Natural Sciences, through field collecting, exchanges, acceptance of gifts, and purchases. Indeed, from 1970 to 1985, he conducted and/or directed for the museum more than 17 ornithological surveys in various parts of Canada, from Newfoundland and Labrador to the Yukon and Ellesmere Island, Northwest Territories. His special emphasis was on the Quebec-Labrador peninsula. He also conducted field investigations in the Lesser Antilles, French Guiana, Argentina, and Venezuela for studies on the systematics and evolution of selected Neotropical emberizine genera. Particular emphasis was placed on filling gaps in the geographic representation of Canadian material, acquiring specimens in particular groups poorly represented in the collections, and on broadening the global geographic representation of specimens, particularly from the Neotropics.

During his last years of activity at the Canadian Museum of Nature, using results from the above-mentioned expeditions in eastern Canada, his work on zoogeography focused on the ecological and historical distribution, taxonomy, and evolution of the many species of birds recorded on the mainland of Quebec and Labrador and adjacent islands. He was particularly interested in the fragments of tundra south of the tree line and the disjunct forest islands dispersed north of the tree line and in special areas that had been little studied, such as northern Labrador, the western part of the Ungava Peninsula, and Mansell and Akpatok islands. He was also studying patterns of distribution of the Nearctic and Neotropical elements of the avifauna of Canada in light of recent distributional, palynological, botanical, and ecological information.

Henri was currently reviewing the status of several North American taxa, examining species limits and geographic variation patterns using standard taxonomic procedures such as biometry and statistical treatments, but also including newer approaches such as song analysis, keratin protein analyses, mitochondrial DNA, and PCR. At the time of his Ph.D. thesis and thereafter, part of his interests dealt (see *Ardea* 65:165–183; *Condor* 101:86–95) with the relationships of the woodpecker genera *Dendrocopos* and *Picoides*. Throughout his career, he was particularly interested in studying various aspects of the biology of the Gray Jay (see *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 48:327–330, 49:147–158; *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 90:5–10; *The Birds of North America* No. 40), the species he chose as the official bird of the 1986 International Ornithological Congress (IOC).

Several years of study (*Wilson Bulletin* 105: 545–572) on the taxonomic status and distribution of the Gray-cheeked Thrush resulted in the redefinition of the status of one population (*Catharus m. bicknelli*) to specific rank, Bicknell's Thrush (*C. bicknelli*). Henri was also currently involved in a revision of the Neotropical genus *Sporophila*. He compiled the literature, examined a number of specimens in museums, and obtained specimens in French Guiana and Venezuela, making progress on pterylographic comparisons of 14 species, keratin protein analyses of 16 species, and collecting material suitable for DNA work on 12 species. Unfor-

tunately, due to his premature death, this study remains unfinished.

Financed by Transport Canada from 1988 to 1992, he employed electrophoresis of feather proteins to identify bird remains trapped in propellers or other parts following collisions of birds with aircraft. This adaptation of known techniques to a new purpose produced excellent results, and more than 99% of the samples could be identified to the species level.

At the beginning of his career at the McGill Redpath Museum, Henri had been interested in establishing, standardizing, and publishing lists of French names for North American birds, and he published a first list in 1968. More recently (1993), as co-chairman of the International Commission on French Names of Birds, he participated in the publication of *Noms Français des Oiseaux du Monde* (Éditions Multimondes Inc., Sainte-Foy, Quebec). This publication, and the criteria used for determining French names, ultimately could serve as a model for preparing standardized lists of Portuguese and Spanish names for the birds of the Neotropics. Finally, at his suggestion, a list of French names of North American birds has been included in the 7th edition of the AOU's *Check-list of North American Birds* (see below).

Henri was the author or co-author of more than 160 titles, including critical taxonomic revisions, more than 40 peer-reviewed publications, various books/monographs and titles in collective works, 7 museum bulletins, 8 papers in congress proceedings, more than 45 book reviews (mainly in *Canadian Field-Naturalist* and *Auk*), and various non-peer-reviewed publications. As a much-appreciated lecturer, he presented public lectures throughout his career.

Henri's particular interest in the history of Canadian ornithology resulted in three publications: "Ornithology in Canada in the 20th century: A capsule overview" (*Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 100:115–118, 1980); "Ornithology in Canada from the beginning to 1950" (*Acta XIX Congressus Internationalis Ornithologici*:109–123, 1988), and "Ornithology at Canada's National Museum" (*Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club* 12:303–322, 1995).

He was also involved in training and supervising several graduate students at the University of Montréal Department of Biological Sciences where, from 1993 until his death, he was "professeur associé." He served as external

thesis examiner at various other Canadian universities.

He was involved in miscellaneous ornithological and museological organizations, serving in various capacities on committees of these organizations and societies: Society of Canadian Ornithologists (president, 1994 to 1995); Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature, IOC (member since 1982); Executive Committee of IOC (1990 to 1994); International Commission on French Names of Birds (co-chairman, 1990 to 1994); World Wildlife Fund (Canada), Member of Scientific Advisory Committee (1981 to 1988); Nature Conservancy of Canada (Scientific advisory board, 1990 to 1992); Committee on Status of Endangered Species in Canada (COSEWIC, chairman, subcommittee on birds, 1977 to 1982, member of executive committee, 1979 to 1989).

Henri joined the AOU in 1962, became an Elective Member in 1978, and a Fellow in 1984. Since 1983, he was a member of the committee on classification and nomenclature, which published various supplements to the 6th edition and then in 1998 the 7th edition of the *Checklist of North American Birds*. Henri's task included the preparation of accounts for approximately 350 species of North American birds (particularly the plovers, sandpipers, swallows, corvids, Paridae, Certhiidae, Sylviidae, and Motacillidae) and the revision of the manuscript for all species known to occur in Canada. In addition, for the geographic/subspecies edition (8th) under preparation, he completed accounts for various genera of Picidae and for *Perisoreus canadensis*. He was elected a Corresponding Fellow of the Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft in 1988 and a permanent member of the IOC in 1990.

As an organizer, Henri was outstanding. This showed throughout his career but notably

in his efficiency in handling his heavy and prolonged duties as secretary-general and organizer of the XIXth *Congressus Internationalis Ornithologici* held in Ottawa in 1986. Preparation began in 1982, and his task extended until 1988 with the publication of two massive (>2,800 pages) volumes of proceedings. Under his direction, the IOC conference in Ottawa was very successful and, among other consequences, it launched the Society of Canadian Ornithologists.

Henri was friendly, courteous, and helpful to those he considered worth helping. He was a meticulous worker and was intolerant of sloppy work wherever he found it. His own office and laboratory were efficient, and his was the tidiest desk on the floor. Good grammar and the use of the right word were always high among his interests. Indeed, he was one of the few who could claim to be truly and completely bilingual. Little wonder, then, that he was chosen to translate Godfrey's *The Birds of Canada* into French. He worked with an unhurried but rapid efficiency and got things done. When he spoke up, what he said was worthwhile. He had a good sense of humor and, in addition to studying birds, he was always "studying" people. He was our friend and colleague since 1955, and we will miss him very much.

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