

ALLAN BROOKS—A BIOGRAPHY

WITH PHOTOGRAPH

By MARJORIE BROOKS

Allan Brooks was born at Etawah, India, on February 15, 1869, the third son of William Edwin Brooks and his wife, Mary Jane Renwick, both of Newcastle-on-Tyne, England. His grandfather was William Alexander Brooks, noted harbor and canal engineer of his time, who died in Panama on his third sojourn there under De Lesseps in 1878.

W. E. Brooks was a keen student of bird life and collected extensively in India. His collection is now in the British Museum, London, England. He was a contemporary of all the pioneer ornithologists of that era, his greatest friend being Allan O. Hume, after whom he named his third son. W. E. Brooks was an Honorary Fellow of the B. O. U., with Alfred R. Wallace. Among his friends were Jerdon, Tytler, Blanford, and Oates. It was the father's wish that one of his sons should be a naturalist, and fortunately Allan showed this interest early, indeed, as soon as he could walk. He was allowed to handle skins from his father's collection as amusement, which, as a mere baby, he did with the care of a born naturalist.

In 1873 Allan was sent home to England where he resided in Northumberland for the next eight years. He constantly met well known naturalists; among these were Canon Tristram and Henry Seebohm; but the one who had the greatest influence for life was John Hancock, considered the father of modern taxidermy. Hancock oversaw young Allan's work and taught him egg-blowing, butterfly collecting, and some botany, with regard to trees in particular. Through these early school years, Allan always considered games a waste of time, and he took every opportunity to tramp the moors, generally alone, giving definite indication of his future as a true naturalist.

Although he was still a young man, W. E. Brooks in 1881 retired from his work in India, since his wife's health was poor and the rigorous climate of eastern Canada had been recommended for her. W. E. B. had always wished to farm, like so many Englishmen who know nothing about it, and the entire family of three sons and two daughters sailed for Canada. When they arrived at Quebec, Mrs. Brooks, who was 44, died and was buried there.

The family now took up residence on a 200-acre farm near Milton, Halton County, Ontario. It was here that Allan came in direct contact with the collecting and making up of skins. The only American text books he had were, first, Jardine's edition of Wilson's "Ornithology" and, later, a copy of Baird, Cassin and Lawrence. The misidentification in five years of only one bird—an immature Cape May Warbler—proves the excellent use to which he put these books. While at Milton, the family was visited by the well known European ornithologists, Henry Seebohm and Major G. F. L. Marshall, the latter of Indian oölogist fame and the author of several treatises on eggs and co-author of a monograph on the barbets. Allan made many field trips with these men. In 1885 he visited Thomas McIlwraith, the veteran bird man of eastern Canada, at Hamilton, Ontario. Here he learned the value of a well made bird skin, a quality that was not demanded by European collectors of that day. While at Milton he saw a good many Passenger Pigeons and collected both adult and juvenile plumages, besides discovering, in 1886, a nesting colony at Campbellville only a few miles from his home. At the end of five years he had become a rapid skinner and a fairly good shot.

Allan always made sketches of birds he had taken, and also sketched the flat but attractive country of that region. None of this early work, however, showed promise of the hidden genius that was to blossom later. The greatest joy of these youthful years Allan found in the occasional trips made with his father to Burlington Bay on Lake Ontario. Here he shot his first duck, and he made the acquaintance of the many shore birds and water fowl which abounded in that district, a prolific one in rare species. Furthermore, some 25 species of birds nested around the Brooks homestead, attracted by the conifers growing in long rows. These groves the family had amplified to add to the beauty of their already attractive farm home.

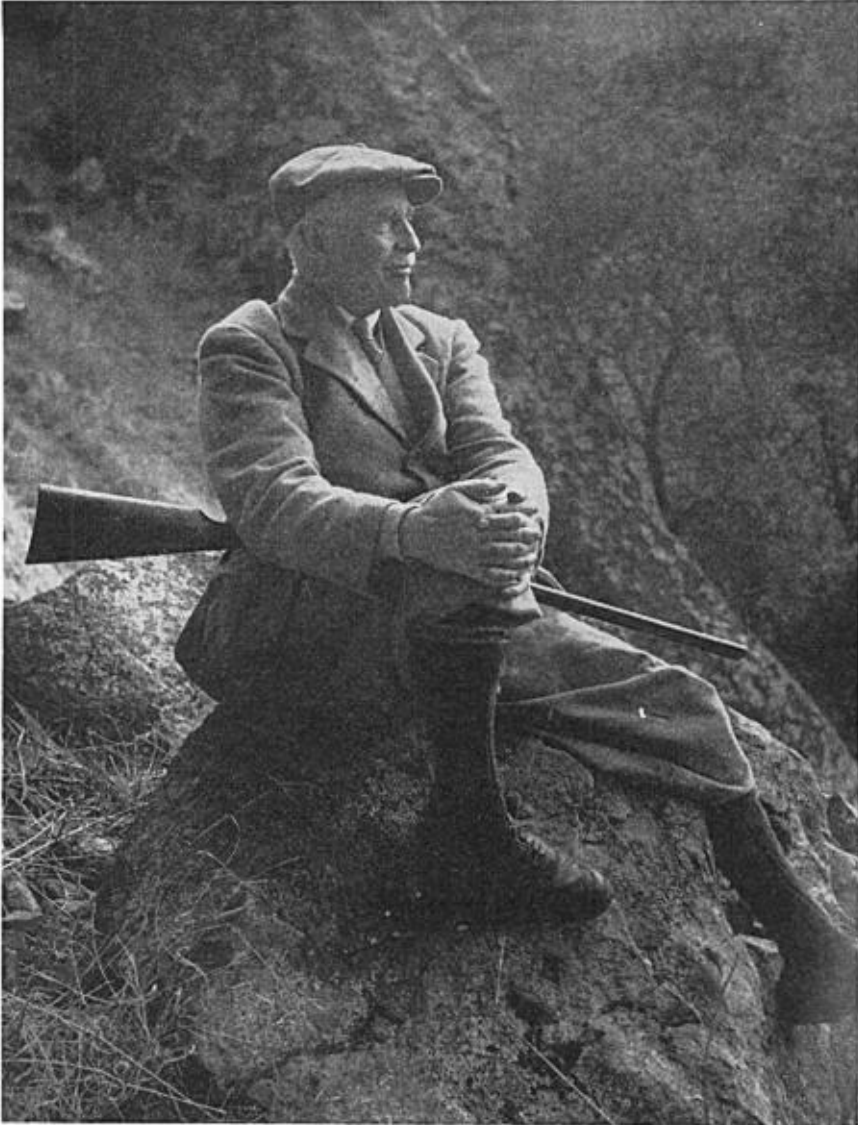


Fig. 7. Allan Brooks: Photographed by Elmer C. Aldrich on Mount Diablo, California, February 2, 1936.

When Allan was eighteen the family moved to British Columbia, on a farm in the fertile valley at Chilliwack, on the Lower Fraser River. Here, in a locality rich in birds and mammals, an entirely new field was opened to the young enthusiast. Along with the activities of the farm were opportunities for sport and study—Sumas Lake, famous for wild fowl, the peaks, the timberline country—all had to be explored. Allan made many new records for the coast region, among them three records of the McCown Longspur. All the many records he sent to the late William Brewster (with whom he was in constant correspondence during this time), but very few of them were published.

In 1891, W. E. Brooks sold the farm and returned to Ontario alone, Allan remaining in the Fraser Valley, hoping he had finished with agriculture. He spent the next year hunting and collecting, with a freedom only too short-lived; at the end of that year he had to return to his father on the new farm at Mount Forest, Wellington County, Ontario. This was a wilder region than Milton, with a numerous list of breeding birds. Now for three years Allan farmed, with bird study only as a side issue. But he was finally able to shake off the fetters of farm work, and in October, 1894, he returned to British Columbia. He now became a zoological collector, with special interest in mammalogy, a study then in its infancy. His collections were sent mostly to Outram Bangs and Gerrit S. Miller, the surplus going to dealers.

Spring of 1897 found Brooks in the Okanagan Valley, which is in the dry interior of British Columbia; here he spent two years, occasionally visiting the North Cariboo district. The winters were chiefly spent in trapping fur-bearing animals, and the summer of 1901 was passed in the Horse Fly district, headquarters being at 158-mile House. Here, much time was given to oölogy and many rare sets were taken, among them Bufflehead Duck, Bohemian Waxwing, and Tennessee Warbler. Brooks spent the winter of 1901-02 at Penticton in the South Okanagan, an interesting locality, at that time the resort of a small number of Trumpeter Swans. The rare cotton-tailed deer, *Odocoileus leucurus*, still existed fairly plentifully in the valley of the Okanagan River. During the following year, 1902, he made many short trips for collecting and study throughout the Okanagan and later again in the Fraser Valley. His next trip was to Vancouver Island, working from the south end up the east coast and finally settling at Comox; here he remained, collecting sea birds, till April, 1904, when he packed all his belongings into a 15-foot skiff and cruised down the coast to Victoria. From there, passage was taken to Quatsino at the extreme northwest of the Island, where considerable collecting was achieved, including a fine bull Olympic elk. In the late fall, he went back to Sumas.

It was at about this time that a certain portion of his income became attributable to his brush. Previously, his earliest efforts at illustrating could be found in nearly every number of the magazine "Recreation," from 1897 on. It was about 1906 that he illustrated his first large work, Dawson and Bowles' "Birds of Washington."

In June of 1905, Brooks definitely decided to make his permanent home in the dry belt of British Columbia, whereupon he purchased an acre of land at Okanagan Landing and built himself a small cottage. This acre soon became a sanctuary for small birds, an average of 34 species nesting each year within a radius of 100 yards of the cottage. The basic idea of this sanctuary was the elimination or control of undesirable species. The practice of this went as far back as the sixties when his father protected the birds of his compound at Etawah by shooting off the crows and large marauding squirrels. Later, in Ontario the crow blackbirds, house sparrows and red squirrels were discouraged in a like manner. Subsequent moves and more mature investigation proved that other factors, until then unsuspected, like the house wren, should also be dealt with. So that

by this time the experience of all these years was put into effect with the result that this small area, probably three acres at the most, accumulated the densest population of nesting birds, counting both species and individuals, in the United States or Canada.

Particular attention was paid to cowbirds, house wrens and chipmunks; snakes, ants and white-footed mice were also found to be very destructive, and the question of adequate cover and feed was not forgotten. Actually 40 species had nested there *and reared their young* between the years 1905 and 1914; the number of individuals was so great that species, like the robin, that are usually intolerant of the proximity of their kind, were nesting within a few yards of one another. In short, this was a practical attempt to give desirable species full protection against their enemies, with no illusions as to the supposed beneficent action of Nature. The results speak for themselves.

In the following years, many trips were made in Canada—to the Gold Range, the Selkirks, and across the Rockies into Alberta—largely in pursuit of big game, but ever with an eye for new birds and mammals. In 1911 Brooks made his first trip to California, to arrange for his work in connection with Dawson on the birds of California. While there, he made many contacts with the ornithologists of that day. A longer visit was made to California in 1912. During this time, he made trips into many parts of that state to familiarize himself with the birds and their habitats, the most pleasant of these in the company of the late Eugene Law. They made one trip of two months, April and May, 1913, to Arizona, collecting at Tucson and in the Chiricahua Mountains, which they worked carefully from 9000 feet to the plains of New Mexico at the east base. Returning to the Okanagan, Brooks completed his fore-mentioned work for Dawson and also did much work for the National Association of Audubon Societies.

During all these years, Allan Brooks had followed his hobby of military rifle shooting, visiting rifle meetings in many parts of Canada. In the early summer of 1914, he was selected as one of the team to represent Canada at the National Rifle Matches at Bisley, England. At the close of the meeting, in August, came the World War, and he immediately enlisted as a private in a Scotch regiment. Difficulties were encountered, however, owing to the fact that he held an officer's commission in the Canadian Militia, impelling his return to Canada to the training camp of the first Canadian contingent at Quebec. Once more sailing, with the contingent, in October, he did not return to Canada until April, 1919, when he was discharged with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. During these years, Brooks served in various capacities in France, from Platoon Commander to second in command of his unit, and he was selected also as chief instructor of sniping and scouting with the Imperial Forces. At the Armistice he was at Mons. Previously, at the battle of Arras, he was awarded the D. S. O., and was three times mentioned in dispatches.

Returning to the Okanagan Valley, Brooks, fortunate to have come through without a wound and in perfect health, again took up his old life. Immediately he began the work of illustrating Phillips' "Natural History of the Ducks," as well as several works for the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California. Expeditions were now made to Comox, to Queen Charlotte Islands, and again to the plains of Alberta. From there, Brooks went to attend his first A. O. U. meeting, in Washington, D. C., in 1920, after which he visited Louis Fuertes at his home at Ithaca, the two working together in Fuertes' beautiful studio. At the close of the year, Fuertes accompanied Brooks to Florida, where they had the companionship of Leonard Sanford, Thomas Barbour, and Frederic Kennard. Some of the happiest days of Allan Brooks' life were spent in the Everglades and on the coast of that state. He finally travelled home by way of Key West and the Gulf of Mexico to Galveston, and thence through California.

In the summer of 1921, a small building used for storage and as a workshop at the home at Okanagan Landing, burned down. Brooks lost a great part of his earlier collection in this fire, including a series of Indian birds which he had had since he was three years old. Many note books and part of his library also were lost. In October of this year he was visited by his old friend, Harry S. Swarth, who was returning from collecting on the Skeena River. Late summer of 1922 again found Brooks in Alberta, where most of the collecting was done in the Sullivan Lake district near the Saskatchewan boundary. At the end of the year he was again in California, where he remained eleven months; localities visited included Snelling, Merced County, Buena Vista Lake, Mt. Pinos, the San Bernardino Mountains, and Morro Bay. H. S. Swarth and Brooks were in Atlin, extreme northern British Columbia, in the summer of 1924, the former in the interests of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. The results of this trip were issued in Swarth's report, Brooks retaining the birds of his own collecting.

In the spring of 1926, Brooks married Marjorie, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Richard Holmes of Arundel, England. Their wedding trip was spent at Alert Bay, British Columbia, and the following year their only son, Allan Cecil, was born at Vancouver. Matrimony did not make Brooks a stay-at-home, and the ensuing years found him and usually his wife, later his son also, in various parts of the globe. The winter of 1927-28 was spent at Brownsville, Texas. Much interesting collecting was done there, in spite of the fact that a good deal of time had to be devoted to painting, as Brooks had to complete the illustrations of Volume III, "Birds of Massachusetts," which task had devolved on him through the tragic death of his friend, Louis Fuertes. From Brownsville the family went to Silver City, New Mexico, and were met there by R. T. Kellogg, who had for many years made that place his home. Kellogg took them to many places of interest and beauty—the Gila River and parts of the lower Mogollon Range.

Leaving there in March, the Brooks' next stop was Tucson, Arizona, where they joined Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Law and went to the San Pedro River to the east. The object of this trip was to get in touch with one of the most elusive birds of the west—the Beardless Flycatcher. Law had only once seen this species, and no one could definitely locate its summer home in Arizona. Brooks had postulated this as the San Pedro River, and he proved correct in the first week and brought in several specimens, to the great surprise of Law. Another take at this place was a specimen of an unknown blackbird, which still remains unique. At the end of the month the journey was resumed, and a visit was made to Mr. and Mrs. Harry Harris at Eagle Rock, California, where the extraordinary blackbird was subjected to examination by Dr. Bishop, Donald Dickey, and A. van Rossem. Berkeley and Inverness were visited before the return home.

The next year, the Brookses built a second home, at Comox, Vancouver Island, and a part of Allan's growing collection was removed here. About 1700 skins were transported, including only one or two specimens of each species, to be used as models for illustrations and pictures. The family usually spent the winters here, but summer always found them at their real home at Okanagan Landing.

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were the next countries that Brooks explored, during the stay of his wife and son in England. At Grand Manan on the Bay of Fundy several additions were made to the extraordinary list of this favored isle, including Yellow Rail, Western Lark Sparrow, and Eastern Grasshopper Sparrow. Trips were made far out to sea for the collecting of marine birds. Brooks attended the Salem meeting of the A. O. U. in October, and later rejoined his wife at Montreal.

In the late fall of 1931, the family went to New Zealand, where they spent the winter near Auckland. Little collecting could be done, since New Zealand possesses the most stringent anti-collecting laws in the world. However, permission was obtained to collect a few water birds, chiefly Tubinares, which visit the coast of North America.

In spring, 1933, Brooks spent three months alone in California and New Mexico, completely traversing the Mexican boundary of the latter state, touching at the various points of the boundary commission's work of 1893. He stopped at camps where Mearns had collected that year. Thanks to the kindness, hospitality, and untiring interest of Messrs. R. T. Kellogg and Stokley Ligon, Brooks spent an exceedingly interesting time.

Early in August of 1934 a trip was made to Port Simpson, British Columbia, and the district north of the Skeena River mouth, to gain an acquaintance with this region, which had been worked by several early ornithologists. Many of the outlying islands were explored, including Green Island Light House, on a rocky island just south of the Alaskan boundary. The return home was made by way of the Skeena River Valley, with stop-overs at Terrace, Lac Else, and Vanderhoof. The similarity between the birds and flora of Vanderhoof and those of the wooded district of Alberta was recognized.

Soon after, Brooks started with his wife and son on a round-the-world trip, stopping again at New Zealand where the North and South islands were visited and a good deal of work done out at sea. He was badly handicapped by the arbitrary laws of New Zealand, and even a small collection of bird skeletons found washed up on the beaches had to be left behind, as no permit could be obtained to take them out of the country. In February, 1935, the round-the-world trip was continued. A short stop was made at each of several points in Australia; and, en route for England, Ceylon, India, and Red Sea and Mediterranean ports were visited. Arriving in England late in March, the Brookses made a long visit at Arundel, Sussex, Mrs. Brooks' home county, and there the abundant bird life was much enjoyed. After crossing the Atlantic, Brooks visited Washington, D. C., and Ottawa. During this world tour, special study was made of pelagic birds and of the migration of jaegers. Twenty-two species of gulls alone were seen.

In January, 1936, Mr. and Mrs. Brooks were again in California. This visit was notable in that Black and Yellow Rails were encountered at the very place where they had been collected by C. A. Allen more than 40 years previously. Several sea trips were enjoyed with Mr. T. T. McCabe, collecting shearwaters and albatrosses. The Suisun Marshes and Tomales Bay were worked under the guidance of James Moffitt. This same summer, the family made a lengthy stay on the north shores of Queen Charlotte Islands, B. C.

About this time, the last of the series of bird illustrations for the National Geographic Magazine was finished. These included almost the entire list of birds found north of the Mexican boundary line.

Okanagan Landing, British Columbia, April 14, 1937.