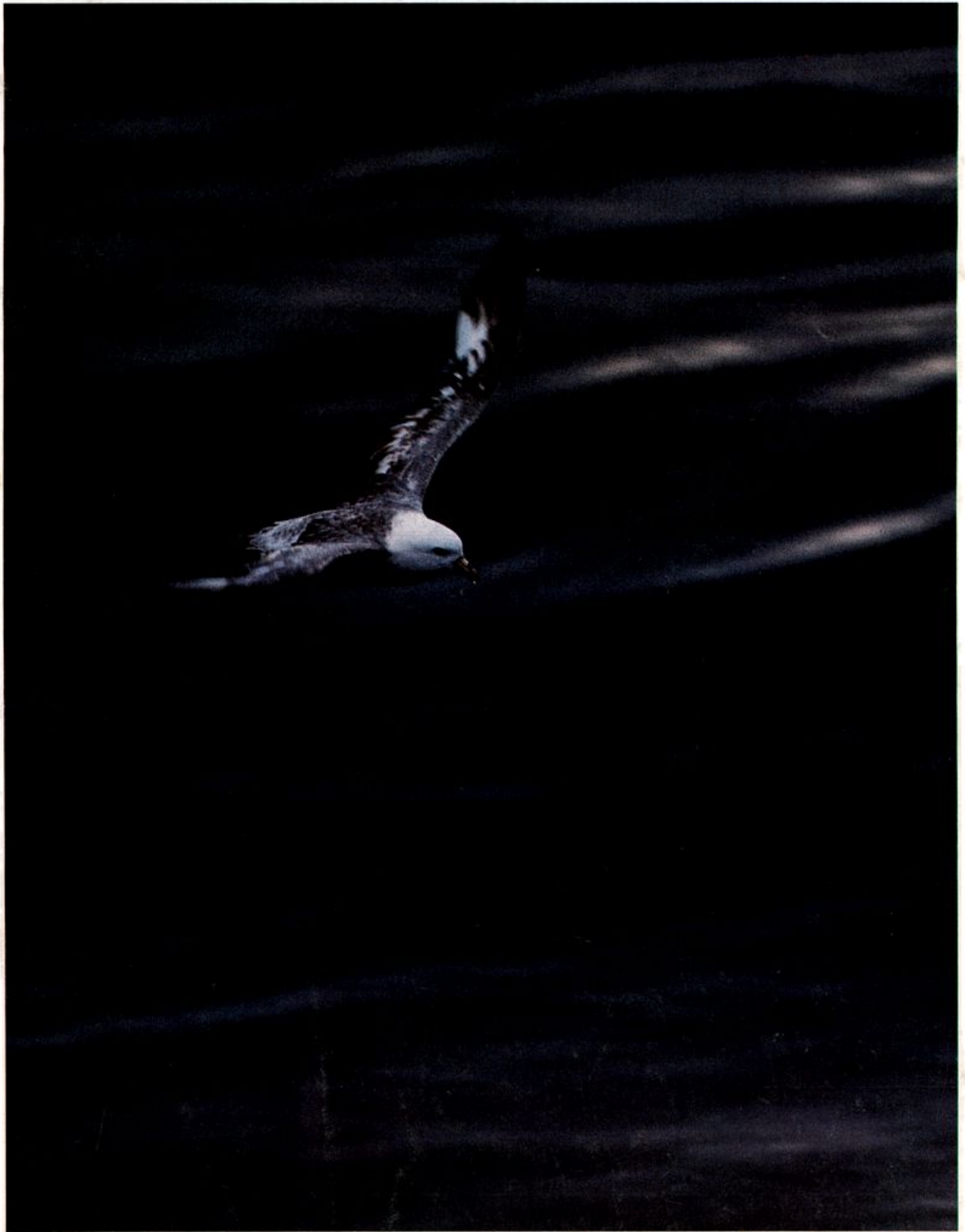


AMERICAN BIRDS

Fall 1986



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. . . from the editor's desk

Robert Cushman Murphy became the first Curator of Oceanic Birds at the American Museum of Natural History in 1926. This was the first such position in any museum. In 1973, at the age of 86, the eminent ornithologist, naturalist, and conservationist died. On his tombstone is carved the image of an albatross in flight. While on the first of his many oceanic research voyages, in October 1912, the boyish, 25-year old Murphy wrote:

I now belong to a higher cult of mortals, for I have seen the albatross! I have been watching the wonderful gliding of the grandest of birds during much of the day. At six this morning . . . in the sunlight, flew the long-anticipated bird, even more majestic, more supreme in its element, than my imagination had pictured . . . and as it turned and turned, now flashing the bright under side, now showing the black feathering that extended from wrist to tip on the upper surface of the wings, the narrow planes seemed to be neither beating nor scarcely quivering. Lying on the invisible currents of the breeze, the bird appeared merely to follow its pinkish bill at random.

This moving description is typical of Murphy; the romantic ocean wanderer whose life's course was set from the time of his first trip to Antarctica aboard a New Bedford whaling and sealing vessel—under sail.

In 1936, *Oceanic Birds of South America* was published in two impressive volumes. Cast in elegant prose with stylistic and aesthetic grace, it contains more than 1200 pages of text, maps, charts, drawings, photographs, and a magnificent series of evocative paintings by Francis Lee Jaques.

In this issue, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Oceanic Birds* as well as the spirit of joyful commitment of its author. We hope you savor Naveen's and Pitelka's articles as much as we did. They place the inheritance of Murphy and Rollo H. Beck into perspective. The photo essay by Bahrt and the Schreibers emphasizes only one area in which seabird research is being conducted today. The articles of Lee, and Watson, Lee, and Backas, and Haney point up several of the exciting facets and discoveries in a field that is enjoying dramatic expansion. And these simply mark the beginning of an issue that was a thoroughgoing pleasure to see through publication.

The genius of *Oceanic Birds of South America* lies in its broad erudition and readability. Volume One is an extremely balanced discussion of the effects of ocean currents, land masses, hurricanes, climate, and meteorology on the biology and distribution of seabirds. Murphy here assesses the impact of these variables using a broad array of facts and countless scientific insights. He articulates the manner in which the areas overlap with one another in their assumptions, themes, and concerns and so clarifies the background on which they are ordered. He depicts nature's oceanic tableau with scholarship and meticulous detail. Volume Two realizes Murphy's conceptual unity, for it focusses on authoritative treatment of the species accounts. These contain all of the essential information as well as each species' natural history, both from the existing literature and from the author's personal field experience. He brings the birds to life by weaving throughout charming cameos expressive of his own encounters with these species while on expedition.

Murphy took the vital initiative and brought his considerable talents to bear on what can only be described as an ambitious intellectual endeavor—the magnitude of which was considerably larger than anyone could have guessed back in the mid-1930s.

Oceanic Birds of South America is now out-of-print; but, it is still eagerly sought from book dealers, and, when a set does become available, it is usually paid for handsomely and quickly. It is certainly not only for the educated specialist. It stands today as a work with great literary merit as well as the timeless classic on marine birds, their biology, and the factors controlling their distribution. It is a wonderful book written by an obviously wonderful man who had a smiling, responsive hammerlock on life. The enviable reputation of Murphy was well-earned and his legendary scholarship lives on in more than 500 scientific papers, nine published books, and copious popular articles published during the incredibly energetic years he spent at the American Museum.

Robert Cushman Murphy began as a landlubber and ended a seadog, leaving for us a legacy as rich as the oceans it fathoms.

Stay tuned!!

S.R.D.

MEETINGS

AAAS ANNUAL MEETING

The American Association for the Advancement of Science will hold its annual meeting February 14-19, 1987, in Chicago. For further information, write to: James Phillips, COS Rep. to AAAS, Babson College, Wellesley, MA 02157 (617-235-1200).

AOU TO MEET IN SAN FRANCISCO

The 105th Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union will be held August 10-13, 1987, in San Francisco, California. Chairing the Committee on Arrangements are Luis F. Baptista and Robert I. Bowman.

WILSON SOCIETY TO MEET

The Wilson Ornithological Society will meet May 27-31, 1987, in Utica, New York.

OWL SYMPOSIUM

Winnipeg, Manitoba, will host a symposium on the Biology and Conservation of Northern Forest Owls of the World February 3-7, 1987. Anyone interested in participating should contact: Spencer G. Sealy, Dept. of Zoology, Univ. of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2. For a paper to be considered for publication, a brief description should be sent in immediately. All papers must be submitted no later than January 15, 1987.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Members of the Northeastern Bird-Banding Association voted to change the name of their organization to The Association of Field Ornithologists. Members felt that the new name reflected the broader scope of their journal, *The Journal of Field Ornithology*.

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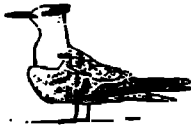
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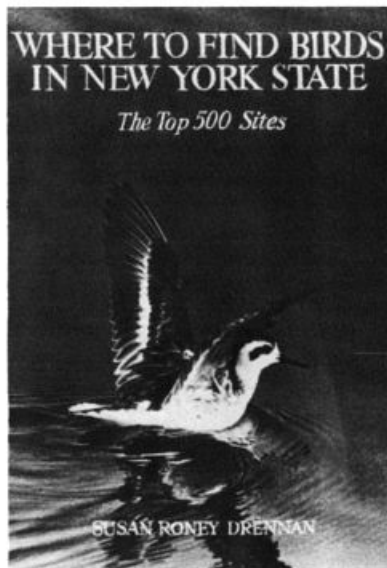
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