

IN MEMORIAM

HOWARD L. COGSWELL, 1915–2006



Dr. Howard L. Cogswell, distinguished field ornithologist, ecologist, author, mentor, teacher, friend of the environment, and long-time member of Western Field Ornithologists, died on 8 June 2006 at the age of 91. Born on a farm in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, in 1915, Howard began his passion for birds as a child when he read books by Thornton W. Burgess, especially his *Bird Book for Children*. When he was about ten he discovered birds as a hobby in the *Handbook of Birds* by Frank M. Chapman and *The Book of Bird Life* by Arthur A. Allen. He hitchhiked to southern California in 1931, took various jobs, and married his

landlady's daughter, Bessie Wilby, in 1938. He familiarized himself with the chaparral and its birds by riding his bicycle into the San Gabriel Mountains from his home in Pasadena. His extensive and detailed notes are well known. In 1944 Joseph Grinnell and A. H. Miller acknowledged him and only five others as those whose "manuscript notes have been most extensively used and cited" in *The Distribution of the Birds of California*. He was a postman when he enlisted in the navy and was sent to the Pacific during World War II, where he served in the V-Mail service. Other sailors in his unit called him "feather funny" because of his interest in birds. His first published article, "Summer Observations of Birds on Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands," appeared in the *Condor* (50: 16–25). Taking advantage of the G. I. Bill, he received his bachelor's degree from Whittier College in 1948 and his master's in 1951. Because of his expertise on chaparral and its birds he was asked to write the chapter on chaparral in *The Bird Watcher's America*, edited by Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. (1965).

Howard received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1962, with his dissertation "Territory Size of Three Species of Chaparral Birds in Relation to Vegetation Density and Structure." While completing his Ph.D. he taught at Mills College in Oakland. My sister was a student at Mills at the time, and she introduced me (John Luther) to Howard while I was a student in high school. He invited me to join him on Audubon field trips. I still remember our excitement when Howard showed me my first Saw-whet Owl on one of those trips. He mentored me in those developing years as a birdwatcher and then later as head of my M. A. committee at California State University, Hayward. I know that many others also remember Howard's introducing them to the exciting world of birds.

Rich Stallcup grew up in Oakland while Howard was teaching at Mills. Rich recalls, "as a very little boy, I would bring him snakes from neighborhood vacant lots to his lab at Mills College, and in exchange he would tell me stories from the field of birds or teach me techniques like the preparation of study skins. Later in life how exciting it was to ride in his airplane trying to census gulls while in a power-dive as he, the pilot, is sifting through a handful of 3 × 5 cards to find out if we were or were not in restricted airspace."

In 1964 Howard joined California State University at Hayward as a professor in biological science. While at CSUH, and as an emeritus professor after his retirement in 1980, he worked with many students on their master's degrees specializing on San Francisco Bay area habitats and birdlife. Chris Swarth received his M. S. in 1983

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working with Howard Cogswell. Chris said of Howard, "he really enjoyed teaching and had a great interest in all aspects of natural history. His special love seemed to be south San Francisco Bay aquatic habitats, especially the bay mudflats and the salt ponds." Howard was an elected director of the East Bay Regional Park District from 1970 to 1982 and was the main driving force behind the development and preservation of many of the east bay area's shorelines. Cogswell Marsh in the Hayward Regional Shoreline, operated by the East Bay Regional Park District, was dedicated to him. The plaque at the marsh says of Howard, "he has played an instrumental role in the planning and creation of this park and continues to conduct and inspire research studies along this shoreline. Through his vision, knowledge and dedication, this restored wetland became a reality for all to enjoy."

Although Howard rarely strayed far from his beloved California, in March 1980 he did venture to Venezuela on a birding tour with former graduate student Rose Ann Rowlett. Rose Ann recalls how Howard showed up "having prepared for the birds with the thoroughness he had tried to teach me, his field guide massively annotated and color-coded as to status and distribution, habitat, and elevation for each species. While serving as a handy reference for the whole group, his elaborate annotations were almost superfluous given how much of it he absorbed in the process—a remarkable amount for a newcomer to 'The Bird Continent.' After all he had shared with me, it was a delight to witness his pleasure on encountering flamingos, Hoatzins, and enormous mixed-species flocks."

Howard Cogswell was an active bird bander and life member of the Western Bird Banding Association, serving as its vice-president 1954–57 and president 1957–59. He helped establish Point Reyes Bird Observatory in 1965 and served on the first board of PRBO. C. J. Ralph recalls, "Howard was a mentor for me in my early years of banding. He took Rich Stallcup and me on many of his field trips when we were in our early teens and was supportive of our adventures over the years. As a board member of WBBA, he was one of the WBBA members that really made PRBO happen." He was also instrumental in establishing the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.

In 1940 Howard became a member of the Cooper Ornithological Society and in 1986 he was voted an honorary member. Honorary membership is "conferred on members of the society who have rendered outstanding service to the society." He became a member of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1944 and an elective member in 1952. He was an honorary fellow of the California Academy of Sciences, a member of the Wilson Ornithological Society, the Association of Field Ornithologists, and the Waterbird Society. In 1966 he was a leader in founding and establishing the Ohlone Audubon Society. He led their first field trip, established their Christmas bird count and, continued to be active in Ohlone Audubon until his death. Howard was the scientific advisor and the inspiration behind the Alameda County breeding bird atlas (in preparation), assembling a large team of former students and those he knew through Audubon to do a thorough breeding bird atlas of the county he lived and worked in. He was the author of *Water Birds of California*, published by the University of California Press in 1977, and many articles and bird surveys concerning San Francisco Bay birds and habitats.

Howard Cogswell served as treasurer/membership chair of Western Field Ornithologists from 1988 to 1992. He set up our first electronic database to track our members. His latest contribution to *Western Birds* was his 2001 review of *The California Condor: A Saga of Natural History and Conservation* by Noel and Helen Snyder.

The enthusiasm, drive, and commitment to teaching and to saving the environment that Howard Cogswell always demonstrated and shared with his friends and his students will be missed by us all. First and foremost, we shall all remember his passion as a field biologist and the joy of sharing days in the field with him.

John S. Luther and Phil E. Gordon