

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF JOSSELYN VAN TYNE TO THE WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BY A. W. SCHORGER

IT will be left to future writers to describe the high rank earned among American ornithologists by Josselyn Van Tyne, who died in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on January 30, 1957. His formal publications may be easily assessed, but few people will realize fully his great contributions to the Wilson Ornithological Society.

He was born in Philadelphia on May 11, 1902. Following undergraduate work at Harvard, he received his doctorate in 1928 at the University of Michigan, with which institution he remained associated until his death. In 1931 he was made Curator of Birds and was instrumental in building the collections of the Museum of Zoology into one of the best among state institutions. Field expeditions to French Indo-China, British Honduras, Guatemala, Yucatán, Bahamas, Panamá, and Bylot Island, and regular attendance at the meetings of the International Ornithological Congress gave him a broad knowledge of the birds of the world.

He became a member of the Wilson Society in 1922 and up to the time of his death was present at all but four of its meetings. There was no interval during that time that he did not serve as a member of a committee or on the Council. From 1935 to 1937 he served as President. During his incumbency careful attention was paid to the business affairs of the Society, and to the programs of the meetings to give full satisfaction to the attendants. In his campaign to increase the endowment of the Society by securing life members, he was very successful.

It is as Editor of the *Bulletin* that his service was outstanding. During a period of ten years (1939–1948) as Editor, he paid particular attention to the quality and usefulness to the readers of the printed papers. Every issue involved a mass of correspondence, diplomatic handling of authors who consider their manuscripts sacrosanct, reading of proof, and endless minor details. Among the 175 papers published during his regime, there are some of particularly high quality, especially in taxonomy and behavior.

A request from members for comments and suggestions that would lead to a journal fulfilling the needs of the Society was among his first innovations. A bibliography of recent literature was added to the *Wilson Bulletin*, the articles being selected for usefulness to the members. A committee on illustrations was appointed to improve the latter. The December, 1941, issue inaugurated the use of attractive frontispieces, approximately one-third of which subsequently appeared in color. The 168 book reviews appeared under the signatures of persons best qualified to prepare them.

Aid to the younger ornithologists was unlimited. Contributors were re-



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quested to avoid using trinomials indiscriminately and attention was called to the fact that binomials were still in good repute. His office acted as a clearing house for research projects, not only to acquaint investigators with the work in progress but to avoid duplication.

He was unstinting in the time devoted to editing although it involved curtailment of his personal research and social life, and sacrifice of holidays. Happening to be in Ann Arbor during this period and desiring to use the library, I inquired if the Museum would be open on Saturday. He replied: "It is not only open on Saturday, but Sunday and evenings."

The Society is unique among purely American ornithological organizations in the founding and maintenance of a library. The proposal to establish a library was made by Frank C. Pellet at the meeting in Ann Arbor in 1928, and two years later an agreement was signed with the University of Michigan whereby the Museum of Zoology became the custodian. Dr. Van Tyne announced in 1939 that the official book-plate of the Society would be a design by George Miksch Sutton, carrying a drawing of the Long-eared Owl—"an appropriate bird since it is named after Alexander Wilson." He was an enthusiastic bibliophile and in his efforts to enlarge the library he made frequent appeals for donations of books and separates. Members were requested to forward a complete list of their publications so that items lacking in the library might be filled. As a result the library now contains approximately 635 books and 8,825 pamphlets. In view of this great service to the Society, the Council at its meeting in Duluth in June, 1957, voted to name the library in his honor, the Josselyn Van Tyne Memorial Library.

It was Dr. Van Tyne's desire that his private collection of books be kept intact insofar as possible. Helen Van Tyne has recently announced her decision to present this valuable collection to the Wilson Ornithological Society, to be incorporated into its library.

I saw him for the last time during the Thanksgiving holiday in 1956. A glance showed that he was very, very ill and it was poignant to find him meticulously reading proof on the Check-List of the American Ornithologists' Union. It would be difficult to find an example of greater devotion to a profession.

DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT, UNIVERSITY OF
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