

In Memoriam

John L. Cranmer-Byng (1919-1999)

Ross D. James

Jack, to those who knew him, loved the intricate beauty of Nature, and felt a lasting responsibility to encourage an appreciation of and a respect for the natural world. He shared this interest with Margaret, his wife for more than 40 years, and together they inspired in their children, Alison, Colin and Sheila, a similar concern for the earth that sustains us all.

Jack was born in England, 18 March 1919, where, encouraged by his parents, he began a lifelong interest in birds before the age of ten. He majored in history at Cambridge, graduating with honours before being embroiled in the Second World War. Shortly after distinguished service in the war, he began to study Chinese, first at Cambridge, and then in 1954, in Singapore. But, neither the formidable task of learning Chinese and the history of China, nor the fascinating bird life of Malaysia, managed to keep him fully occupied, for there he met and later married Margaret.

They moved to Hong Kong in 1956, where he was appointed lecturer in history at the University. In 1964, the family moved to Canada, where Jack became a professor in the History Department at the

University of Toronto. He taught and researched Chinese history there until his retirement in 1984. His concern for environmental issues also led to his becoming an associate of the U. of T. Institute for Environmental Studies. He was active in trying to find ways to conserve urban natural areas. For his research and publications in this area, he received a Federation of Ontario Naturalists Conservation Award. He was an active member of local naturalist organizations throughout his life.

Shortly before retirement, Jack became interested in the life of Percy Taverner, the first ornithologist at what is now the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa. For more than 40 years, Taverner helped lay the foundations of scientific ornithology in Canada, was a leading advocate for bird conservation, and fostered a widespread interest in birds through publications about the birds of Canada. Yet there was little available published information about him. Jack, as a historian and ornithologist, about to have time to pursue personal interests, undertook to chronicle the life of Taverner.

As frequently happens, however, a more modest idea turned out to

be a far larger task. With the wealth of information available, Jack decided such a work had to include “a look at events, personalities, and achievements that were part of the development of ornithology in Canada in the first part of the twentieth century”, not just a chronology of one person’s life. And so, a casual pastime became a decade long absorbing challenge.

I met Jack as he began the biography, searching through backrooms of the Royal Ontario Museum for scattered bits and pieces, but it was with publication that we got to know each other better. I reviewed a thoroughly researched and insightful manuscript, carefully prepared by Margaret. But, after lengthy negotiations with a publisher, and complete acceptance of the content, it was turned down because of money, and despite the promise of a hefty sum from Jack. It is a devastating feeling to be told, in essence, that ten years of your life were not worth it.

Not wishing to go through an overwhelming rejection from another publisher, he called me for

suggestions. I was able to contact and facilitate consideration by the Publications Committee and Editor of the *Canadian Field-Naturalist*, who were able and willing at the time to publish the biography. Special Issue, Volume 110, Number 1, January-March 1996, makes for fascinating reading of the life and times of ornithologists early in this century. It is well worth reading for an understanding of the development of current activities in which all of us now participate.

The completion of the Taverner biography was a monumental undertaking for Jack and Margaret. But, even as Jack’s health began to deteriorate, the compelling fascination of birds kept them involved. They helped with the editing of OFO Special Publication No. 1, *Ornithology in Ontario*, and continued to participate in OFO annual meetings. Jack left us peacefully on 6 April 1999, following a stroke. He enriched the lives of many, with his carefully researched writings that will continue to inspire, and the enthusiasm for nature he and Margaret encouraged in others along the way.

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