



JAMES ALEXANDER MUNRO, 1884-1958

IN MEMORIAM: JAMES ALEXANDER MUNRO

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THE dedication of a granite memorial with metal plaque to James A. Munro at Summit Creek, near Creston in southeastern British Columbia on August 1, 1968, brought into sharp relief the work of an outstanding Canadian ornithologist and conservationist who died in Ottawa at the home of his old friend, Hoyes Lloyd, on September 29, 1958. Erected by the Canadian government through its Wildlife Service, the memorial marks the first such public recognition by the federal government of the accomplishments of one of its own professional conservationists.

As Ian McTaggart Cowan, Dean of Graduate Studies, University of British Columbia, stated when unveiling the memorial, Munro "had been the chief spokesman in western Canada for the cause of migratory birds for 38 years." Dr. Cowan also pointed out that "the defiling of lakes and streams by pollution was a real hurt to Mr. Munro. He spoke up, almost alone, of these problems, and after many years finally found sensitive ears. . . . Mr. Munro sought knowledge as strength and his investigative research resulted in a number of major ecological works, among them reports on fish stocks and patterns based on studies made at the Nanaimo Biological Station, also on game resources in the Cariboo and the Kootenays. During the last two years of his life he concentrated his efforts on Kootenay Flats where he envisaged the establishment of one of North America's most important waterfowl and propagation programs."

Munro was the first to recognize the importance of the Duck Lake marshes in the east Kootenay region as a resting place for migratory waterfowl, and he championed the cause against their reclamation for agricultural use. His foresightedness led to the establishment of the Creston Valley wetlands as "among the most important to migratory birds in the Pacific Flyway."

His contemporaries considered his series of 16 papers on the life histories, populations, and movements of British Columbia waterfowl (1923-1949) to be "models of their kind." Dr. Cowan had collaborated with Munro on many of these programs, and in 1947 they produced together "A review of the bird fauna of British Columbia," which remains today the accepted authority on the ornithology of the province. He termed Munro "a man of unswerving integrity, courage, high principles, imagination, strong ideals yet a man with a certain pragmatism."

Jim Munro was born in Kildonan, Manitoba on November 8, 1884, the youngest of a Scottish couple's 10 children. His father, William Ferguson Munro, came to Canada about 1858, taught school in Ontario, and then

became a land agent in Manitoba. Later in Toronto he was Commercial Editor of *The Globe* newspaper and Deputy Registrar of Deeds. Earlier he had produced a pamphlet entitled "The backwoods life" (Toronto, Hunter, Rose, & Co., 1869) that detailed pioneer life as Elijah Corning experienced it from 1819 to 1829 at Corning's Mills, north and west of Toronto. He also contributed a 9-page chapter entitled "Winnepegoosis" to "The prairies of the North-west" in Rose-Belford's *Canadian Monthly Magazine & National Review* (Toronto, July, 1879). The library of the University of Toronto has copies of both these rarities, and Jim Munro had a copy of a later edition of "The backwoods life."

Jim came to Toronto with his parents in 1898 and, then 14 years old, started work with the Corticelli Silk Company (an association that lasted 10 years), first as a stockroom boy, later as a traveler in eastern Ontario. That same year he started an egg collection—in the Royal Ontario Museum is his second set, that of a Swamp Sparrow he collected in Toronto's Don Valley on June 15, 1898. By 1900 he was making birdskins—still extant is a Least Flycatcher he took at Kew Beach, Toronto, June 17, 1900.

Jim's journal for the period 1899–1910, which his family has given to the ROM, shows he made frequent trips to Coboconk, Ontario, on which he published papers in *American Ornithology* (1904) and the *Ottawa Naturalist* (1910). Earlier, in 1903 and 1904, he wrote a few nature articles for *The Globe* and for Toronto's *Mail & Empire*. In 1911 he published in the *Ottawa Naturalist* an important paper on the spring migration of birds along the Toronto waterfront.

Influential associates at Toronto were the Provincial Biologist of the Ontario Provincial Museum, Dr. William Brodie; Dr. Brodie's son-in-law, John Edmonds; and Sam Wood, who wrote weekly articles for *The Globe*. There is little doubt that his association with these three naturalists was an important factor in his later decision to embark on a career as a professional collector and ornithologist. From 1907 to 1909 he collected reptiles, fishes, and amphibians for Dr. Brodie and "was with him a great deal." This experience helped to round out his knowledge of natural science as Dr. Brodie, at the time of his death in 1909, was generally considered to be the finest all-round naturalist Canada had ever produced. In 1909 Munro advertised in the *Oologist* offering to exchange birdskins and eggs.

On January 7, 1907, Jim married Isabella Louise Hungerford Darby in Hamilton, Ontario. Because of his wife's poor health (tuberculosis), the Munros moved in 1911 to Okanagan Landing, British Columbia, where they spent the rest of their lives and where Jim maintained a 21-acre fruit farm containing 225 peach, plum, and apple trees. In 1915 they had a daughter, Isobel Alison, now Mrs. G. N. Cull of Victoria, British Columbia.

Jim's heart, however, was not in the fruit business, and he managed to spend about half his time collecting. Mrs. Munro also collected and sold butterflies and beetles (see *Oologist*, 1912). In 1911 Jim received 30 cents for small skins, 40 cents for flicker-sized specimens, and \$1.25 for ducks. His material was eagerly sought because of the expert manner in which he prepared his specimens. He sold birds, eggs, and mammals to various institutions (American Museum of Natural History, Tring Museum, United States National Museum) and to private collectors (Fleming, Bishop, Wood, Dwight, Thayer).

He joined the A.O.U. in 1913, and in 1915 and 1916 the British Columbia Provincial Museum hired him to collect for them in the Okanagan Valley. In 6 months of the latter year his specimen totals reached 290 mammals, 528 birds, 1,118 insects, 10 reptiles and amphibians, 300 plants, 35 fishes, and 40 sets of birds' eggs. He also collected bird stomachs for W. L. McAtee, United States Department of Agriculture, to whom he sold some 4,500 stomachs (at 5 cents each) between 1911 and 1918. In 1919 he collected for one month for the Victoria Memorial Museum at Ottawa.

His near neighbor at Okanagan Landing, Major Allan Brooks, was a constant source of help to him and a field companion on many expeditions into the mountains between 1911 and 1920 (interrupted by Brooks' service overseas in World War I). Undoubtedly Brooks' friendship had a tremendous effect on Munro's development as an ornithologist. This association began to cool about 1920, partly because Munro's increasing responsibilities as Federal Migratory Birds Officer (starting that year) allowed him less time for field collecting, and partly because of conflicting personalities, both men being outspoken, touchy, sensitive, and easily upset. Neither had the temperament that allowed for compromise, and an intolerance of each other built up that verged on antagonism, much to the dismay of their colleagues Taverner, Fleming, and Bishop. Brooks and Munro had a high regard for each other's ornithological abilities, but they could not get along with each other in close or constant association.

Mrs. Munro died in 1919, and on September 7, 1921, Jim married Alice Olive Bunting in Victoria, British Columbia. In 1923 they had a son, David Aird, who later became Director of the Canadian Wildlife Service and who is currently Director of Community Affairs in the same department (Indian Affairs and Northern Development).

From 1920 to 1934 Munro was Chief Federal Migratory Birds Officer for the four western Canadian provinces and, from 1934 until his retirement on his 65th birthday in 1949, the same for British Columbia only. His title from 1947 was Dominion Wildlife Officer. His duties included responsibility for the administration of the Migratory Birds Convention

Act, selecting lands for sanctuaries and public hunting grounds, lecturing to schools, sportsmen's groups and naturalists' associations, writing on matters of conservation, and doing research on migratory birds. In 1934 the A.O.U. elected him to Elective Membership and in 1941 to Fellowship.

In the 1940s Munro collected plants for the British Columbia Provincial Museum (276 sheets received between 1943 and 1946). He was Honorary President of the Victoria Natural History Society. After his retirement Jim continued to collect specimens in British Columbia, and in winter in Arizona and California. Between 1950 and 1957 he made 10 extended trips to Morro Bay, California, two of them of 4 months' duration. Just before his death in 1958 the British Columbia Fish and Game Branch employed him to study waterfowl in the Cariboo region.

Throughout his working life Munro was an indefatigable and industrious field worker and a constant contributor to the principal ornithological periodicals in North America. His complete bibliography (on file at the ROM) numbers better than 175 titles over the 55 years from 1904 to 1958. How many of his specimens are extant in the museums around the world is impossible to estimate as he was a professional collector for a long period and had arrangements with a large number of institutions and individuals. As long ago as 1924 the B. C. Provincial Museum had 1,500 of his birdskins, and a few months before his death in 1958 the ROM in Toronto purchased 2,000 of his mammals and 8,461 of his birds. The latter represented 594 species, most of them from western North America, and most collected and prepared by himself.

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