

OBITUARY

JOHN H(OPKINTON) BAKER was a big man, dark-browed and imposing, whose manner awed many who therefore thought him cold. But those who dared face up to him got to know and respect a forceful, innovative individualist who devoted the second half of his life to protecting the birds that attracted him from boyhood.

Born June 30, 1894 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where his father was then Director of Harvard's Drama Workshop, he joined the Nuttall Ornithological Club and the A.O.U. at 17. He became an Elective Member in 1949. Graduating from Harvard in 1915, he spent 17 years in business and was President of the Linnaean Society of New York and Chairman of the Board of the National Association of Audubon Societies when, in 1934, he accepted the executive directorship of that association. The organization became the National Audubon Society in 1940 and Baker was made president in 1944. He married Elizabeth Dabney of Dallas in 1921 and they had two daughters: Barbara (Mrs. David W. O'Brien) and Joan (Mrs. John W. Shepardson).

On first becoming Executive Director, John Baker brought several promising young men to Audubon, including William Vogt, Roger Tory Peterson, Richard H. Pough, and Allan D. Cruickshank, each of whom made his own special mark in the ornithological and conservation world. The society grew rapidly under his aegis, but as so often happens to men of action, he failed to see the implications of his own success: as his bright young men left him, he replaced them with clerks and tried to make all the decisions himself. On retirement he left an organizational shell.

His very real contributions to ornithology and conservation were somewhat indirect ones, the result of his innovations in management and conservation education, and of personal diplomacy. He created the Audubon Camps, an important training ground for young ornithologists who were—especially in Maine—initiated as “kitchen boys” and spent a summer or two rubbing elbows with an experienced staff under the direction of Carl W. Buchheister, who was to become Baker's successor. It was Baker, also, who conceived and initiated the Audubon Nature Centers, Audubon Screen Tours, and local, joint-membership Audubon Chapters, all important advances in helping the public gain new insights into the man-nature relationship, and each a training ground for naturalists and conservationists.

John Baker would unfortunately have nothing to do with his Audubon predecessor, T. Gilbert Pearson; and he engaged in a long struggle with Rosalie Edge, later the creator of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. But from Pearson he inherited a young man who had recently been made director of sanctuaries, and with whom he evolved a deep working relationship. Robert P. Allen was encouraged to pursue his life history studies of Black-crowned Night Herons near his home on Long Island, and in 1939 Baker assigned him to full-time field investigations of the life history and habitat requirements of the rare birds the society had made it a special mission to protect. At Baker's urging the Audubon Society gave fellowships to Cornell University and the University of California at Berkeley, thus enabling James T. Tanner to produce the first Audubon Research Report, “The Ivory-billed Woodpecker” (1942), and Carl Koford, “The California Condor” (1953). But Bob Allen produced three reports single-handedly: “The Roseate Spoonbill” (1942), “The Whooping Crane” (1952), and “The Flamingos: their life history and survival” (1956). These monographs are memorials to their authors and to the man who supported the focused field work they required.

In addition to a substantial expansion of the Audubon sanctuary program, John

Baker deserves most of the credit for the creation, in 1947, of the Sespe Condor Sanctuary in Los Padres National Forest, California; and his persistence made him a key figure in the creation of Everglades National Park, again in 1947.

Baker was also the first conservation leader to speak out against the environmental hazards of DDT use. As early as 1946 he warned, at a Winter Park meeting of the Florida Audubon Society, that "History is replete with examples of man's headlong rushes into control measures with lasting adverse effects he failed to foresee. The damaging possibilities of the broadcasting of DDT outdoors call for restraint and utmost caution in its use. Let us not open another Pandora's Box." In 1958, writing in *Outdoor America*, he publicized the fact that the Secretary of the Interior's Advisory Committee on Fish and Wildlife—of which he had been chairman—had urged a \$25,000,000-a-year research program to screen the chronic toxicity of the 500 different pesticides then in use. Although this caused him to be villified as impractical and irrational, a decade later the U.S. Department of Agriculture requested and was given \$65,000,000 simply to "monitor" DDT levels in the environment, a program it quietly abandoned when its own findings proved too embarrassing to complete and publish.

John Baker was a good field ornithologist and a forceful advocate of the Audubon conservation approach; but because he preferred to work quietly, often on a personal diplomacy basis in high places, his full accomplishments will never be known. This is a loss he contributed to by refusing to help write the history of his very personal 26 years at the helm of the Audubon movement. He said it would hurt too many people if he told it the way it had been. He suffered debilitating strokes in 1967, eight years after retirement, and died 21 September 1973.—ROLAND C. CLEMENT.

NEWS NOTE

"The best laid plans" applies to museums as well as mice and men. The construction of new quarters and the move of the bird collections at Field Museum of Natural History have been postponed and are now on the following (tentative) schedule—construction, 1 December 1974 to 30 September 1975; move, 1 October 1975 to 31 December 1975. During construction, access to the collections will be limited; during the move there will be none. Thank you for your forbearance.—MELVIN A. TRAYLOR, *Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois 60605*.