



GEORGE J. WALLACE, 1907-1986

IN MEMORIAM: GEORGE J. WALLACE

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George Wallace, Fellow of the A.O.U., died on 8 March 1986 at the age of 79, in his home in East Lansing, Michigan. He had spent 31 years, until his retirement in 1972, as a faculty member of the Department of Zoology, Michigan State University. After retirement he and his wife, Martha, took up residence in Grayling, Michigan, but in recent years they had spent their winters in East Lansing.

His autobiography ("My World of Birds: Memoirs of an Ornithologist," 1979, Ardmore,

Pennsylvania, Dorrance Press) provides a warm and entertaining account of this fine gentleman's life. One of 7 children, George was born in 1907 in Waterbury, Vermont, and developed his first interest in birds soon after World War I. He grew up on a farm, where five generations of Wallaces have lived, and attended a one-room country school. Leaving home at age 21 in 1928, he entered the University of Michigan, where he received his A.B., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees. Although he studied for a while

with Josselyn Van Tyne, the two did not hit it off, and Wallace completed his doctorate under the supervision of Dr. Frank N. Blanchard. His dissertation, "Bicknell's Thrush, its taxonomy, distribution, and life history," was published in 1939 (Proc. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist. 41(6): 211-402).

Wallace's first position was as a biologist with the Vermont Fish and Game Service. After only 9 months he took a job as warden of the Pleasant Valley Bird and Wildlife Sanctuary, which earlier had been occupied by Maurice Broun, late of Hawk Mountain. A brief tenure as a game ecologist with the Michigan Department of Conservation followed, before a job as instructor at Michigan State College (later University in 1955) became available.

George Wallace was probably best known as a teacher. He first taught an introductory course in ornithology and then developed a 3-quarter course for advanced undergraduates and graduate students that was both popular and sound. From this came one of the best textbooks of ornithology ("An Introduction to Ornithology," 1955, Macmillan). It went through 3 editions. Ornithologists who took this course or completed a master's degree with Wallace include Robert D. Burns, W. John Smith, John L. Zimmerman, George Fisler, and J. W. Hardy. A doctoral program became established in the mid-1950's, and his Ph.D. students included Lester Eyer, J. P. Linduska, William Pielou, John Mehner, Richard Bernard, Harold Mahan, Robert L. Fleming, II, David R. Osborne, and Gordon L. Kirkland, Jr., all A.O.U. members and some still active in research.

In addition to his textbook, memoirs, and notes in various journals, Wallace turned out some significant longer works, including a standard reference paper on food habits of owls ("The Barn Owl in Michigan," 1948, Michigan State Coll. Agr. Exp. Sta. Tech. Bull. 208: 1-161), "Bird mortality in the Dutch elm disease program" (with W. P. Nickell and R. F. Bernard, 1948, Cranbrook Inst. Sci. Bull. 41: 1-43), and "Studies in neotropical thrushes in Colombia"

(1965, Michigan State Univ. Mus., Biol. Sci. Ser. 3: 1-47). The Dutch elm disease paper came in the thick of the opening rounds of controversy about DDT, and because of pressure from agricultural and entomological interests at Michigan State University, Wallace nearly lost his job. Enlightenment saved the day. He served a time as editor of the *Jack-Pine Warbler* and as a board member of the Michigan Audubon Society.

George Wallace had the charming speech patterns and inflections, as well as the low-key droll sense of humor, of his New England heritage. I recall the 1968 Alaska A.O.U. meeting and especially George's paper. When his time was about up, the chairman of the session signaled him to wind it up. His spontaneous response was, "Why is it that when other people give talks, the time goes so slow and when I give them it goes so fast?" He got the best laugh of the sessions. Although fun to be around, he was shy and sometimes retiring. He did not drink alcoholic beverages or care for late-night parties, so at A.O.U. meetings he seldom attended the pre-dinner cocktail hours or late-evening gabfests. Yet he was always around the formal sessions, attending papers and strolling the halls to talk with anyone about birds.

After my two years with Wallace at Michigan State, I was suddenly immersed in a high-pressure competitive doctoral program at the University of Kansas. I previously had had no contact with professional ornithologists; Dr. Wallace's realm was the perfect intermediate step. He nurtured my qualities and gently began the process of sharpening me for the tough road ahead. I might not have survived academically or professionally without the experience of his gentle touch in the transition stage. I suspect all his former students remember him in part in this way.

George Wallace married Martha Cooper in 1934. She, two daughters, Sylvia McGrath of Nacogdoches, Texas, and Myra Conner of Peace Dale, Rhode Island, five grandchildren, and two brothers survive him.