



ROBERT JAMES NEWMAN, 1907-1988
(From a photograph taken in 1979)

IN MEMORIAM: ROBERT JAMES NEWMAN

FRANCES C. JAMES

Department of Biological Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306 USA

Robert James Newman, retired curator of birds in the Museum of Zoology at Louisiana State University, died at the age of 80 on 28 January 1988. He was well-known in North America and abroad for his studies of avian migration, and was a Fellow of the A.O.U. He is survived by his wife, Marcella Habros Newman, who shared his lifelong interest in birds. Born in Philadelphia on 6 July 1907, Newman received a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1928 with a major in English. In 1945 he entered graduate school in zoology at Louisiana State University and began a long and productive collaboration with George H. Lowery Jr., who was just then completing his own doctoral studies at the University of Kansas. Their several expeditions to the state of San Luis Potosi in Mexico with their wives produced the study skins that became the core of the collection of Neotropical birds for which the Museum has

become renowned. Newman received his M.S. degree in 1951 and his Ph.D. in 1956.

First as assistant curator and then (in 1961) as curator, Newman was active in field studies of all terrestrial vertebrates in Louisiana and in the development of exhibits for the Museum. He was recognized as an expert on the distribution of birds in the United States, serving as regional editor for the Central Southern Region for Audubon Field Notes (now *American Birds*) from 1950-1961 and preparing the national summary three times. From 1959-1962 he served as review editor for literature on migration and orientation for *Bird-Banding*.

He was president of the Louisiana Ornithological Society (1955-1956). At the national level, he served on the Council of the A.O.U. and was its treasurer from 1962-1965. His commitment to service to the profession and to helping others was always exceptional.

The 1950s and 1960s were important and productive years for the Lowery/Newman team. During this period the Museum was the headquarters for a remarkable project in which hundreds of volunteers contributed data to a continent-wide study of nocturnal bird migration. Lowery had worked out a method whereby direct observations of the silhouettes of birds, seen through a 20× telescope against the face of the moon, could be translated into estimates of the magnitude, direction, and rate of migration. With data taken simultaneously at many stations, he and Newman could analyze regional patterns of migration in relation to weather patterns and topographic features. In 1952 Newman published two papers describing the methods and encouraging participation: "Wings across the moon" (*Audubon Magazine* 54: 212-218) and "Studying nocturnal migration by means of the moon" (1963, Special publication of the Museum of Zoology, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Univ.). At the height of the project it involved approximately 2,500 participants at more than 300 localities from Canada to Panama. Newman organized and compiled the results, and based his dissertation on an analysis of the hourly pattern of the number of birds migrating at night. His analysis showed that on most nights the number of migrating birds peaked at ca. 2,300. Three major papers that reported the results of the project, published jointly with Lowery, were "Direct studies of nocturnal bird migration" (1955, pp. 238-263 in *Recent studies in avian biology* (A. Wolfson, Ed.), Univ. Illinois Press), "Selected quantitative data on night migration in autumn (1964,

Special publication No. 3, Museum of Zoology, Louisiana State University, 39 pp.), and "A continent-wide view of bird migration on four nights in October" (1966, *Auk* 83: 547-586). The results showed vast, simultaneous, broad-scale migrations that covered several states. Most birds were flying with the wind. Except for some evidence that the direction of flight was deflected by the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico, the birds did not follow topographic features. These findings were confirmed later with radar data.

The Museum used Newman's attention to detail in other ways. Every sentence of every publication was subjected to his critical editorial review. Even so, he always had time for field trips with the enthusiastic cadre of graduate students, myself included. His colleagues also remember him for his sense of humor. He enjoyed teasing them in a friendly way. I will mention only one of the famous gifts he prepared for the legendary Museum Christmas party. It was an enormous unabridged dictionary that he presented to Lowery, bearing a new cover with the new title "Additions and Corrections to the Birds of Louisiana, Part 1, Loons through Grebes." Former LSU graduate students can provide endless similar anecdotes. This affectionate humor kept Bob going through a long period of declining health, during which he attended A.O.U. meetings with sterling loyalty. In the first decade of his retirement, he remained an avid birder and his enthusiasm stimulated increased field activity by others in Louisiana. We will always remember him fondly.