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IN MEMORIAM: BETSY TRENT THOMAS, 1923–1998

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Betsy Thomas died suddenly in her home overlooking the Thornton River in Rappahannock County, Virginia, on 2 January 1998. She was 74 years of age. Betsy joined the AOU in 1975 and became an Elective Member in 1985. Born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, on 3 August 1923, Betsy was drawn to natural history illustration at an early age. She received a B.A. degree in art history from Skidmore College in 1946 but put aside a career to marry and raise a family. Betsy's husband was a highway engineer whose work for the World Bank took him and his family to Vietnam, Colombia, and finally Venezuela, where they settled in 1964 in Valencia.

As her family responsibilities lessened, Betsy focused her natural history aptitude on birds. She quickly learned to identify the birds around Valencia and in the llanos and coastal cordillera. By 1970 she was helping others find and identify Venezuelan birds, but Betsy's intense interest led her beyond bird finding. One direction took her to conservation, and she was the main driving force in founding the Sociedad Conservacionista Audubon de Venezuela, an important voice for natural history conservation and education in Venezuela.

A second path led to ornithology. Betsy saw the need for additional knowledge of Venezuelan birds. With only the bare essentials and a beaten-up old camper, she set off to the field and spent months on end in wild, remote corners of the country, especially in the llanos. Venezuelan friends were awed by her frugality and fearless determination. In her efforts to improve her scientific skills, she was aided by many ornithologists who sought her help when they visited Venezuela. She, in turn, always took the time to teach Venezuelans about birds. During summers, when she visited her children who had returned to the United States, she took graduate courses at the University of Massachusetts. The results were more than 30 scientific papers, including seminal works on storks, flycatchers, and thornbirds. Betsy returned to the United States in 1984, but she visited Venezuela at least annually to continue her field work.

Throughout her life, Betsy exhibited an incredible appetite to learn and the energy and courage to venture into new fields. She earned the appreciation and gratitude of many for her willingness to share her knowledge. It is hard to believe that a person of such indomitable will has passed on. We will miss her.