

**BULLETIN**  
OF THE  
**NORTHEASTERN BIRD-BANDING ASSOCIATION**

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**EDWARD HOWE FORBUSH**

1858-1929

By Dr. JOHN B. MAY

He is gone, and the woods and fields are dreary.

He is gone, the Friend of the Birds. The Redwing calls from the alder swamp, among the apple trees the Bluebird warbles a soft greeting from the sunny South, high overhead the Wild Geese, in northward-cleaving wedge, honk loudly but in vain. And in the leafless garden, the little Chickadee, his favorite of all the birds, flutters back and forth, and calls, and listens, and calls again.

Edward Howe Forbush, who passed away at his home in Westborough, Massachusetts, March 7, 1929, in his seventy-first year, was a friend to the birds in the full sense of the words. He had studied the lives of our wild creatures from the time when he was a little child. Equipped with the keenest powers of observation, and trained through long years to note every action of the birds he loved, he interpreted their habits with the utmost sympathy and understanding, in language which appealed to young and old alike. Reared in an age which considered the laboratory as the only proper place for the study of natural history, he was a pioneer in bird-protection and in teaching the value of the living creature. As he himself wrote, "I came to see that an examination of the dead was merely a preliminary to the study of the living, and that it was more essential to preserve the living than the dead." From that time on he preached the gospel of conservation, by lectures, by newspaper and magazine articles, and by his books, to an ever-increasing, appreciative following of bird-lovers.

He was a Founder and for many years President of the Massachusetts Audubon Society; field agent for New England of the National Association of Audubon Societies; and a member from its organization of the Advisory Board under the act carrying out the Migratory Bird Treaty between this country and Canada. He was a Fellow of the American Ornithologists'

Union and a member of its Council. He was the first president of the Northeastern Bird-Banding Association and of the Federation of the Bird Clubs of New England. All of these organizations have been active in bird-protection, and Mr. Forbush was instrumental in securing and enforcing many acts of protective legislation, both local and national. He was also active in having set aside many areas for permanent wild-life sanctuaries, and it is most fitting that recently a group of his friends purchased a beautiful woodland valley among the Berkshire Hills and presented it to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as the Edward Howe Forbush Wild-Life Sanctuary. It is a satisfaction to all his friends to know that this was accomplished during the lifetime of Mr. Forbush, and to know that he had himself visited and approved the sanctuary.

It was as an economic ornithologist that Mr. Forbush was known most widely. His studies of the food habits of our birds, especially in their relation to agriculture, earned him an international reputation, and his writings are quoted by scientists wherever English is spoken, and have been translated into several foreign languages. His investigations have furnished data of great value to agriculture, horticulture, and forestry and have been a real contribution to the welfare of the world's peoples.

At the time of his death Mr. Forbush was still engaged in the preparation of his three-volume work upon the "Birds of Massachusetts and other New England States," published by the Commonwealth. The first volume, issued in 1925, met with instant approval, and was followed in 1927 by the second volume. The manuscript of the final volume was almost completed when Mr. Forbush laid down his pen for the last time, only the introduction and a chapter or two on extinct birds being lacking. These three volumes, the culmination of his many years of observation and research, the outgrowth of his deep and abiding love for our feathered friends, the masterpiece toward which all his earlier efforts had been leading, will be a lasting memorial to Edward Howe Forbush.

We honor the memory of Edward Howe Forbush for his outstanding accomplishments in economic ornithology, we praise him for his great work in wild-life conservation and protection, we read again and again his charming descriptions of the intimate lives of our feathered neighbors, but it is still another side of the man himself which has endeared him to his host of friends and which renders so poignant our sense of loss in his passing. He held a most unusual place in the hearts of hundreds of persons who had never met him face to face but who



EDWARD HOWE FORBUSH

knew him through the revelation of his writings. Since his death scores of letters have been received by his former associates in the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture, expressing the high esteem in which he was held, and many of these letters have been from people whose only contact with him had been by means of correspondence. His sincerity and single-mindedness of purpose, his patience and tactful consideration, his friendly interest in the problems of the veriest tyro in bird-study, gave a personal touch to all his relations with others. Visitors found him a patient listener, always ready to draw upon his great store of knowledge for their benefit. He was modest and unassuming in his bearing, but when, as a result of thorough investigation and keen judgment, he formed an opinion, he was ready to back it against any man or group of men, and his ideas were valued accordingly. His kindness, his saving touch of humor, his never-failing sense of justice, won friends even among those who opposed him in matters of policy in conservation, and he accomplished his ends with a minimum of effort as, tall, spare, and almost ascetic in appearance, he moved quietly about his chosen work. There must be a tremendous satisfaction in knowing that one has made a real contribution to the welfare and happiness of many, many people, and this satisfaction belonged to Mr. Forbush.

His was a clean and upright life, dedicated to the advancement of interest in natural and simple things, and it was most appropriate that as he was laid away to his last long rest, birds called in the near-by pines, and among the beautiful flowers which covered him, there lay a simple spray of pussy willows, "from the woods he loved so well."

Cohasset, Massachusetts.