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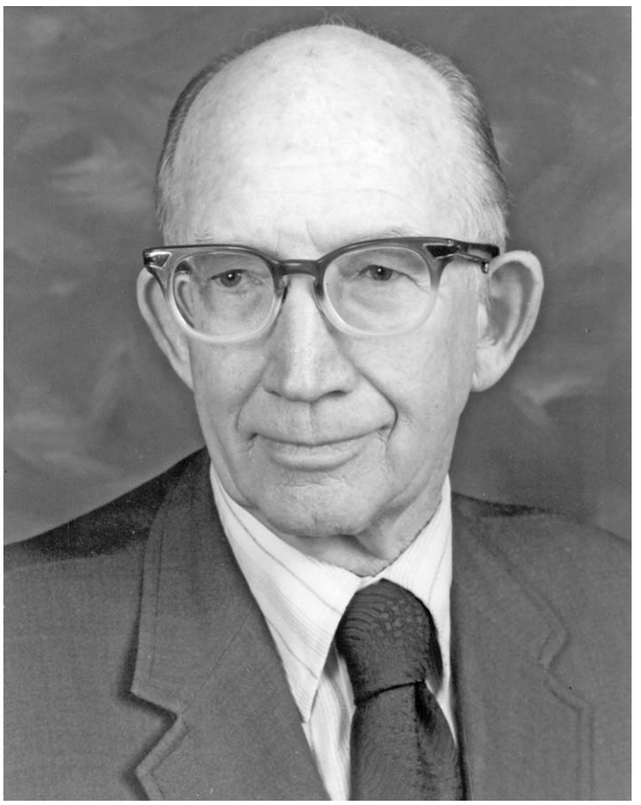
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IN MEMORIAM: WILLIAM HARROUN BEHLE, 1909–2009

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William Harroun Behle, 1909–2009

William "Bill" Harroun Behle, AOU Fellow (1951), Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1959), Honorary Member (1958) and Past President (1972–1974) of the Cooper Ornithological Society, and member of the Wilson Ornithological Society (since 1935), died at home on 26 February 2009, just two months and 17 days before his 100th birthday. He was bedridden for his last two months, but his mind remained sharp.

Bill was among that special group of ornithologists trained at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ) at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, during the 1920s and 1930s, to whom a large share of North American ornithologists today trace their professional genealogies. Having obtained a B.A. (1932) and M.A. (1933) at the University of Utah, he earned a Ph.D. (UC, 1937) while working as a research assistant at the MVZ, where he was among the last of Joseph Grinnell's students. (He passed on to me a pair of calipers that Grinnell had used.) In 1937, he returned to the University of Utah as an instructor, and in 1951 he became a full professor. Other than four summers as a ranger-naturalist at Grand Canyon National Park, his entire professional career was spent at the University of Utah.

Bill was active in the Utah science scene, serving as president of the Utah chapter of Sigma Xi (1959–1960), of the Phi Sigma biological society (1931–1932), of the Utah chapter of the American Association of University Professors (1950–1951), and of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters (1959–1960). He served on the board of directors (1937–1970) and as president (1954–1955) of the local Audubon Society. An early colleague and, in a sense, mentor, Ralph Chamberlin, named a spider, *Aphonopelma behlei*,

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after him. Bill was the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award in Biological Sciences from the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters (1977). He received the first Distinguished Natural History Award given by the Utah Museum of Natural History (1982), five years after his retirement.

Bill maintained a rather heavy teaching load, instructing thousands of undergraduates and training 32 graduate students; most of the latter received Master's degrees, and many went on to doctoral degrees. He was an integral part of the Biology Department, acting as head of the Department of General Biology throughout its existence (1948–1954) and as premedical counselor (1943–1953). He loved his classes and enjoyed teaching. As he lectured, his frequent jokes revealed a subtle sense of humor (you knew he was joking when you saw his slight smile or caught his soft chuckle). He was beloved by his graduate students and, owing to his middle name, he was affectionately called, though not to his face, the "Great Blue Heron."

Despite his teaching load, Bill was very active in field work. With his graduate students, he sorted out the systematics and geographic variation of Utah breeding birds. He found that a large portion of the Great Basin, following the decline of the Pleistocene Lake Bonneville, was occupied by Horned Larks that differentiated significantly in this unique environment and whose breeding range shadowed the former lake. Bill believed that the education of a student should be broad. His field trips provided lessons in history as well as biology: he was well-versed in Utah history, from the prehistoric Anasazi basket makers to the settling of the state by American pioneers, who included his grandmother. His trips were enhanced even more when he joined forces with the botanist Seville Flowers (yes, there really was a botanist named Flowers) and mammalogist Steven Durrant. His interest in history was reflected in many publications on the natural history of birds, bird colonies and rookeries, and the islands of the Great Salt Lake. Two of his last publications, *Utah Birds: Historical Perspectives and Bibliography* (1990) and *History of Biology at the University of Utah* (2002), are especially comprehensive.

Bill's major contributions to ornithology, other than his service in organizations, were 140 publications on the biogeography and systematics of birds in western North America. He spent more than 40 years in that endeavor and was largely responsible for amassing the collection of some 23,000 specimens now housed in the Utah Museum of Natural History. He was a strong advocate for the Museum and served on the original faculty committee that recommended a single university facility to house the scientific collections then held in separate academic departments. Following his retirement in 1977, he remained very active as an Emeritus Professor of Biology and Emeritus Curator of Birds for at least 25 years. Throughout his university tenure, he was active in civic organizations such as Sons of the American Revolution, Salt Lake City Tracy Aviary Commission (1947–1977), Board of Directors of the University Credit Union (1962–1969), and the Advisory Committee on upland game birds, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (1950–1955), to mention a few.

Many of his graduate students also worked on biogeographic or systematic questions that helped round out his broad-reaching studies on the birds of Utah. With fond memories I think of the first Turkey Vulture I collected and asked him for some help in preparing. He responded, "No thank you, I have already skinned my Turkey Vulture." Interestingly, when Bill traveled afar on vacation he did not look at birds. I recall asking him about birds he saw on a trip he and his beloved wife, Dorothy, made to Spain in the 1960s. He responded, "Well, I really did not see any, but I saw one heck of a lot of wonderful buildings and other sights." Bill seemed to like dead birds better than live ones. One graduate student had a large wire cage in the bird range where he kept a dozen or so Black Rosy-Finches. For several nights in a row, after the students were gone, Bill would dispatch one or two and leave them on the floor of the cage. In the morning he would tell the student that those poor finches that died overnight really should go into the collection and would he make skins of them?

Bill married Dorothy Davis in 1934, and they were together 67 years. She passed away in 2001, at the age of 93. Dorothy and Bill are survived by two sons, Howard and Raymond, their partners, and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren, none of whom, so far as I know, is interested in ornithology.

Eric Rickart, curator of vertebrates at the Utah Museum of Natural History, and Sarah George, Director of the Utah Museum of Natural History, provided important insight during the writing of this memorial.

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