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Marion A. Jenkinson Aou Service Award, 2010

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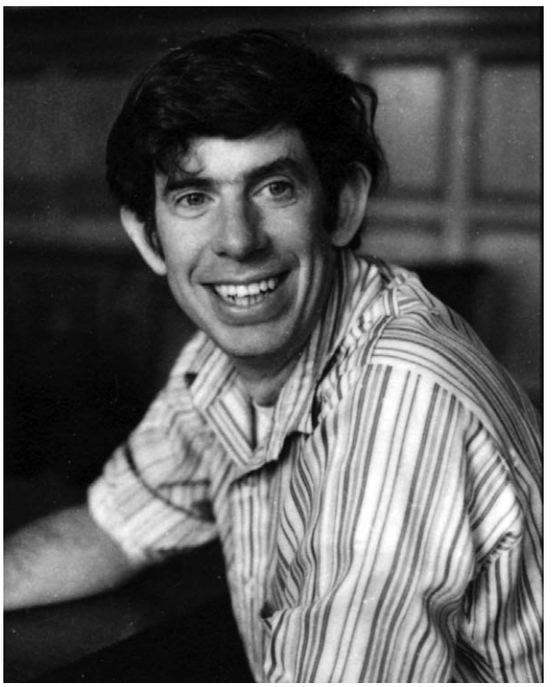
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MARION A. JENKINSON AOU SERVICE AWARD, 2010

Frank B. Gill



Frank B. Gill in the library at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, 1974. (Photograph by Jerry Freilich.)

The name Frank B. Gill is almost synonymous with the science of ornithology and its largest professional organization, the American Ornithologists' Union. His career began when he was 7 years old. His grandfather handed him a pair of binoculars and directed his attention to a Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) perched on a bird bath. "This was the first time I saw a bird through binoculars. I saw the big spot on the breast and I was hooked [on] the power of identification. I remember, 'This is neat!'" At ages 8, 9, and 10 he was watching birds around his home in Teaneck, New Jersey, and anywhere his grandfather would take him. As a teenager, the passion continued and led him to the University of Michigan, where he discovered the Museum of Zoology and a group of birders. He became an ornithologist without further thought. He went on to earn his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1969 and joined the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, later that year.

He continued his early research on foraging economics and became an influential voice in the study of geographic variation and speciation in island white-eyes, North American warblers, chickadees, and titmice. For his contributions to the science of ornithology, Gill received the William Brewster Memorial Award in 1998.

During his years at the Academy of Natural Sciences, he founded and directed Visual Resources for Ornithology (VIREO), which provides a wealth of pictures of birds that are especially useful to teachers of ornithology. He also became a thoughtful participant on several AOU committees, and his governance work culminated in his election to the presidency, an office he held from 1998 to 2000. Following his term as president, Gill "retired" and became treasurer (2005–2009), in which capacity he restructured the AOU finances and "retired" again with the union in sound fiscal condition.

Gill's contributions to the AOU and to North American ornithology go far beyond AOU governance. In the late 1980s, he championed the idea of writing the life histories of all North American birds, then a fledgling project of the AOU to replace the dated series by A. C. Bent. The species accounts would summarize all that was known about a species and indicate directions for future research. The accounts of many species have also provided

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the basis for informed conservation management. Gill not only located the start-up funds for this immense project and convinced the AOU to back the project financially, he became its director in 1990. He convinced ornithologists from across the continent to write accounts and continued to guide the project into its final stages. During those years, the Internet became increasingly accessible and diversified. Gill was quick to adapt his vision of the life histories of *Birds of North America* to the new communication reality. At the invitation of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, the staff and editorial structure of the BNA accounts were transferred there, and *Birds of North America* is now available online. The electronic medium also allows continuous updating of the accounts.

Also in the late 1980s, Gill completed work on his textbook, *Ornithology*, which became the leading text in the field. The book is unusual in its breadth of coverage and its depth on selected, key areas of ornithology. The balance of breadth and depth has continued to evolve as the text has passed through a second and third edition and the field of ornithology has advanced and shifted emphases.

For his many contributions to the governance of the union and for his creativity in providing outlets for ornithological knowledge, the American Ornithologists' Union is pleased to award Frank B. Gill the Marion Jenkinson AOU Service Award for 2010.

Award criteria.—The Marion A. Jenkinson AOU Service Award was created by the Council in 1996 to honor Marion Jenkinson Mengel, who served the AOU as treasurer and in other capacities for many years. It is awarded to an individual who has performed continued extensive service to the AOU, including holding elected offices but emphasizing volunteered contributions and committee participation. Recipients are selected by the AOU Executive Committee. The award consists of a framed certificate.

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