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IN MEMORIAM: MARY ANNE HEIMERDINGER CLENCH, 1932–2011

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Mary Heimerdinger Clench, ca. 1968.
Photo courtesy of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

Mary Anne Heimerdinger Clench, an AOU member (1953), Elected Member (1969), and Fellow (1973), was born on 18 January 1932 in Louisville, Kentucky, and died on 27 June 2011 in Gainesville, Florida. As a child, Mary, her older sister, Alice, and their parents Henry and Alice Heimerdinger moved to Manhasset, Long Island, where her father was public relations director for National Distillery—no doubt a challenging job during Prohibition. Mary seemed to have received her self-confidence from her father and her love of the outdoors from her mother, an avid gardener.

Mary's love of birds, however, was fostered by a series of mentors. Her high school biology teacher in Manhasset, Jesse V. Miller, was an active bander who involved his students in bird banding. After working with Miller for four years, Mary obtained her own banding permit and joined the Eastern Bird Banding Association in 1951. Miller also loaned her his copy of Margaret Morse Nice's *Watcher at the Nest*, which she said "clinched" her choice of a career. She chose Wheaton College for her undergraduate education because they offered a course in ornithology. In 1953, she graduated from Wheaton (where she was a member of the synchronized swim team) with a B.A. in Biology. Her ornithology professor, Clinton V. McCoy, encouraged her to go on to graduate school. She joined the AOU and began graduate school at Yale, working first with S. Dillon Ripley and later with Philip S. Humphrey. At Yale she earned two master's degrees and a Ph.D. The project for her first M.S. (1955), "The population increase of the Northern Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus abieticola* (Bangs) in New England," did not result in a thesis, but in a report that was never published. Her second M.S. (1959) was a non-thesis degree in Biology. Her Ph.D. dissertation (1964), "A study of morphological variation in the dorsal and ventral pterylae of Passeriformes," was published in part in *The Auk* (1970, 87:650–691).

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Mary's interest in avian anatomy was strongly encouraged by Kenneth C. Parkes at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. She began work at Carnegie as a research assistant in ornithology in 1963 and, on completion of her Ph.D., was promoted to assistant curator. In 1967, she married Harry K. Clench, a lepidopterist and associate curator at Carnegie. They spent considerable time in the Bahamas, he seeking butterflies, Mary seeking the winter home of Kirtland's Warbler. Mary remained at Carnegie, became associate curator of birds, and was also an adjunct associate professor of biology at the University of Pittsburgh. She continued to work on pterylosis and was intimately involved with the long-term banding and bird-monitoring efforts at Carnegie's Powdermill Nature Reserve, effectively linking museum and field ornithology. Following Harry's death in 1979, Mary suffered a stroke and resigned her position at Carnegie. In 1980, she moved to Gainesville, Florida, to assist her mother, but also continued her pterylosis research at the Florida State Museum, University of Florida, where she served as adjunct curator of birds. After her mother's death in 1983, Mary took a research position at the Veteran's Administration Medical Center in Gainesville (1983–1986). In 1987, she accepted a position as a research assistant professor at the University of Texas Medical School, where she pursued research related to the avian cecum and motility in the avian gut.

Mary served on the AOU Council (1977–1978) and on several AOU committees. Most importantly, she served on the Committee on Bird Collections (1966–1982), chairing that committee from 1973 to 1980. Mary was also active in the Wilson Ornithological Society in several capacities and served as its president (1987–1989).

Among other contributions, Mary served on the Board of Directors of the National Audubon Society (1982–1984), as editorial advisor for *American Birds* (1980–1994), and as editor of *Living Bird* (1980–1981). Always an advocate of roles for amateurs in ornithology, at the 1990 joint meeting of the Association of Field Ornithologists and the Wilson Ornithological Society, Mary gave the lead presentation at a symposium on *The Amateur in Ornithology* with her lecture "From the pilgrims to the present: contributions of amateur ornithologists."

In 1996, Mary and coauthor John Mathias were awarded the Edwards Prize (for the best major article published in the previous volume of the *Wilson Bulletin*) for their review of the anatomy and functions of the avian cecum.

Mary Clench danced through life on a tightrope from which she studied birds, advocated for conservation, and mentored others who shared her interests. She balanced her passions for avian anatomy and the study of living birds, for service to professional ornithology and to the birding public, and for her career and her family. Even when she fell from that rope—such as when she fell and broke her arm at the 1985 Wilson meeting where she was serving as co-chair of the scientific program—she cheerfully climbed back to the rope and the task at hand.

Mary was predeceased in 2004 by her sister Alice Wells Cullu, who died at age 78 after a long career as a medical editor for the Veteran's Adminstration.

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