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In Memoriam



The Auk 120(4):1195–1198, 2003

IN MEMORIAM: DEAN AMADON, 1912–2003

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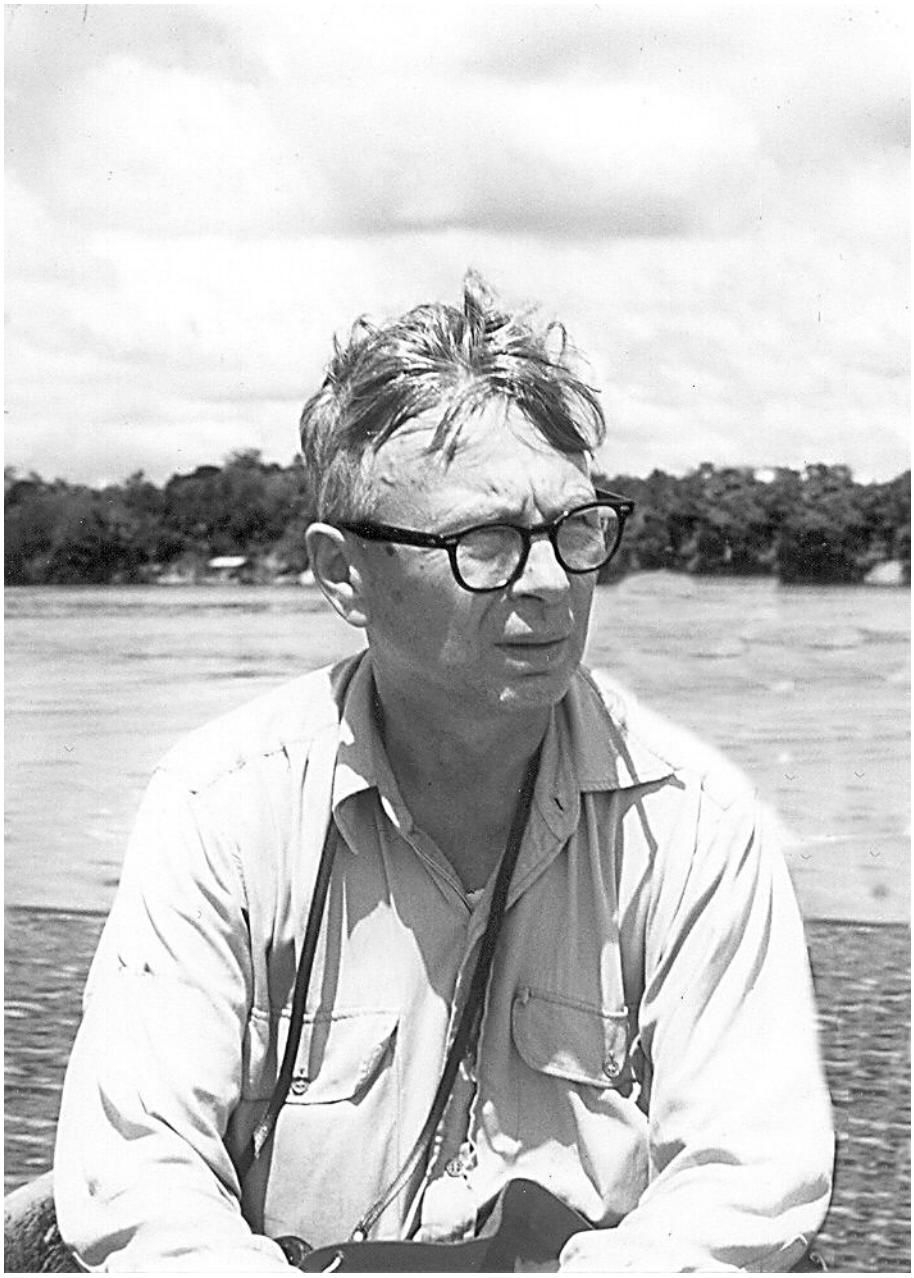
Dean Amadon, a former President of the AOU (1965–1966) and for three decades my best friend, died after a brief illness at home in Tenafly, New Jersey, 12 January 2003. Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 5 June 1912, Dean was already interested in birds before his parents moved to a dairy farm in Cattaraugus County, western New York, in 1919. As a farm lad, he helped with chores and raised rabbits and trapped fur-bearers in winter to supplement the family's income. He observed birds and mammals; read books by John Burroughs, Thornton W. Burgess, and Ernest Thompson Seton; and in 1925 published a note on crows in *A Paper for Boys*, a Sunday school paper.

A high school teacher told Dean that Professor E. H. Eaton, the authority on New York's birds, taught at Hobart College, Geneva, New York. He entered Hobart as a freshman in 1930, the year in which he also joined the AOU. In late 1933 Dean hitchhiked from Hobart to New York City to attend the AOU 50th Anniversary Meeting at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). Hitchhiking back upstate to Hobart after that meeting, he paid the driver with a cock pheasant that he had mounted. By the time he graduated, Phi Beta Kappa, from Hobart in 1934 he had published an article on western New York birds in *The Auk*. He undertook graduate studies at Cornell University with Arthur A. Allen (he also briefly studied at the University of Wyoming) but could not sustain graduate studies in the depths of the Great Depression, and after a few semesters, accepted a job with the Connecticut Fish and Game Department in 1936. Paid only at the end of the month, he twice pawned his Phi Beta Kappa key for $3.00.

Frank M. Chapman, of the Ornithology Department at the AMNH, interviewed Dean in 1937 and hired him with funds from Mr. P. B. Philipp to curate eggs including those from Mr. Philipp's own collection, thus commenced a 66-year association with the American Museum. At the museum in 1937 Ernst Mayr, poring over specimens, suggested that Dean, in his spare time, help him in research on the vast Whitney South Seas collections. Needing no encouragement, Dean began a lifelong friendship with Ernst. Many publications treated various taxa of Pacific birds, some coauthored with Mayr and many authored by Amadon alone. In this period, Dean began his lifetime research on birds of prey. Drafted in 1942, he served in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, dealing with insect and rodent control, working with bubonic plague carried by field rats in Hawaii. In his spare time, he conducted research on the Hawaiian honeycreepers (Drepanididae) that were to form the basis for his doctoral thesis. He also spent time in the Philippines and developed a knowledge of its birds. Meanwhile, he had met Octavia (Tavvy) Gardella whom he married in 1942. The couple were devoted to one another, and to their two daughters, Susan and Emily. Tavvy often attended AOU and other meetings with Dean. They frequently entertained local and overseas ornithologists, especially after moving in the 1950s to their Tenafly home in the 1950s, where they made everyone feel welcome. Dean's devotion to Tavvy was especially evident in his care of her and of the children during a critical illness Tavvy suffered in the 1950s; he somehow continued his museum work and productivity. Later, after Tavvy was disabled by a series of strokes, Dean cared for her at home. He exhibited his love, kindness, and infinite patience when with her, and maintained an outward calm as well as his cordiality, helpfulness, and friendliness to visitors.

Following World War II, under special arrangement with Professor Allen at Cornell, and with administrative leave from the museum, Dean was able to complete his doctoral thesis in 1947 with a minimal residence at Cornell. Known among graduate students at Cornell (including Kenneth C. Parkes and Allan R. Phillips) for his extensive knowledge of birds and his wry sense of humor, he was also an aggressive ping-pong player. He prepared his thesis on Hawaiian honeycreepers for *The Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* (1950). Meanwhile his first views on subspecies appeared in 1949; six more conceptual papers on lower categories (genus, species, subspecies) were to follow in the next four decades, two of which I was fortunate to coauthor. With Ernst Mayr

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Dean Amadon, 1912–2003

(Dean Amadon on the Nocturnal Curassow Expedition, American Museum of Natural History, Rio Negro, Amazonas Providence, Venezuela. Taken by Albert Earl Gilbert, January 1972.)

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he published the influential "A Classification of Recent Birds" in 1951. Like Mayr, Dean favored large genera that include species of diverse intrageneric relationships and (usually) sympatric species that are valuable in interpreting features likely to be of importance in maintaining reproductive isolation among congeneric species.

Dean's friendliness attracted visitors and the use of the collection by researchers, many of them foreign, as well as artists, amateurs, and fellows and grantees of the F. M. Chapman Fund. Friends, including the Lamont family, provided financial support, naming Dean as Lamont Curator of Birds in 1955. In 1957 he became Chair of the Department of Ornithology, a position he held for 16 years. The department was a beehive of activity within that period. Robert Cushman Murphy, John Zimmer, Jim Chapin, Tom Gilliard, Wesley E. Lanyon, Charles Vaurie, and I were on the curatorial staff, and research associates Jean Delacour, Gene Eisenmann, Jim Greenway and Walter Bock were very active. Dean was influential in the establishment and direction of the F. M. Chapman Memorial Fund, particularly in its support of young, would-be ornithologists, serious amateurs, and prospective Chapman Fellows. William Phelps's (senior and junior), Crawford Greenewalt, John du Pont, and Jared Diamond were among his frequent visitors, as were Bob Goelet, Leonard and later William Sanford, Bayard Reed, Frank Smithe, and many others. Staff members Mary Le Croy, John Farrand, and Stuart Keith were encouraged in their research efforts, as was Helen Hays' productive Great Gull Island Project. Dean was interested in the departmental archives, and its important art collection and also worked at upgrading the bird halls. Dean believed that research was best conducted in uninterrupted peace and, rather than troubling the curatorial staff with chores that came up, often performed the tasks himself.

Adjectives ascribed to Dean were quiet, charming, engaging, self-assured but self-effacing, unassuming, gentle, uncomplaining, absent-minded, hard-working, helpful, kind, thoughtful, loyal, wise, witty, and scholarly. I never once saw him lose his temper or show anger. He was especially encouraging to young students and artists and was ever generous with his time. He helped several of them financially himself, and he often assisted by finding departmental funds to employ them part-time. Liberal politically, Dean had a penchant for the underdog, evident in his sports interests as well. Importantly, on the F. M. Chapman Memorial Committee, he did not like to turn applicants down and often argued for partial support, or a trial grant, in hopes of encouraging applicants to continue progress in ornithology. Dean wielded a strong editorial pen, helpful indeed to colleagues with prospective articles.

Dean authored or coauthored more than 400 scientific articles, reviews, books, and reports (a list of his publications is available from the Ornithology Department, AMNH). He considered his and Leslie H. Brown's *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World* (1968) and his and Jean Delacour's *Curassows and Related Birds* (1973) as his most important publications. Birds of prey were a central theme after 1968, and he was consulted by many colleagues. Other ornithologists find Dean's research on the Hawaiian honeycreepers; on his concepts of superspecies, species and subspecies; and various of his taxonomic treatments of avian families and subfamilies as especially insightful. He also wrote a popular book on avian evolution and zoogeography and coauthored the "coffee table" book *Land Birds of America* (1953).

Dean was a member of the AOU for 72 years, a Fellow for 54 years, a member of its Council for decades, and President in 1964–1966; he was a member of the AOU Committee on Nomenclature and Classification that produced the 1957 check-list and a popular figure at the Centennial AOU Meeting in 1983. He served as President of the Linnaean Society of New York and received its Eisenmann Medal in 1998. Dean was on the board of, and a life member of, the Raptor Research Foundation. He was president of the John Burroughs Memorial Association and was involved in its development and the enhancement of its sanctuaries. He served on boards of the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell, the Delaware Museum of Natural History, and the Explorers' Club. A Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and Honorary Member of the British Ornithologists' Union, he was awarded a Doctor of Science degree by Hobart College, who also bestowed upon Dean its Alumnus of the Year 2000 medal. Dean taught as a visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin for a semester. His conservation bent was evident in his serving as assistant chairman of the American section of the International Conference on Bird Protection (ICBP), predecessor of BirdLife International, his acting to make the department available for meetings of environmental organizations, and his strong financial support of them.

Field work was not neglected. Indeed, Dean constantly and thoughtfully observed birds until the last two weeks of his life. In addition to his wartime field work, he observed birds of prey whenever and wherever he could; he often watched hawk migration at Hawk Mountain and elsewhere. He journeyed to Africa several times and studied with Leslie Brown "on safari." He also studied in the Galápagos Islands and conducted field research in Australia, the South Pacific, and the Great Barrier Reef islands. With Don Eckelberry he made lengthy trips to Mexico and Argentina (see "Argentina through the back door," *Explorers' Journal* 39:2–9, 1961). He became a good friend of William Partridge, helped Bill to study at AMNH, and enabled the museum to purchase part of Partridge's extensive Argentine collections; the only

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assignment ever given me by Dean was to sort, identify, and apportion the Partridge collections among four museums. Dean visited the Archbold Biological Station in 1943, as its first visiting scientist (typically, the visit resulted in a publication on the Florida Scrub-Jay). He became a friend of its founder Richard Archbold, and up until the 1990s, he and Tavvy frequently made a winter trip to Lake Placid, Florida, to study for two weeks to a month at that station.

Dean's trusting nature made him prey to unscrupulous home repair and auto dealers; over the years, Dean favored purchasing used cars. These often proved to be "lemons," requiring frequent returns to the dealer for pricey repairs. He got along famously with collections manager Charlie O'Brien and technician Allen O'Connell at the museum whose custodial and service staff would do any thing for him. He seemed able to chat comfortably and unhurriedly with anyone, including attendants at service stations, shops, and hotels. Naturally sympathetic and kind, he more than repaid favors. Ever an optimist, he would say "Well, let's go on!" when a heavy snowstorm forced frequent pauses; once it took us over four hours to reach the museum from New Jersey, only to find that the museum had closed for the day. He always requested that I drive, perhaps in the knowledge of his absent-mindedness and his tendency to take a good look at any bird (traits, incidentally, that he shared with his Cornell advisor, Arthur Allen). Dean spoke in soft tones, yet his was a far-carrying voice from a lectern or podium.

Dean's mind was active nearly up to his death. I treasure the one or two letters per month he sent to me in Kenya since 1997. We exchanged views on such topics as the Middle East, the elections of 2000, superbowl games, habits of various birds, polar bear taxonomy, and even the Iraq situation in late 2002. In August 2002 (with the hope that I had been enjoying the Celestial Empire during the Beijing International Ornithological Congress), he sent his final manuscript, "Classification and biodiversity: Express it or suppress it?", treating higher categories, molecular biology ("what it can and cannot do"), "why evaluation and ranking are neglected," cladists, and other topics. It contains a table of "Taxa whose classification often does not reflect their contribution to biodiversity," including such items as: humans, pandas, polar bears (again), rodents, the Emperor Penguin, the Musk Duck, and peacocks and their taxonomy. Quite some fare from a 90-year-old who of course greatly admired his mentor Ernst Mayr's prolific pen at an even more advanced age.

His reprints and books on birds of prey Dean left to the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology at Camarillo, California; they had published a volume by Dean and his late good friend Richard (Butch) Olendorff, *An Annotated List of Books on Birds of Prey (Other than Falconry)*. Dean's personal and professional papers are in the ornithology section of the Olin Research Library at Cornell University. Contributions in his name may be made to the Dean Amadon Scholarship Fund for Supporting the Study of Birds of Prey, at Raptor Trust, 1390 White Bridge Road, Millington, New Jersey 07946.

I missed the party for Dean given by the Ornithology Department on the occasion of his 90th birthday in June 2002. Fortunately, I lunched with him and Tavvy early in November 2002, when he took me out to show me extensive debarking of a shrub by a Downy Woodpecker. A little over a month later, after his awful diagnosis, Jenny and I received a Christmas card. His writing was cramped and shaky. He was obviously upset but his humor plunged the depths ("Can you lend me a revolver!"). He noted "Don't worry, I have had a good run for it," and stated his hope that I would write his *Auk* memorial. This was followed, within the week, by a second card, in his normal handwriting. He had clearly come to terms with his malady and noted the plans his daughters were making to care for him at home, and his first "wish for the season," that Jenny and I would be able to carry on productively for many more years. Talking to him by telephone four days before he died, he was calm and concerned that we not worry. All his friends will miss Dean, the gentle man and exemplary ornithologist, a paragon of humanity at its best.

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