

## **In Memoriam: Mortimer Brooke Meanley, JR., 1915–2007**

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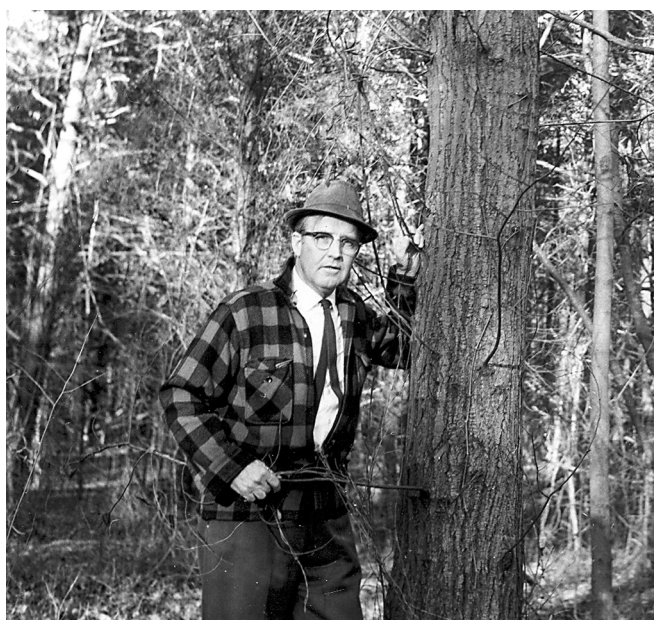


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### IN MEMORIAM: MORTIMER BROOKE MEANLEY, JR., 1915–2007

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Mortimer Brooke Meanley, Jr., 1915–2007

Mortimer Brooke Meanley, Jr., was born at Riderwood, Baltimore County, Maryland, on 19 January 1915, and died at home in Maine on 19 August 2007. He was always called “Brooke” as an adult. Much of his youth was spent in birding and other natural-history activities, interests he credits to the Boy Scouts and his teachers. These activities directed him toward a professional career in wildlife biology. He was educated at McDonogh High School in Owings Mill, Maryland—at the time a private, semimilitary school for boys—and graduated in 1934.

In June 1934, when he was 19 years old, Brooke and his friend Tom Gilliard drove a motorcycle on a two-month trip to study and photograph birds at Bonaventure Island at the end of the Gaspé Peninsula, Québec. They collected and prepared study skins in the field, an activity in which Brooke became proficient. On their

return trip, they drove through New York City to visit the American Museum of Natural History and check study skins of birds of interest. Brooke later studied natural history at the University of Maryland, where he received his B.A. in Biology in 1942. He participated in college athletics, favoring running and lacrosse.

Brooke served in World War II from 1942 to 1946 and was responsible for rehabilitating injured soldiers in Atlanta and Macon, Georgia. He most enjoyed taking rehabilitating soldiers on nature hikes in the woods and wetlands of the surrounding areas. When telling friends of his wartime experiences, he would comment on the unbelievable good fortune of meeting his military commitment by taking soldiers on bird walks. I have often wondered how many ex-GIs became birders because of Brooke’s influence during the war years.

After military service, Brooke returned to the University of Maryland and received an M.A. in Plant Geography in 1949; his thesis was titled *A Preliminary Report on the Distribution of the Pines of the Atlantic Coastal Plain*. Following graduate school, he married Anna Gilkeson in 1950, and in 1960 they had a daughter, Louise.

Brooke worked for the Division of Birds at the U.S. National Museum from 1949 to 1950, where he honed his ornithological skills. From 1950 to 1957, he was employed as a wildlife research biologist for the Wildlife Research Laboratory, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, at Denver, Colorado. His assignments at field stations in Stuttgart, Arkansas, and Alexandria, Louisiana, involved extensive field work and research on Red-winged Blackbirds. He published numerous articles on the distribution, migration, ecology, and management of blackbirds in relation to damage of agricultural crops. His blackbird research during the latter part of this period, in Kisatchie National Forest in Louisiana, focused on the management of birds and mammals as related to direct or artificial seeding of longleaf pine. His research revealed that the chemical compound Thiram, when applied to pine seeds, repelled bird use. Seedling success rose from 0–300 to 2000–5000 per acre after treatment, making the study an exemplar of applied research.

From 1957 to 1977, he was employed by the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland. He continued to work on blackbirds, and he trapped and banded thousands of birds. He is credited with helping to design a very effective decoy trap used to capture blackbirds for banding. His field work in the Southeast gave him many opportunities to explore the wetlands of this region, which became the focus of his first book, *Swamps, River Bottoms, and Canebrakes*, published in 1972. During this period, he also conducted extensive studies on various species of rail and published the classic North American Fauna (no. 67, 1969), *Natural History of the King Rail*. He received a Special Achievement Award from the Department of Interior for this outstanding publication. Later he published another North American Fauna (no. 69, 1971), *Natural History of the Swainson's Warbler*.

Brooke was an outstanding photographer and spent many hours in the darkroom of Patuxent Wildlife Research Center developing and printing his own black-and-white film. The excitement of seeing his own pictures being developed in the trays of chemicals before him was a pleasure that he shared with many other Patuxent biologists. He was extremely popular, loved Patuxent and his colleagues, and mentored many younger biologists whose careers initiated the environmental movement. Often he would stick his head in an office and greet a colleague with the words, "Ornithology! Never leave Patuxent." He also was fond of saying, "Everything is copasetic."

He was frugal by nature and had a reputation for wearing his clothes until they became threadbare. However, he was usually semiformal dressed, with a white shirt and a tie, and wore a brimmed hat throughout his life. He gave up smoking early in his career, but for many years was noted for carrying an unlit cigarette in his hand for effect and as a reminder of the past.

Brooke's enthusiasm for birds was evident to all, but especially to me. On 11 May 1974, I was driving a government vehicle through Patuxent on an old gravel road when he shouted "stop the car!" I had no idea what was wrong, but he immediately jumped from

the vehicle and soon had his binoculars focused on a pair of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in a pine tree. He had recognized their call and was ecstatic that I had a camera to record the event. That record was later approved and published as marking the northern extension of the species' range. He often reminded me of what a great and lucky day that was.

Brooke took his profession seriously. He became an associate member of the AOU in 1935, an Elective Member in 1952, and a Fellow in 1974. In addition to the AOU, he was a member of the Wilson Ornithological Society, Northeastern Bird Banding Association, Eastern Bird Banding Association, Virginia Society of Ornithology, Maryland Ornithological Society, Georgia Ornithological Society, Arkansas Ornithological Society, and the Audubon Naturalist Society of Washington, D.C. Brooke was elected to membership in the Washington Biologists' Field Club in 1961 and enjoyed many of the club's activities on Plummers Island in the Potomac River.

Brooke published more than 125 articles about his research and natural history and assisted many other researchers with their studies. Although most of his professional assignments dealt with blackbird depredation on agricultural crops, his extensive collection of notes, bird pictures, and natural-history observations became the subjects and illustrations of other articles and books.

In 1977, Brooke retired from the government and left Patuxent Wildlife Research Center to take up residence at his wife's family homestead in Fishersville, Virginia. In retirement, his continued analysis of field notes and photographs became the basis of a series of books, including *Birds and Marshes of the Chesapeake Bay Country* (1975), *Blackwater* (1978), *Birdlife at Chincoteague* (1981), *Waterfowl of the Chesapeake Bay Country* (1982), and *The Patuxent River Wild Rice Marsh* (1992). In 2001, his two last books, *Notes on Southern Marshes, Swamps, and Pineywoods* and *Notes on Dismal Swamp Plants* were printed in enough copies to distribute to his many friends.

In the 1990s, Brooke's beloved wife and frequent traveling companion, Anna, suffered progressively from Alzheimer's disease. In 1997, they moved to Maine to live with their daughter Louise, her life partner Deb, and their three grandchildren. Brooke and Anna had contributed significantly to expand their daughter's home to accommodate the move. Brooke was a constant companion and caregiver to his bedridden wife until her death in 2001. During that long period, Brooke maintained contact by telephone and letters with his friends. He especially enjoyed being informed of news of the birds and biologists at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and the county parks along the freshwater marshes of the Patuxent River downstream of the Center. He continued to mentor young biologists and naturalists well into his retirement years, and corresponded with many of his protégés. He was always interested in new information on the behavior of birds and discussed such with great enthusiasm.

As Brooke advanced in age, his birding trips became less frequent, and because of knee problems he became more confined to his home. His life-long interests in jazz, reading, and wildlife observation continued, however. Another passion was the occasional trip to Alisson's Restaurant in downtown Kennebunkport, Maine, for lunch. He became a regular patron and had his favorite table. The staff at Alisson's affectionately referred to Brooke as "Mr. B,"

and his friends and relatives shared many lunches there with him. However, he always insisted on paying the bill. Once after being treated to a lunch, I noticed that he gave the waitress a fifty-dollar tip. When I brought it to his attention that he was very generous, the tip being more than the bill, he explained that she was a college student and needed some extra cash. Brooke was very benevolent with his personal possessions and funds and eventually helped finance the college education of his three grandchildren. Many friends who visited him were surprised to receive a book from his library as a gift.

Brooke drove his own car while in his late eighties and once, while leaving the parking lot at Alisson's restaurant, he was stopped by an older man walking on the sidewalk. The man wanted to know how old Brooke was, and then proceeded to tell Brooke he was lucky, because his wife wouldn't let him drive. Brooke was quite pleased to be complimented on this late-life accomplishment, but was more intrigued when he learned that the man, Mr. Walker, was the uncle of George Herbert Walker Bush.

During his final months of life, Brooke's daughter Louise, who now had adopted her middle name of Brooke, became his caregiver, with the help of Deb and the grandchildren, until his death. Brooke's friends were numerous and extended throughout the country. He maintained contact with them to the end of his life. One Patuxent friend, Jerry Longcore, visited Brooke two weeks before he died and recalls how much Brooke enjoyed reminiscing about Patuxent biologists and those of the old Biological Survey. When Jerry mentioned that he had a picture of F. C. Lincoln banding a Mallard, Brooke commented that his friend "Freddie" had offices at Patuxent and in Washington, D.C., and that he would like a copy of the picture, which Jerry sent. Brooke's passion for birds was exceptional, and his friendship to birders and ornithologists who shared his passion was legendary. Brooke will be greatly missed by the many who had the privilege to share the world of birds with this gentleman biologist.

The comments of Rich Dolesh, Lynda Garrett, Mike Haramis, Gary Heinz, and Jerry Longcore are greatly appreciated.

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## IN MEMORIAM: ARTHUR EUGENE STAEBLER, 1915–2007

BRAD VALENTINE

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Arthur Eugene Staebler, who joined the AOU in 1935 and became an Elective Member in 1955, died on 5 March 2007 at the age of 91, at home, in Clovis, California. The oldest of three children, Art was born on 3 May 1915 in Detroit and moved to Birmingham, Michigan, at the age of four. In high school, he learned the natural sciences by collecting insects and birds for the Cranbrook Institute of Science. He graduated high school in 1933.

Art majored in Zoology (B.A., 1938) at the University of Michigan (U of M), then immediately entered the graduate program there. He spent six months with a team of scientists in Chiapas, Mexico, where he collected animal specimens, many of which are still housed in the U of M Museum of Zoology. He received an M.S. in 1940.

Art met Helen Williams, of Columbus, Ohio, while at the U of M, and they married in 1940. Caught up in Art's love of nature, the day after the wedding, they traveled and honeymooned at a boys' camp, where he worked as a nature counselor. In 1943, they had their first child, Bruce. In 1947, while living in Ann Arbor, they had twin girls, Ann and Susan. Their fourth child, Chad, was born in 1957 in Fresno, California. Helen, his wife of some 67 years, outlived Art by about a month.

In November 1943, Art was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Public Health Service and was stationed in Miami, Florida. His assignment was to ensure that alien insects that might pose public health or environmental risks would not enter the country. At the end of the war, Art was discharged and returned to U of M to pursue his Ph.D. in Ornithology. In

1949, he became director of the W.K. Kellogg Bird Sanctuary in Augusta, Michigan. Concurrently, he completed his doctorate, with a dissertation comparing the life histories of Downy and Hairy woodpeckers.

In 1955, Art became an Assistant Professor of Biology at Fresno State College (now California State University, Fresno). Until retiring in 1980, he taught courses in biology, ornithology, advanced ornithology, vertebrate natural history, vertebrate zoology, and vertebrate paleontology. He also developed and taught concentrated inter-session classes in museum specimen preparation, waterfowl management, and desert ecology. During the turbulent 1960s and against a resistant administration, Art championed faculty personnel decisions based on qualifications and performance. Starting in the 1970s, he began a survey of vertebrate fossils, mostly in the hills west of the San Joaquin Valley. Then, as an emeritus professor, he expanded this interest and discovered new species of mosasaurs and plesiosaurs.

Art was a captivating instructor. Students eagerly anticipated each new topic introduced with his trademark: "Imagine, if you will..." Flexible and generous with his time, Art was happy to administer students' independent studies. He chaired committees for 11 graduate students, whose work covered a wide range of subjects—regional floras, estuarine fish, freshwater fish, Great Blue Herons, White-crowned Sparrows, Sierra Nevada meadow avifauna, American Dippers, and food habits of deer and range cattle. In retirement, he chaired two committees for master's theses on paleontological subjects. Even late in life, at an assisted-living