

## **IN MEMORIAM: E. OTTO HÖHN, 1919–1997**

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Emil Otto Höhn was born in Basel, Switzerland, on 14 March 1919; he died in Edmonton, Alberta, on 23 April 1997. Throughout his life, Otto maintained a keen interest in birds, a pursuit that was stimulated during his early childhood in Switzerland. At age 13, he was sent to Slough Grammar School in Buckinghamshire, England, where he spent his teenage years before entering Guy's Hospital Medical School at the University of London. From this university he was awarded a number of degrees: an Honors B.Sc. in Physiology in 1939, an M.B., B.S. in 1943, an M.Sc. in 1946, and a Ph.D. in 1951. His supervisors for the two senior degrees, W. R. Spurree and J. M. Robson, both studied problems in vertebrate reproductive physiology, a subject that kindled in Otto a lifelong interest.

In 1947, Otto emigrated to Canada, joining as an Assistant Professor the Department of Physiology in the College of Medicine at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Two years later, he took the position of temporary medical officer for Canada's Indian and Eskimo Health Service in the Northwest Territories. This four-month stint whetted his interest in arctic ornithology and the special adaptations shown by birds in this environment. He rose through the ranks at the University of Alberta to become a full Professor in 1975. Although his appointment was in the College of Medicine, he remained broadly interested in birds as research vehicles and in ornithologists as stimulating interlocutors. He maintained a membership in ornithological societies in Switzerland, Great Britain, and Canada. He joined the AOU in 1961 and became an Elective Member in 1972. He was also made a Fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America.

On his arrival in Edmonton, Otto encountered a kindred spirit in the person of William Rowan, who was to influence greatly his re-

search interests in avian endocrinology. Rowan at the time was Head of Zoology at the University of Alberta and a pioneer in the field of avian migration. They shared a consuming interest in the relationship between the hormonal and behavioral status of birds. This led to Otto's numerous contributions to major endocrinological journals. He published a textbook, *Hormones in Man and Animals*, and contributed a chapter, "Avian endocrine glands" to A. J. Marshall's *The Biology and Comparative Physiology of Birds* (1961). He published three monographs in German (on loons, phalaropes, and ptarmigan) and more than 50 papers on bird distribution and behavior in English-language journals.

I met and came to know Professor Höhn through the Edmonton Bird Club, a group of enthusiastic birders who met regularly to hear talks on avian subjects and enjoy field trips together. Otto was a soft-spoken man of kind and gentle manner who often surprised his audience when one of his numerous eccentricities surfaced. He cared little for convention and rather delighted in shocking his associates, particularly his students. Having traveled widely in the Canadian north, usually in the company of Inuit people, he had a good store of unusual physiological observations with which he would regale his students. One of the more unorthodox was a detailed physiological explanation of how Husky dogs were able to defecate while running full tilt!

My own personal experience of Otto's delightful unorthodoxy was as an undergraduate arriving on campus to write a final exam one snowy April morning. A battered Austin with the Professor at the wheel came slithering toward me, rounded a sharp curve, and came to a bumpy stop against the curb as the driver leaped through the rapidly opened door. The

Professor, with shotgun to shoulder, fired into a Virginia creeper that covered part of the front of the Medical Building. There was a loud exclamation of delight as he retrieved the limp corpse of a robin newly arrived from more temperate climes. Turning to this astounded and gaping student, he announced triumphantly that this was the very specimen he needed for

his ongoing studies of gonadal cycles in migrating birds! In these times when "political correctness," in all its myriad forms, seems to reign supreme, it is refreshing to remember those among us who were not only delightful people but also wonderful eccentrics. In this his wife, Barbara, and his surviving son, Peter, can take comfort.