BioOne COMPLETE

In Memoriam: Ian McTaggart-Cowan, 1910–2010

Authors: Campbell, R. Wayne, Jakimchuk, Ronald D., and Demarchi, Dennis A.

Source: The Auk, 130(4) : 807-809

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2013.130.4.807

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

Downloaded From: https://complete.bioone.org/journals/The-Auk on 28 Mar 2024
Terms of Use: https://complete.bioone.org/terms-of-use

The Auk 130(4):807–809, 2013
© The American Ornithologists' Union, 2013.
Printed in USA.

IN MEMORIAM: IAN McTAGGART-COWAN, 1910–2010

R. Wayne Campbell,[1] Ronald D. Jakimchuk,[2] and Dennis A. Demarchi[3]

[1]*2511 Kilgary Place, Victoria, British Columbia V8N 1J6, Canada;*
[2]*645 Ardmore Drive, North Saanich, British Columbia V8L 5G3, Canada; and*
[3]*1442 Brooke Street, Victoria, British Columbia V8S 1M3, Canada*

Ian McTaggart-Cowan, AOU member (1939) and Elective Member (1941), died on 24 April 2010 after a brief bout of pneumonia, 79 days before his 100th birthday. Ian remarked with concern, "In the blink of an eye, my lifetime on this planet, we have moved from natural history, descriptive biology, and studying the whole animal to relying on computer-simulated models, and other expedient methods, to provide solutions to major conservation and management issues. I have yet to see a model that works—they all lack basic natural history."

Ian was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 25 June 1910 and in his third year moved with the family to the southwest mainland coast of British Columbia (BC). He grew up on the marine shores of English Bay in Vancouver and moved, in about 1919, to nearby North Vancouver, where the coastal coniferous forests provided a rich avenue for exploration. Neither of his parents was a naturalist, but Ian had an innate sense of wonder and awe for the natural world and its creatures. He was a collector from an early age and was professionally recognized as a mammalogist, ornithologist, malacologist, and herpetologist. He also developed a reputation as a philatelist, book collector, and a grower of award-winning alpine plants.

Like many other keen young naturalists of the period, Ian eagerly waited for weekends, holidays, and other free time to investigate local animal life. Although he relished observing, he had a deeper curiosity for how the natural world worked. With an animal in hand, the experience became more intimate and revealing. Driven by curiosity, he established a trap line for small mammals and maintained it deep into the nearby mountain forests. Later, at age 12, his first rifle in hand, he expanded his field collecting to include larger birds like owls. He was influenced by the descriptive writings of Ernest Thompson Seton, one of the founding pioneers of the Boy Scouts of America. While working on his Scout "bird warden" badge, Ian kept a diary of birds seen around his home for a year. As part of the process to validate the badge, James A. Munro, the migratory bird officer for Canada, reviewed Ian's notes and challenged some of his identifications. Two of the species changed, not surprisingly, were flycatchers.

In 1927, Ian graduated from North Vancouver High School having served on the publications committee and as assistant business manager for the school's yearbook. In his senior year, he attended a lecture by Kenneth Racey, a mining executive and well-known local naturalist. The talk, sponsored by the Burrard Field Naturalists, was on mammals of the Lower Mainland region of southwestern BC. Afterward, Racey invited Ian to view his study skin collection. This meeting culminated in a long-term, personal relationship, until Racey's death in 1959. This chance meeting led to Ian's publishing a "Note on Yellow-Bellied Marmot" (Murrelet 10:640, 1929). Racey received a copy of Cowan's article and encouraged him to continue publishing. Ian quickly published *"Mammals of Point Grey"* and "Notes on some mammals in British Columbia" in *Canadian Field-Naturalist*. He continued to write and publish for the next 72 years and produced over 300 titles.

Ian enrolled in an honors zoology program at the University of British Columbia (UBC) immediately after high school and quickly became involved in the biology club, holding various executive positions, including president. By his third year, Ian had established a reputation as an ardent collector and meticulous preparator, comfortable in the outdoors, and an excellent marksman.

In 1930, Ian was offered a job assisting private collector and well-known naturalist Hamilton Mack Laing on a collecting expedition sponsored by the National Museum of Canada. The pair spent time at Newgate, near the BC–Montana border, and later established camps in Jasper and Banff national parks in Alberta. Soon after arrival in the Rocky Mountain parks, Mack was offered a job as a park naturalist and Ian was left alone to complete the summer's work. Later Mack commented that Ian was "a born naturalist—not one of those biologists made in college and interested only in the cheque his Ph.D. will pull in for him." Ian participated in other summer collecting excursions, including a 1931 trip to the west coast of Vancouver Island with Racey.

As university graduation approached, Ian corresponded with Dr. Joseph Grinnell at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, regarding graduate studies. During that exchange, Ian mentioned that he was enthused with the systematic and taxonomic work of Harry Swarth and his work in BC. Grinnell sent Ian copies of all relevant works that had been issued in the series *University of California Publications in Zoology*, which would later inspire Ian to publish similar lists of the birds and mammals in BC.

Ian graduated from UC Berkeley with a Ph.D. (1935) and the benefit of a mentorship from Grinnell that would guide him for the next seven decades. Ian's dissertation, "Distribution and variation in deer (genus *Odocoileus*) of the Pacific Coastal Region of North America," was published verbatim the following year in the journal *California Fish & Game*. Ian returned to BC in 1935 to accept a position with the BC Provincial Museum (now Royal BC Museum) as its first biologist. He immediately initiated major collecting expeditions to expand the vertebrate collections. The most significant was a 57-day exploration to the south Peace River region of the province. Ian and his assistant Patrick W. Martin recorded 132 species of birds, among which Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (Nelson's Sparrow), Bay-breasted Warbler, and Cape May

Downloaded From: https://complete.bioone.org/journals/The-Auk on 28 Mar 2024
Terms of Use: https://complete.bioone.org/terms-of-use

Warbler were new species records for the province. "The vertebrate fauna of the Peace River District of British Columbia" initiated the museum's *Occasional Papers* series in 1938. In later years, theses produced by several of Ian's students were included in the series.

Ian left the provincial museum as assistant director in 1940 to become an assistant professor of zoology at UBC in Vancouver. With the same verve that characterized his approach to life and passion for natural history, Ian immediately began to mold the zoology department into the first major research institution in Canada with a focus on wildlife biology. In his early years as a professor, Ian returned to the national parks in 1943 to continue research on mammals and birds.

Ian became professor in 1945 and head of department in 1948. Over the next decade, he established UBC as one of the top academic institutions in Canada for workers in zoological research. While administrative responsibilities replaced field time, he worked closely with his students and brought depth to the department of zoology by recruiting faculty in widely varied disciplines.

In the late 1950s, Kenneth Racey donated his private collection to UBC, which was followed by donations of more BC collections from Walter S. Maguire and J. Wynne and smaller collections of skulls from hunters and biologists. Later, Ian also received the large H. R. MacMillan ornithological collection of exotic specimens. He established a vertebrate museum within the department of zoology that housed about 45,000 specimens of mammals, birds (including eggs), amphibians, and reptiles. The collection, later named the Cowan Vertebrate Museum, is now part of the much larger Beaty Biodiversity Museum at UBC. After 11 years as head of the zoology department, Ian was appointed dean of graduate studies at UBC (1964), a position he held until retirement (1975). During his 24 years with the zoology department, Ian maintained a vibrant program but also embraced teaching.

Ian was a talented communicator, which was the key to his success as a teacher. He taught undergraduate and graduate courses for more than two decades. Even during administrative sojourns, he continued to teach the introductory course in zoology. In the early years, the course was a prerequisite for medical students; for some it was the last they considered medicine as a career. One of those pre-med students was Rudolf H. Drent, who changed his career focus after attending a single lecture by Ian. After Rudi Drent completed his M.A. at UBC and his Ph.D. in the Netherlands, Cowan invited him to return to UBC as an assistant professor (1967). Drent accepted the position, remained five years, and subsequently returned to the University of Groningen. Ian later remarked, "Of all the young professors I recruited, Rudi is the one I will miss most as his approach to ornithological research was refreshing and directly applicable to conservation issues in British Columbia."

Teaching was always a priority, and Ian was unsurpassed as a lecturer. He believed that "teaching did not start and end in the classroom." When time permitted, he would leave his administrative office 5 to 10 minutes early with an armful, or cartful, of props for his lecture. During the trek across campus, he frequently caught the attention of passing students, and some of the more curious stopped him to ask what he had. Students quickly learned after Ian's first class that if they wanted a seat in the lecture hall they had to arrive early, or at least on time, for subsequent lectures. His lectures were dynamic, popular, and attracted many students from other disciplines and frequently other professors who were looking to become better lecturers. He was the only professor at UBC who was regularly visited by the fire marshal to clear the aisles of students. Each time, the audience shuffled and gathered tightly in front of Ian.

Throughout his life, Ian strongly understood that publishing was a professional responsibility that too many biologists and graduate students disregarded. He frequently recounted that "Good writing is hard work and if I complete a manuscript page a day it has been a productive 24 hours." He led by example, producing hundreds of papers, in several disciplines, over a 72-year period. While nearly half of his written works focused on mammals, including *Mammals of British Columbia* (co-authored with Charles J. Guiguet, 1965), he also produced books and articles on conservation and management of wildlife. His publications earned him a reputation as "Father of Wildlife Management in Canada." Ian contributed to five classic books on BC's birds. In the late 1930s, he met with James A. Munro at the BC Provincial Museum to discuss updating the 1925 publication *A Distributional List of the Birds of British Columbia* by Allan Brooks and Harry S. Swarth. They prepared a simple species outline that included a status designation followed by a list of noteworthy records for each season. Initially Ian helped gather data, but in 1940, after his appointment to UBC as a new faculty member, he became immersed with new responsibilities and Munro continued to complete the manuscript. *A Review of the Bird Fauna of British Columbia* was published by the Provincial Museum (1947) and remained the standard reference for BC's birds for 44 years.

While dean of graduate studies, Ian retained his role as curator of the vertebrate museum. His success in expanding the zoology department influenced the future of the museum as limited office and research space for faculty and graduate students became a problem. By the late 1960s, there was increasing pressure to use museum space for offices. Ian forestalled that encroachment by hiring Wayne Campbell as a full-time assistant curator.

In November 1972, Ian invited Campbell to discuss updating the 1946 provincial bird book Ian co-authored with James Munro. Campbell had the basis for a new book by amassing more than 235,000 records and nearly 900 articles on the province's birds. Ian concluded that a revision of the 1946 volume would be best served if Campbell were at the BC Provincial Museum, where collections and other resources were available. He encouraged and supported Campbell's application for a position as assistant curator of birds and mammals at the museum. Both men wanted a "new approach" that would include detailed aspects of habitat, ecology, and natural history, rather than being merely a list of records. Campbell had identified major gaps in information that required attention before writing could commence. Ian was apprehensive of the scope proposed for the revision and believed that enthusiasm and commitment would go a long way to completing the task. Over the next 14 years, details for 140,000 specimens were obtained on BC birds housed in museums around the world. More than 6,700 articles on the technical and unpublished literature were gathered and reviewed (see *A Bibliography of British Columbia Ornithology*, vols. 1 and 2). Remote areas of the province were visited and coastal islands were surveyed. In addition, a database that included submissions from over 7,000

Downloaded From: https://complete.bioone.org/journals/The-Auk on 28 Mar 2024
Terms of Use: https://complete.bioone.org/terms-of-use

naturalists of more than 2 million records was established on 3 × 4 inch file cards.

Ian actively encouraged the project and wrote several species accounts and the synopsis "Avian Biodiversity, Ecological Distribution, and Patterns of Change." At the reception to celebrate publication of *The Birds of British Columbia* (4 vols.), Ian commented that this body of work was the most significant involvement of his career and would have the greatest and most far-reaching and decisive impact on the conservation and understanding of birds in the province. In addition, Ian published other papers on birds as well as on molluscs, amphibians, and reptiles—and two books on law stamps of Yukon and BC.

Ian was recognized as a distinguished Canadian scholar by the Royal Society of Canada (1946). He received the prestigious Aldo Leopold Memorial Award from the Wildlife Society, the Fry Medal from the Canadian Society of Zoologists, and the Doris Huestis Speirs Award from the Society of Canadian Ornithologists/Société des Ornithologistes du Canada, the latter for his contributions to ornithology. Ian received the highest civilian honors bestowed by the Canadian and BC governments in becoming an Officer of the Order of Canada (1971) and Officer of the Order of British Columbia (1991). He also received honorary D.Sc. or LLD degrees from UBC, the University of Alberta, Simon Fraser University, the University of Waterloo, and the University of Northern British Columbia. In addition, he held executive positions, often as president or chair, on at least 27 different organizations, both professional and amateur. He invested a combined commitment of 137 years of cumulative service! He never attended a meeting unprepared and was in constant contact with informed individuals to keep updated on the distribution and population changes in wildlife in BC and Canada. Ian's philosophy regarding the role of an individual was straightforward: "You must be the change you wish to see in the natural world."

Ian married Joyce Racey, the daughter of Kenneth Racey, in 1936. They raised two children, Ann and Garry. During 66 years of marriage, they shared a life of biological discovery and world travel. Ian McTaggart-Cowan is survived by his daughter, Ann Schau, and was predeceased by his wife Joyce, his son Garry, and his own accomplished siblings. His brother Patrick became the first president of Simon Fraser University in BC. His sister Pamela was a prominent architect and sister Joan a horticulturalist.

A commemorative volume, which includes contributions and memories from Ian's students, colleagues, and associates will be published by the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies in Victoria, BC (see www.wildlifebc.org).

We thank Spencer G. Sealy, Peter Ommundsen, and Alton S. Harestad for review comments, and Ann Schau for information on her father's early life.

Downloaded From: https://complete.bioone.org/journals/The-Auk on 28 Mar 2024
Terms of Use: https://complete.bioone.org/terms-of-use