Arthur Augustus Allen

December 28, 1885 — January 17, 1964

It can be truly said that birds filled the life of Arthur Allen. He was the first professor of ornithology in America and devoted a lifetime to teaching and research in ornithology at Cornell. His devotion to the field was paramount, and there was no corner of the discipline into which his curiosity did not take him with enthusiasm.

Although Dr. Allen specialized in birds, his breadth of training and his experience in biology were exceptional. He developed an inimitable style of writing and speaking which enabled him to share his knowledge and discoveries with others in a delightful manner. One didn't need to be an ornithologist nor even know anything about birds to enjoy his lectures, his stories, or his books. His ease in writing, his charm as a lecturer and teacher, his unique ability as a raconteur, his sense of humor, and his quickness of response were characteristics which endeared him to all.

Dr. Allen was born in Buffalo, New York. His early years were spent there. He entered Cornell in 1904 and received the A.B. degree in 1907, the M.A. degree in 1908. In 1908 and 1909 he received a fellowship in zoology, and in 1911 he was awarded the Ph.D. degree in zoology.

In 1912 Dr. Allen collected for the American Museum of Natural History in Colombia where he discovered over fifteen species of tropical birds new to science. His expeditions and discoveries in ornithology from tropics to arctic, almost too numerous to mention, resulted in his election to membership in the Explorers' Club of New York. Outstanding was the discovery of a nesting pair of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in Florida in 1924. In 1935 he led an expedition for Cornell and the American Museum of Natural History in search of vanishing birds, during which the rare Ivory-bill was again located, this time in Louisiana. The birds were photographed in motion and still pictures, resulting in the best series of studies ever made on this almost extinct species, and the only sound recordings made to date. Three separate trips to Hudson Bay (1934, 1944, 1954) gave him an unusual familiarity with arctic birds, their songs and problems. With the Office of Scientific Research and Development in 1944-1945 he renewed his acquaintance with tropical birds in Panama in the interest of the armed forces and helped clear up many mysteries of the tropical jungles and their sounds.

His doctoral thesis on the life history of the Red-winged Blackbird was recognized immediately as a new and effective approach to the study of living birds and became the pattern for similar studies all over the world. His research on diseases of the Ruffed Grouse won for him the Outdoor Life Medal in 1924. While conducting his

eminently successful experiments on raising Ruffed Grouse in captivity, he discovered a basic sex rhythm. His paper on this subject is a classic, which has stimulated much research in avian ethology. In 1948 he found the hitherto unknown nest of the Bristle-thighed Curlew in Alaska, for which he was awarded the Burr Prize by the National Geographic Society.

Though his scientific contributions to ornithology through teaching, research, lecturing, and writing were many and varied, it was his warm personality which endeared him to thousands of students who remember his courses and field trips, his counsel and the lovable example he set for all who came in contact with him. He guided his students toward making outstanding contributions of their own with an informality that put them at ease. His willingness and ability to share his knowledge, his enthusiasms, and his inspirations with others were outstanding.

Dr. Allen's popular writing about birds began with stories written for *Bird Lore*, which was edited by his friend, Dr. Frank M. Chapman of the American Museum of Natural History. Dr. Allen soon became assistant editor of the magazine and for years contributed regularly to the publication, which later became the *Audubon Magazine*. These stories about birds became later the basis for two volumes, *American Bird Biographies*, published in 1934, and *The Golden Plover and Other Birds*, published in 1939. These books present life histories of forty-seven American bird species in which scientific facts about the birds are woven into most charming tales.

In his text, *The Book of Bird Life*, published in 1930, the aspects of the subject are presented from paleohistory, anatomy, physiology, and function to techniques for study of them in the field and laboratory. This introduction to general ornithology had eleven reprintings during its first thirty years of use. In April, 1961, a revised edition of the book was published which included new material on ethology and migratory behavior, and on the recent progress made in recording the songs and calls of birds.

In 1951 the National Geographic Society published his *Stalking Birds with Color Camera*, a monumental collection of 331 bird photographs in color, mostly by the author, and stories of the making of the photographs. In this and other publications Dr. Allen has done much to help others who aspire to perfection in bird photography.

The first course in wildlife conservation given in the United States was taught at Cornell in 1919 by Dr. Allen. His deep interest in this field caused him to assist in organizing the professional Wildlife Society in 1935, and to serve as its second president.

His ear for bird sounds was phenomenal. His ability to quickly coin little verbalizations helped him and his students to become adept at learning songs and calls and at passing the knowledge on to others. When sound

recording was introduced about 1925 in the motion picture world and it became electronically practical, Dr. Allen immediately showed interest in the possibility of using this new tool in biology and especially to expand interest in ornithology. The first "Cornell Bird Songs" were recorded in May, 1929, in Renwick Park in Ithaca. Beginning in 1930 with Albert R. Brand and others, he led the team, which created the Cornell Library of Natural Sounds and a long series of published records of birds and other animals.

Cornell thus became the first American university concentrating on bioacoustics studies—and the present size of its sound collection attests to his long encouragement of the work in which he took an active, keen part. The collection now contains some 20,000 recordings of approximately 1500 bird species from all zoogeographic regions of the world.

The Laboratory of Ornithology, which was one of Dr. Allen's proudest achievements, may be thought of as beginning with his appointment as Assistant Professor of Ornithology in 1915. In 1955 the Laboratory was officially recognized as a part of Cornell University and Dr. Allen became its co-director. Later he was named honorary director but always remained most active in its operation and management.

Dr. Allen was a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union and a member of the International Ornithological Congress, the Wilson Ornithological Club, the Cooper Ornithological Club, the American Society of Naturalists, American Wildlife Society (president, 1939), the Society of Mammalogists, Sigma Xi, Gamma Alpha, the Explorers' Club, the Savage Club, and others.

His wife, Elsa Guerdrum Allen (Ph.D. Cornell) was closely associated with him in his fieldwork and writing and for many years assisted him with his Summer School classes in ornithology.

Dr. Allen's many talents, his tremendous energy, his accomplishments, his wonderful spirit, and his generosity in sharing his great knowledge have left an indelible stamp on the field of ornithology, on his students, and on Cornell.

E. C. Raney, O. H. Hewitt, P. P. Kellogg