

## John T. Emlen, Jr. 1908–1997



Yes, even the wood thrushes sang. They added their voices to those of appreciative family members and friends at John Emlen's memorial service following John's death on November 9, 1997.

Germantown, Pennsylvania was home base from his birth in 1908 until his college years at Haverford College (B.S., 1931) and Cornell University (Ph.D., 1934). He was birding by age 12, attending meetings of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club at 14, publishing notes in *The Auk* by 19, and accompanying Witmer Stone and Stuart Danforth on expeditions to the Caribbean when he was 20.

Shortly after John's marriage to Virginia Merritt in 1934, home base shifted to Madison, Wisconsin. This brought him into contact with Aldo Leopold while working with the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey. The Madison stay was interrupted by a teaching opportunity at the University of California at Davis, and by a wartime project of rat control with the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health in Baltimore, Maryland.

With Madison as home base from 1946 on, he taught zoology to hundreds of UW-Madison students in introductory and advanced classes, and trained over 60 students in Masters' and Doctoral programs. Many of these students learned bird banding techniques both on campus and at the Cedar Grove Ornithological Station at Cedar Grove. He wrote articles for *The Passenger Pigeon* dealing with Cliff Swallows, Ring-billed Gulls, and Dickcissels. Of particular interest to John were the problems of obtaining accurate measurements of bird populations. He

worked at developing workable standards before the Breeding Bird Survey began in 1966, and remained a keen student of this throughout retirement years.

He maintained an active interest in the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, serving as president in 1955–56. In 1967, WSO awarded him the Golden Passenger Pigeon Award. The citation read, in part: “Our recipient has shown himself to be a warm human being with a mischievous sense of humor, and with a critical mind that is a delight to young and old alike . . . His complete dedication to the facts of science has long been balanced by a remarkably calm and generous personality.”

Other awards have come his way. He served as vice-president of the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU), president of the Wilson Ornithological Society, and chairman of the Animal Behavior Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1973 he received the Elliot Coues Award from the AOU.

Radiating from home base in Madison, motivated by research, supervision of students and love for travel, the Emlens traveled in all directions. Health problems from 1965 on threatened to curtail this, but John continued to work and teach part time until retirement in 1974. Even periods of recuperation became opportunities for further travel and research.

All this is beautifully recounted in his memoirs, privately published in 1996, entitled *Adventure is Where You Find It: Recollections of a Twentieth Century Naturalist*. His concluding words were: “I can look back over a rich and rewarding life in which I have visited all of the world’s continents and many of its islands. How lucky can a guy get?”

The Emlen tradition lives on in wife Jinny, sons John, Steve and Woody, and the students who benefit from the Emlen Scholarship Fund established by UW-Madison.

*Samuel D. Robbins, Madison, WI.*