Elizabeth Lack, 1916–2015

Ted R. Anderson

Kingston, Washington, USA
ted020@centurytel.net

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Elizabeth Lack, widow of the eminent British ornithologist David Lack and an acclaimed ornithologist in her own right, passed away at her home on Boars Hill, Oxford, on July 31, 2015. Born in Hertfordshire, England, in June 1916, the daughter of Jack Silva, a starch manufacturer, Elizabeth grew up in Kent from the age of one. Early on, she developed an intense interest in birds and the out-of-doors, an interest she pursued with her younger brother and with the full support of her parents. She also studied violin and piano as a child, and intended to study piano at the Royal Academy of Music, London—a plan that was interrupted by the onset of World War II. She served during the war, along with 217,000 other women, including Princess Elizabeth, in the Auxiliary Territorial Service. She spent most of the war driving ambulances.

When David Lack was appointed director of the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology (EGI) in October 1945, he advertised an opening for a secretary for the institute. Elizabeth applied and was hired, effective January 1, 1946. Almost immediately her passion for the study of birds became apparent, and David extended her duties to include part-time field assistant. Her principal fieldwork involved monitoring nests of robins and tits in Wytham Wood and swifts breeding in the tower of the Oxford University Museum.

David and Elizabeth were married on July 9, 1949, and during their honeymoon trip to the Norfolk coast,