



Mice in the Freezer, Owls on the Porch

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Mice in the Freezer, Owls on the Porch.—Helen McGavran Corneli. 2002. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin. xvi + 347 pp., 42 black-and-white photographs. Cloth, ISBN 0-299-18090-5, \$29.95. Paper, ISBN 0-299-18094.—This book is not only the “official” biography of a legendary couple who were pioneers in wildlife management in Wisconsin, but is a 61 year love story.

As George Archibald says in the Foreword, this is a “heartwarming account, full of unpublished stories and insights about...two of America’s most fascinating and accomplished field naturalists.” Right on! Helen Corneli, an English professor and forty-year friend of the Hamerstoms, began collecting material for this book in 1990 but did not feel able to complete it until after Fran’s death in 1998.

Frederick N. Hamerstrom, Jr., known throughout his lifetime as “Hammy,” was raised in Massachusetts and attended Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. At a dance there he met Frances Flint, a student at Smith College and the only daughter of a wealthy Boston family. Although shy and reserved, he was so smitten that he proposed on their third date. It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast in personalities. Hammy was a handsome, quiet, diligent, scrupulously honest man who combined courtliness with integrity, discipline with grace, and principle with practicality. Fran, when she met Hammy, was an unusually attractive society belle with amazing energy and a flair for the dramatic. But they loved each other and both were resilient and adaptable. Fran was

always a bit of a rebel; she began smoking cigarettes at age seven and not surprisingly died of lung cancer—but not until age 90.

Hammy completed his undergraduate studies at Harvard, then married Fran in 1931. Their prospects appeared bleak in the depth of the Great Depression, but Hammy enrolled that fall as a student in the Game Conservation Institute in Clinton, New Jersey. The next year the two of them, against severe competition, were chosen by Paul Errington to enter his graduate program in Ames, Iowa. Hammy’s Master’s thesis on nesting of the Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) was published in 1936. Fran diligently analyzed Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) pellets and published, with her husband and Errington, a landmark study of owl prey, receiving a prize for the best undergraduate woman’s research project.

In 1937, both joined Aldo Leopold’s graduate program at the University of Wisconsin. For his Ph.D. dissertation, Hammy studied Wisconsin prairie grouse. Fran, the only woman to obtain a graduate degree with Leopold, studied dominance in winter flocks of chickadees for her Master’s degree. After the war, they settled in Plainfield, Wisconsin, to begin their life work on grouse, particularly the Greater Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*).

Sadly, in spite of Hammy’s dedication, populations of the Greater Prairie-Chicken locally dropped from 86 booming grounds on 87,600 acres to only 3, and elsewhere in Wisconsin declined even more drastically. Ring-necked Pheasant dominance, hybridization with other grouse species, mechanization of agriculture, irrigation, pesticides, and other factors may have contributed to the decline.

The Hamerstoms, especially Fran, were able to galvanize unprecedented support for their various causes. In the immediate postwar period, their home was the coordinating station for sending money, clothing, and food to starving ornithologists in Europe. Their large rustic home was a mecca for sportsmen and birders from great distances—and wealthy patrons, including many of the 175 corporate officers, 82 business executives, 45 lawyers, 27 medical doctors, and the Governor of Wisconsin, who formed The Society of *Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus*. That group collected large amounts of money for purchase of land in the Buena Vista marsh; Fran wrote their newsletter, *Boom!* Visitors, called “boomers,” were taught from blinds to observe behavior at the booming grounds of the prairie chicken; massive, perhaps unmanageable, amounts of data were collected. Fran attracted students, called “gaboons,” to help her with extensive studies of raptors and conduct over 20,000 small mammal trap nights; her autobiography listed names of 67 of those volunteers, who helped her, often for an entire summer, in return for their room and board. The second floor of their large home became a dormitory.

While working with Errington, Leopold, and Van Tyne, Hammy published major scientific papers each year, but thereafter his production was limited mainly to annual reports for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). His superb writing skills, however, were used to help posthumously complete Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* and to critique and improve the papers of many younger biologists. Fran found her niche in writing technical and popular articles, many in collaboration with Hammy, and most telling of her raptor studies. Between 1970 and 1994 she added 10 books, including *An Eagle to the Sky*, *Walk When the Moon is Full*, *Wild Food Cookbook*, and *Harrier: Hawk of the Marshes*.

Corneli has used the Hamerstrom archives to good purpose and has caught the generous spirit of this dedicated couple, their remarkable hospitality, their teaching and mentorship and their good example to all they met. The photographs are excellent, but a map of the mentioned areas in Wisconsin and Michigan is lacking. I detected five typographical errors in names of people and places. I was surprised that Corneli did not give the exact date of death for either Hammy or Fran, an absolute necessity in any biography, and regret that she did not share the full story of the reason for the Hamerstrom's early retirement. The DNR spot-checkers were not looking for evidence that they were shirking as might be inferred from page 244; instead, the Hamerstroms were officially chastised for working *more* than the forty-hour week covered by DNR insurance policies.

The "ripple effect" of Hammy and Fran, through their students, and their influence on a third generation in turn, will live on for years to come. This informative two-person biography deserves a wide readership.—C. STUART HOUSTON, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0J8, Canada. E-mail: houstons@duke.usask.ca.

To generalize, one group of researchers believes that birds evolved from theropod dinosaurs, most likely from within a family such as the Dromaeosauridae or Troodontidae. There is much to recommend the theropod-to-bird (TB) hypothesis, as well as considerable unresolved problems (see Feduccia 2002, Olson 2002). Either way, claims that the TB hypothesis is "the only game in town" (Lawrence Witmer, p. 19) or that the debate is waning (Livezey 2003) are not accurate and therefore do little to further the TB cause. A second set of researchers, constituting a minority, favors the origin of birds from an undetermined archosaur other than theropods, with thecodonts and crocodylomorphs most often mentioned as possible candidates. This "non-theropod-archosaur-to-bird" (NTAB) hypothesis also has good evidence to support it, although suffers from poor taxonomic resolution that logically can be attributed to incompleteness of the fossil record. Negative evidence, of course, haunts all of paleontology; the TB group has not identified with certainty even the family of theropods that they believe is closest to birds. (Recent assignment of the Early Cretaceous four-winged bird called "*Microraptor*" to the Dromaeosauridae [Xu et al. 2003] is not substantiated osteologically.)

For perspective, I should note that, in spite of NTAB leanings, I am not an active member of either the TB or NTAB group. Happily swamped studying much younger fossils, I am content to sit in the stands and observe the game, which sometimes seems to lack umpires. There have been lots of Cretaceous bunt singles, some Triassic and Cretaceous errors, but no Jurassic home runs. Each of the competing hypotheses has both strong and weak points. As someone who studies only fossils that certainly are birds and even can be placed in modern orders and families if not genera or species, I must also say that I appreciate the difficulty of studying Mesozoic fossils that have no surviving close relatives.

Mesozoic Birds is a large book divided into four parts: I. The Archosaurian Heritage of Birds (chapters 1–2), II. Taxa of Controversial Status (chapters 3–5), III. The Mesozoic Aviary: Anatomy and Systematics (chapters 6–17), and IV. Functional Morphology and Evolution (chapters 18–20). Both editors, and most of the 31 authors, are from the TB group. The authors are from 10 countries and six continents, an impressive gauge of the strong international interest in Mesozoic birds. There is considerable overlap in authorship and subject matter with another large collection of papers published in 2001, *New Perspectives on the Origin and Early Evolution of Birds* (Gauthier and Gall 2001).

Lawrence Witmer begins *Mesozoic Birds* with a chapter called "The Debate on Avian Ancestry" in which he promotes the TB hypothesis and the cladistic methodology that makes it possible. He also attempts to refute some of the snags in the TB hypothesis that

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Mesozoic Birds: Above the Heads of Dinosaurs.—Luis M. Chiappe and Lawrence M. Witmer, Eds. 2002. University of California Press, Berkeley, California. xii + 520 pp., 230 text figures. ISBN 0-520-20094-2. Cloth, \$95.00.—For the past 150 years, the earliest known bird has been the late Jurassic *Archaeopteryx*. In spite of multiple, beautifully preserved specimens of this bird, which still retains some undeniably reptilian features, perhaps the most polarized issue in ornithology and vertebrate paleontology is the origin of birds.