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## IN MEMORIAM: ERNEST PRESTON EDWARDS, 1919–2011

ALLEN M. HALE

*Buteo Books, 3130 Laurel Road, Shipman, Virginia 22971, USA*

Ernest P. (Buck) Edwards, an Elective Member of the AOU since 1954, died a day after his 92nd birthday in Lynchburg, Virginia. He taught ornithology, ecology, and field natural history at Sweet Briar College (SBC), his boyhood home, from 1965 until his retirement in 1990. His interest in the avifauna of Mexico began when he and Stephen W. Eaton (fellow graduate students at Cornell) made a summer trip there in 1946 to study birds. Buck's account of some of their adventures in Nuevo León and Tamaulipas can be found in *Moments of Discovery: Natural History Narratives from Mexico and Central America* (2010, University Press of Florida), edited by Kevin Winker. Following frequent annual trips to Mexico, Buck wrote and published *A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico* (1972), the third edition of which is still in print (1998, University of Texas Press).

Buck was born in Allahabad, India, on 25 September 1919, the son of Presbyterian missionaries Preston Hampton and Mabel Griffith Edwards. He grew up at SBC, where his father was a physics professor and his mother a librarian. After attending Lynchburg College, Buck transferred to the University of Virginia, where he and his older brother, George Griffith Edwards, shared a room with bunk beds on the Lawn, a particular honor at Mr. Jefferson's University, before graduating Phi Beta Kappa in 1940. He began his graduate work at the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University in the summer of 1940 and immersed himself in ornithology courses taught by Arthur A. Allen and Peter Paul Kellogg. World War II intervened, and Buck served in the U.S. Army until 1946, when he resumed his studies at Cornell; he received his Ph.D. in the fall of 1949.

Following a teaching position at the University of Kentucky, he worked as a civilian with the U.S. Army Chemical Corps in Frederick, Maryland, where he met his wife, Mabel Thacher. After they married and before coming to SBC, he taught at Hanover College, served as associate director of the Houston Museum of Natural History, and taught for five years at the University of the Pacific in California. At SBC he was best known as the "bird man," but his interest extended to the college's hardwood forests, where he established permanent research plots and a network of nature sanctuaries. He and Mabel knew every fern, orchid, and wildflower on SBC's 3,250 acres, and they were a distinctive pair

as they rambled the forest trails. Buck, taller than six-foot-four, always wore a fedora and carried binoculars around his neck. Mabel, white-haired and diminutive, wore blouses embroidered with wild flowers and birds. Together they used their botanical knowledge to produce an exhaustive, annotated list of the vascular plants growing at SBC. The forest plots, sanctuaries, and plant list are valuable educational and research assets for the biology department and will serve as a legacy from Buck and Mabel for future generations of students.

Buck's enchantment with Mexico and its birds continued from 1946 to the end of his life. In 1955, in an effort to share his knowledge and experience, he wrote and published *Finding Birds in Mexico*, a book of a new genre designed to provide the traveling bird watcher with information on destinations, what birds might be found there, and where to look for them. He divided the country into regions reflecting the diverse topography of Mexico, describing the climate, vegetation, topography, and bird life of each. In 1972, having spent, in aggregate, nearly four years in the field in 31 of Mexico's 32 states, territories, and districts, he produced *A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico*. For the first time, bird students had a field guide with color plates depicting nearly 500 species found south of the border. These groundbreaking books were self published and successfully marketed by the Edwards team (Buck and Mabel) over the years and in successive editions. In his retirement, Buck continued to write and publish: *Checklist of the Birds of Belize and the Mexican Yucatan* (2004), *Birds of the Shenandoah National Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park* (2006, McDonald and Woodward Publishing), and *The Hummingbirds of North and Middle America* (2008).

An image of this gentle and courtly southern gentlemen related by his nephew Preston from a recent trip to the Yucatan captures so well the professor and "bird man": in the forest, the tall and slender Edwards standing alongside his Mayan counterpart, the two intently working out the identification of a bird high in the canopy.

Buck was preceded in death by his wife Mabel in 1996. He is survived by his niece Anne Cary Edwards, and nephews Dr. H. Berryman Edwards, Jr., Dr. Preston H. Edwards, and Dr. Benjamin G. Edwards.