

In Memoriam: Philip Strong Humphrey, 1926–2009

Author: Lovejoy, Thomas E.

Source: *The Auk*, 129(4) : 785-786

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2012.129.4.785>

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

The Auk 129(4):785–786, 2012
© The American Ornithologists' Union, 2012.
Printed in USA.

IN MEMORIAM: PHILIP STRONG HUMPHREY, 1926–2009

THOMAS E. LOVEJOY

University Professor of Environmental Science and Policy, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia 22030, USA



Philip S. Humphrey, 1926–2009.

At the entrance of Dyche Hall, The Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Philip S. Humphrey, Member (1947), Elective Member (1958), and Fellow (1962) of the AOU, was born in Hibbing, Minnesota, on 26 February 1926. He died in Lawrence, Kansas, on 13 November 2009. The son of an iron mining engineer, he grew up in Litchfield, Connecticut, where from earliest memory he was interested in birds—an interest encouraged by S. Dillon Ripley and by his childhood friend Duryea Morton. He went on to become both a distinguished ornithologist and a leader in natural history museums and similar institutions. He nurtured many a career.

Through the encouragement of Ernst Mayr, Phil studied biology at Amherst College, graduating cum laude in 1949, having

first served in the U.S. Air Force from 1944 to 1947 (during which he published two papers in *The Migrant*). Then, on the advice of Mayr, he went to the University of Michigan to work with Jocelyn Van Tyne and took his first ornithology course from Sewall Pettingill. His thesis was on the anatomy and systematic biology of the sea-ducks (*Mergini*), and he received his doctorate in 1955. The systematics of waterfowl remained a lifelong interest. He remained at Michigan for two years, during which he managed to take apart (temporarily) one of the few existing specimens of the extinct Labrador Duck to study its anatomy, including its feather tracts (pterylosis).

From 1957 to 1962, Phil was assistant curator of ornithology at the Peabody Museum of Natural History (where Ripley was director) and assistant professor of zoology at Yale. In 1959, together with Kenneth C. Parkes, he published the classic paper on the terminology of molts and plumages that established the system used to this day. It was based on a better understanding of the actual biology of feathers, including new feather growth as the initiator of molt. In 1959, together with Marston Bates (University of Michigan), he co-edited *The Darwin Reader*, which is still in print.

During his Yale years, Phil advised four doctoral students, Peter Ames, George A. Clark, Jr., Mary Heimerdinger Clench, and George E. Watson, all of whom went on to distinguished ornithological careers. (He also served as my freshman advisor.) He conducted field studies in Haiti in 1959. With a Guggenheim Fellowship, he spent the 1960–1961 academic year in Argentina, including three months in late 1960 in Patagonia with Roger Tory Peterson, which led to a lifelong interest in Patagonian birds.

From 1962 to 1967, Phil was at the National Museum of Natural History, first as curator of birds (supervising the move of the massive, 1,400-case bird collection into the new East Wing Sixth Floor) and then as chairman of the Department of Vertebrate Zoology. While there, he initiated and led the massive Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Project that covered about 4.3 million square miles. Also at the invitation of the Rockefeller Foundation, he did field work in the Amazon of Brazil in the vicinity of Belem at various times during 1962–1965 and conducted studies of avian ecology in conjunction with the epidemiology of arthropod-borne viruses.

In 1967, Phil returned to academia as director of the Natural History Museum at the University of Kansas and as chairman and professor in the Department of Zoology (becoming a professor in the new Department of Systematics and Ecology in 1969).

Although his administrative skills were superb, he never lost contact with the substance of his field or his interest in students such as Bradley Livezey, Yoshika Oniki, and Pamela Rasmussen, as well as fellow scholars like Richard Prum and Douglas Causey. He initiated a book series on the vertebrates of Kansas and started the summer programs for children. He engaged and wrote thoughtfully about collections and museums and served in various officer roles for the Association of Systematic Collections. He was a member of the American Association of Museums and a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

He had an ongoing interest in and commitment to conservation, serving on the Pan-American Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation, on the board of the World Wildlife Fund-U.S. (1978–1984), and on the WWF-U.S. Council (1985–1993). He maintained an interest in Patagonia and steamer-ducks, including the description of a new species, *Tachyeres leucocephalus*. Steamer-ducks were a major interest: he published multiple papers and a University of Kansas Museum of Natural History monograph with Brad Livezey. The Patagonian interest resulted in the Preliminary Smithsonian Manual *Birds of Isla Grande (Tierra del Fuego)*, with Phil as the lead author of four.

Phil retired in 1995 but continued his scholarly interests. In 2005, he suffered a stroke in the course of carotid surgery. Paralyzed on one side, his mind was intact and he actively engaged in conversations and e-mail and wrote several short stories before his death.

Phil was noted for his personal skills in addition to his scholarly ones, and for a delightful sense of humor. He had a lifelong interest in piano, fly tying, and fishing. He married Mary Louise Countryman in 1946 and is survived by her. She now lives near their daughter Margaret in Medford, Oregon. He is also survived by son Steve, who lives with his wife in Costa Rica, as well as three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.