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AWARD ANNOUNCEMENT

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AWARD ANNOUNCEMENT

LOYE AND ALDEN MILLER RESEARCH AWARD

The Cooper Ornithological Society awarded its 2004 Loye and Alden Miller Award to Alexander Frank Skutch. In this time of increasing emphasis on the theoretical and experimental aspects of biology, including ornithology, Dr. Skutch stands out as a compelling symbol of the importance and promise of the study of natural history. Although many of his publications deal with botany or philosophy, this award recognizes his staggering contribution to our knowledge of the life histories and ecology of Neotropical birds, which previous to his work were either little known or completely unknown. During his nearly seven decades of study, Dr. Skutch published more than 20 books and hundreds of papers in both the scientific and popular literature.

We sometimes lose sight of the fact that today's sophisticated studies of avian ecology, evolution, and behavior rest on a foundation of natural history. It is the wealth of observations of the basic biology of species that point the way to more theoretical questions and hypotheses. Skutch himself moved in that direction as a result of his observations of cooperative breeding in birds, which he first reported in 1935, as well as his discernment of the diversity of reproductive rates among species. Robert Ricklefs has noted that as a result of the latter perception, Skutch very early on "outlined a basic proposition of *r*- and *K*-selection theory."

Alexander Skutch was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1904, and was interested in nature throughout his life. He received his Ph.D. in botany from Johns Hopkins University in 1928. He supported himself and his family by collecting and selling botanical specimens to museums. His first visit to Central America was in 1928, to carry out research on bananas for the United Fruit Company. He became fascinated with a Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (*Amazilia tzacatl*) nesting outside his laboratory window, and the rest, as they say, is history. Professional ornithologists are the beneficiaries of his multitudinous scientific works, but he also inspired amateur ornithologists and those simply interested in nature, conveying to them the beauty, wonder, and excitement of the Neotropics and its avian inhabitants.

The Miller Medal and citation were to be presented to Dr. Skutch at his home in Costa Rica on 20 May 2004, as part of a celebration of his 100th birthday. Sadly and quite unexpectedly, Dr. Skutch passed away on 12 May. At a celebration of Dr. Skutch's life, Dr. Alfonso Mata, Vice-President of the Board of Directors of the Tropical Science Center, with which Skutch was long associated, presented the Miller Medal on behalf of the Cooper Ornithological Society to the Ornithological Society of Costa Rica in Dr. Skutch's memory. The Small Preserves Network in Costa Rica plans to restore the old farmhouse where Dr. Skutch lived and turn it into an educational center and museum about his work. The Miller Medal will be displayed at the museum.



FIGURE 1. A fireside presentation by a young Alexander Skutch (1928). Photo courtesy of the Centro Cientifico Tropical.

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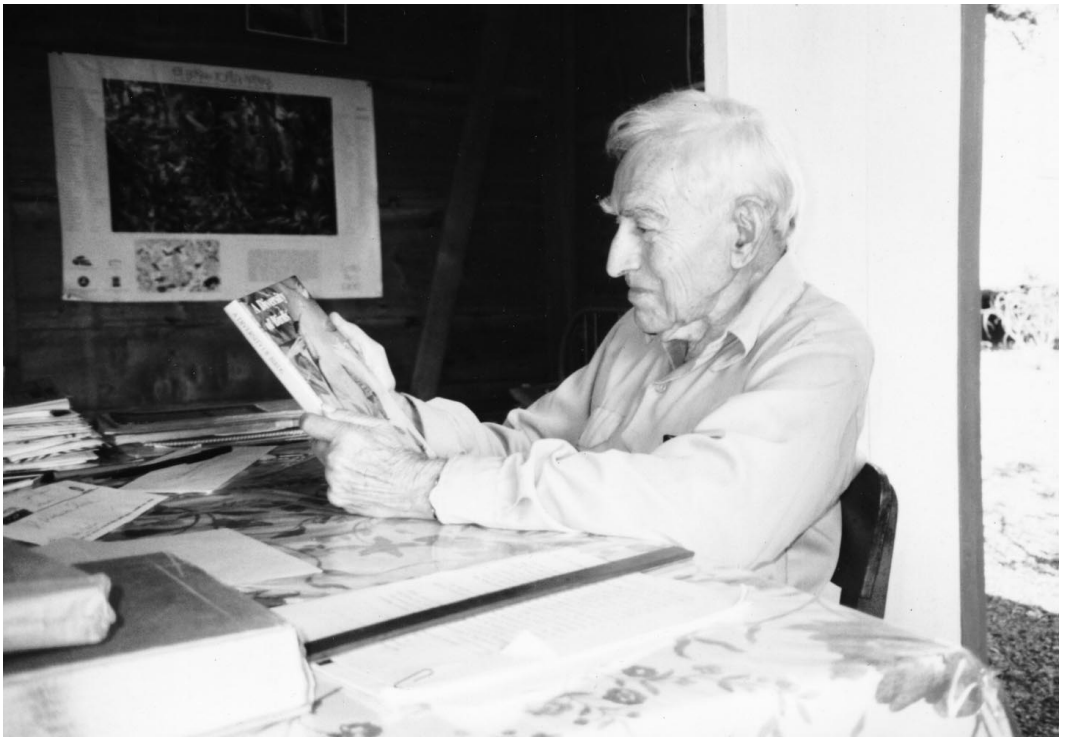


FIGURE 2. Alexander Skutch, awarded the Loye and Alden Miller Research Award for 2004. Photo courtesy of the Centro Cientifico Tropical.

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