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FREDERICK NATHAN HAMERSTROM, 1909–1990  
(From a photograph taken in 1989)

## IN MEMORIAM: FREDERICK NATHAN HAMERSTROM

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Frederick Nathan Hamerstrom was born on 8 July 1909 at Trenton, New Jersey. He died on 28 March 1990 in a rustic cabin on the Umpquah River in Oregon, a spot that he and his beloved wife of almost 60 years, Frances, had selected when they knew that Fred's death was imminent.

Fred, known to his many friends as Hammy, received his A.B. degree from Harvard in 1931 and was married that same week to form one of the closest and most effective research teams in American ornithological history. Reflecting his boyhood passion for hunting and game-bird biology, Fred attended the Game School at Clinton, New Jersey. Alert to the developing conservation trends of that period, he

quickly moved on to a program of research and training in wildlife ecology under Paul Errington at Iowa State University (M.S. in 1935).

A job as Project Game Manager with the U.S. Resettlement Administration tided him through the years of the great depression and paved the way for work towards a Ph.D. degree under Aldo Leopold at the University of Wisconsin (1941).

Fresh from his degree conferral, Fred accepted the position of Curator of the Edwin S. George Reserve of the University of Michigan where, with Fran, he established close ties with biologists in Ann Arbor including ornithologists Josselyn Van Tyne and George Sutton. From 1943 to 1946 his work at the

Reserve was interrupted by World War II. Fred served as an Aviation Physiologist and teacher of survival in the U.S. Army Air Corps.

Returning to Wisconsin in 1949 Fred was appointed Project Leader for the newly formed Prairie Grouse Management Research Unit of the Wisconsin Conservation Department where he, with Fran as Assistant Leader, proceeded to make major contributions to both research and management until and well beyond his retirement in 1972. These contributions included, importantly, extensive research on Prairie Chicken and Sharp-tailed Grouse breeding behavior and the development of basic management programs. This included "the scatter pattern," an innovative plan of habitat management that may well be credited with the rescue of the Prairie Chicken from extirpation in Wisconsin. Interest in the chickens and sharptails continued after his retirement, but new attention was now focused on hawks and owls, subjects of special interest to the Hamerstroms from the beginning. The two were offered Adjunct Professorships at the nearby University of Wisconsin campus at Steven's Point where their work with faculty and students was intensive and greatly appreciated. Studies of harriers, based on an accumulation of records on hundreds of nestings and hundreds of color-marked individuals over some 25 years, were published by the Smithsonian Institution. As the years passed, the Hamerstroms also found time to conduct an intensive study of Harris' Hawks in Texas and to conduct a study of the longevity of Osprey nests in Sonora, Mexico.

The chicken behavior research project, which extended over 22 years, required following the movements and activities of hundreds of individuals—essentially the entire population of the 50,000-acre Buena Vista marsh—from week to week and from year to year. Realizing that a project of this scope could be accomplished only with the cooperation of a large crew of skilled observers, Fred and Fran conceived the idea of enlisting amateur bird-watchers, hunters, and ornithology students from the various university campuses in Wisconsin and surrounding states. Ornithologists at a dozen local colleges and universities saw this as an exceptional teaching opportunity and responded enthusiastically, sending busloads and auto caravans of ornithology students each spring to the Hamerstrom's 100-year-old farmhouse near Plainfield, Wisconsin, during the booming season. Here the novices were carefully scheduled one or occasionally two persons per blind to provide complete coverage and avoid undesirable crowding. They were greeted personally, assigned sleeping quarters (bunk space for a sleeping bag in a large second floor "ballroom"), given a superb introduction to Prairie Chicken biology and conservation by Fred, instructed on note taking, told the arrangements for predawn transportation to a blind on 1 of 10 or 15 booming grounds, and sent to bed with a warm pat on the back. After from four to five hours of unforgettable watching and

listening in a simple, homemade blind, all were returned to headquarters for a roundup of reporting and experience exchanges, and then they were sent back to their respective campuses and the relative boredom of the university classroom.

The Hamerstrom's work on Prairie Chicken management was no less praiseworthy and impressive than the behavior study. Especially notable was their development of a plan for acquiring and managing scattered plots of grass- and brushland for nest and brood habitat in late spring and summer. Extensive state land purchases in the Buena Vista area, as originally visualized, would have been costly and highly unpopular with landowners and local governments concerned with the prospect of losing considerable acreage from the tax rolls. Instead, by organizing conservation-minded citizens and helping them form two fund-raising groups, known as "The Society of *Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*," and "The Prairie Chicken Foundation," the Hamerstroms raised enough money to purchase more than 13,000 scattered acres of marginal and submarginal grass and brushland, now valued at more than half a million dollars. The chickens responded and the alarming downward population trend of the 1960s was reversed in this critical area for the species in the state.

With Errington, he published the very first paper in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* (1937), "The evaluation of nesting losses and juvenile mortality of the Ring-necked Pheasant." A bulletin with Paul Errington and Frances Hamerstrom on the Great Horned Owl and its prey in the north-central United States, published by Iowa State College in 1940, won the Wildlife Society's award for that year. Fred, almost always with his wife and co-worker, Fran, produced four major publications on the Prairie Chicken, receiving the Wildlife Society's award again in 1957. His publication list includes 69 technical and scientific papers. He also did extensive editorial work, especially for the Wildlife Society, and was principal referee for all publications of the Raptor Research Foundation. He was also an invaluable editor and critic for his wife on all her popular and semitechnical books on nature and wildlife.

Hamerstrom's activities included membership in some dozen scientific organizations. He was a Fellow of the AOU, was twice President of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology and Co-Vice President with his wife of the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Letters and Arts. Awards included the Silver (1966) and Golden (1973) Passenger Pigeon award of the W.S.O., the National Wildlife Federation's award for distinguished service to conservation (1970), the United Peregrine Society's award for conservation (1980), and the research award from Wisconsin's Bureau of Research (1973). In 1990 the Raptor Research Foundation created the Frederick and Frances Hamerstrom Award in recognition of their contributions to raptor research.

Fred and Fran frequently attended AOU meetings when their field research permitted. They gave papers at seven International Ornithological Congresses where their work was well known and admired. They traveled extensively throughout the ranges of most American and European grouse species, and advised on or participated in research projects on grouse and deer in several European countries. These trips also provided opportunities to discuss hunting traditions, hunting ethics, and general conservation—special interests stemming from their life-long interest in hunting.

Although widely recognized for his contributions to ornithology and conservation, Fred was a quiet, soft spoken, and generally retiring gentleman. He was happiest, I think, when he trudged in hip boots or on snowshoes through the chicken habitats of his beloved Buena Vista marsh, or quietly discussed as-

pects of his exciting research, while he was seated in a comfortable chair or perhaps on a stool or packing box in the warm radiance of one of the great potbellied stoves that decorated and heated the highly informal and friendly farmhouse he shared with Fran for so many years.

Hammy's life was full of warmth and humor, rich in subtle nuances and stories of practical jokes that he or Fran had perpetrated on each other or on some unsuspecting friend, perhaps the listener. He was a warmhearted man who, in the postwar period of extreme hardship overseas, took on and, with Fran's active help, steered a vigorous, AOU-sponsored program of relief for stressed ornithologists in the European war zone. All who knew this great, lovable ornithologist personally will find much joy in thinking back over their various encounters with him.