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IN MEMORIAM: ROBERT A. MCCABE, 1914-1995

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Robert A. McCabe, Fellow of the AOU, died 29 May 1995 after a year-long battle with cancer. During his 81 years, Bob rose from the poverty of the depression years in South Milwaukee, Wisconsin to the highest positions and honors within his chosen profession. His contributions to the field of wildlife ecology will endure through the many students and professionals he influenced during his long and distinguished career.

Born in 1914, Bob spent his youth in the hard-working, but lower income German/Polish sec-

tion of Milwaukee. From Bob's early experiences he recognized the importance of improving one's situation through education. Finishing high school at the height of the depression meant delaying college until he could afford tuition. At this time, Bob was introduced to a circle of rabbit hunters who embraced his newly found enthusiasm for the out-of-doors by inviting him along to take care of the dogs and clean their quarry. Herein was the seed that blossomed into a life-long pursuit of knowledge regarding natural resource ecology. A life-



ROBERT A. MCCABE, 1914-1995

(Photograph taken in 1984)

guarding job and a small athletic scholarship enabled Bob to begin his quest for higher education at Carroll College in Waukesha, Wisconsin. Encouraged by a biology teacher for whom he worked as a teaching assistant, Bob decided to pursue graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. A pre-registration trip to the University in 1939 was pivotal for Bob. As he later said, it was "only a master stroke of fate" that he was to meet Aldo Leopold and begin an association that would profoundly influence his life.

Bob initiated his graduate work on Gray Partridge under the tutelage of Professor Leopold in 1939 in the fledgling Department of Wildlife Management and graduated with a Master's degree in 1943. At the Professor's behest, he then became the Biologist for the University of Wisconsin Arboretum and Wildlife Area. In 1945, Bob became Leopold's assistant and an Instruc-

tor in the Wildlife Department, while initiating his Ph.D. work on Ring-necked Pheasants. Professor Leopold's untimely death in 1948 ended a professional and very personal relationship for Bob, but the nine-year association formed the intellectual bulwark for Bob's ensuing career.

Following completion of his Doctorate degree in 1949, Bob became Assistant Professor in the Department of Wildlife Management (Ecology) and became department Chairman in 1952. He served in that capacity until 1979, continuing and enhancing the Leopold philosophy and standard. Throughout his career, Bob was an innovator, always attempting to bring new technology and disparate techniques to bear on the complexities of ecological processes. He was the first to use the precursor to DNA/RNA analyses, egg-white electrophoresis, to investigate phylogenetic relationships among birds. Bob

was among the first to use radio isotopes as identifying markers for field studies of movement and distribution of birds and mammals, and he was an early advocate of using infrared light technology for studying animal behavior at night. Early in Bob's long-term association with the Delta Waterfowl Research Station in southern Manitoba, he built the first duck decoy trap in North America for the capture and banding of waterfowl. The trap had been designed by Sir Peter Scott and employed tolling techniques developed by the Dutch. Although an advocate of innovative techniques and equipment, Bob was quick to point out the folly of measuring "with a micrometer when a yardstick would do."

Bob recognized early the value of long-term research. He maintained active data collection on varied species and activities such as American Woodcock breeding counts (40+ years); waterfowl use and distribution in University Bay (30+ years); Eastern Cottontail demographics (15+ years); four songbird studies that have from 8 to 27 years of continuous data collection; and a study of *Trillium* propagation and distribution that was initiated in 1948. Although trained as a wildlife scientist, Bob's curiosity regarding the intricacies of ecological processes superseded boundaries of game management and encompassed a broader view of what is now fashionably termed conservation biology. The breadth of his research efforts reflected Bob's interests in ecological relationships and land ethic, which had been instilled by Professor Leopold.

The extent of Bob's varied interests was indicated by the professional societies that he belonged to and participated in. He became a member of the AOU in 1946, an Elective Member in 1951, and a Fellow in 1967. He was also a Life Member of the Wilson Ornithological Society, a member of the Cooper Ornithological Society, the Association of Field Ornithologists, the British Ornithologists' Union, and the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, of which he was President in 1973. Bob was a Life Member of The Wildlife Society and served as its President (1976-77). He was also a member of the British Ecological Society; the American Society of Mammalogists; the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters (President 1979); The Wisconsin Historical Society; and the Wilderness Society.

During his distinguished career, Bob's ex-

pertise and counsel were sought at the state, national, and international levels. Some of the more notable assignments he accepted include Chairman of the Research Committee for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, chairman of the National Academy of Sciences Subcommittee on Vertebrate Pests, consultant for the North American Waterfowl Research Foundation, member of the Secretary of the Interior's committee on the use of lead versus steel shot, and consultant for the Department of Interior regarding the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Internationally, he received Rockefeller Foundation funding for surveying wildlife training in Africa, including Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Also, he served as consultant for the National Parks of Ethiopia. In 1969, Bob was awarded a Fulbright professorship at the University College in Dublin, Ireland. Over the ensuing 15 years, Bob had five graduate students from University College working on wildlife resource problems in Ireland and made annual trips as a consultant to the Irish Government for their National Parks Department. Active in the International Congress of Game Biologists, Bob had many friends and acquaintances in the ecology field worldwide. Although a seasoned traveler, Bob often showed his personal bias by commenting that no country was more beautiful than the U.S., particularly Wisconsin.

While building a career, a department, and a reputation, Bob also managed to raise a daughter and three sons, but he could not have accomplished either task without the love, support, and counsel of his wife, Marie, whom he met at Carroll College, where she was studying for a degree in education. They married in 1941 after Bob had started his graduate program and Marie had taught school for a year. Bob was a loving, albeit not indulgent, father to his older children, but he instilled in all his offspring a love of the natural world and, with his sons, the art of being afield. Bob's family was his pride and joy, and the four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren were particularly special. Marie was Bob's strength throughout and remains the lynch pin of the McCabe clan.

After 27 years as Chairman of the Wildlife Ecology department, Bob stepped down in 1979 and retired as Emeritus Professor in 1984. Retirement apparently was not in Bob's lexicon, for he continued to go to the office every day until stricken and even then managed to reg-

ularly visit his office to check his correspondence until 3 weeks before his death. Bob's "retirement" years were some of his busiest. He brought to conclusion some of his long-term data sets, particularly his research on the Willow Flycatcher, which culminated in the book *The Little Green Bird: The Nesting Ecology of the Willow Flycatcher*. Another book that occupied Bob's attention was occasioned by the centennial (1887-1987) of Aldo Leopold's birth. Although for years reticent to discuss his very personal relationship with Aldo, Bob collected his remembrances in a book entitled *Aldo Leopold: The Professor*, for which he received the Wisconsin Historical Society's Award of Merit. As both a bibliophile and wildlife art collector, Bob naturally gravitated to reviewing the increasingly popular books on the collected works of a wildlife artist or group of artists. He published 16 such reviews and was working on others at the time of his death. He was also in demand as a lecturer on wildlife art and a reviewer of exhibits, but he was loath to be called an expert, because he acknowledged that he had a critical eye for the artwork, but not the skills to produce it.

Bob never sought nor expected accolades for pursuing a profession that he felt was as much an avocation as a vocation. But his commitment to excellence is reflected in the tributes he received. In 1976, his alma mater Carroll College selected Bob as a Distinguished Alumnus and in 1989 awarded him an Honorary Doctorate degree. The Wisconsin chapter of The Wildlife

Society presented Bob with "The Wisconsin Award" in 1982 for his outstanding contribution to the wildlife profession. Ireland's National University bestowed an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree on Bob in 1988. The award of which Bob was most proud was presented to him in 1986 by the Wildlife Society—the Aldo Leopold Medal—the highest honor in the wildlife ecology profession.

Those who were associated with Bob knew of his delight in teaching and challenging students about the mysteries and wonders of their ecological surroundings, his passion for hunting Ruffed Grouse, and his strength and tenacity when it came to confronting those who disparaged ecological processes, its science, or its teachings. Bob was teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend to a remarkable number of people in the fields of ecology; his influence can be measured by those many who are proud to say that they had known him. His precept of attainment through education will be Bob's legacy through an undergraduate scholarship program established in his name in the University of Wisconsin's Wildlife Ecology Department.

Bob's only remark when accepting the Leopold Award was a heart-felt "I hope Aldo would approve." For all of us who have known Bob McCabe and have been influenced by his devotion to furthering the understanding of our natural resources and enhancing the concepts of land ethic, we can only feel that Aldo would not just have approved, he would have been extremely pleased.