

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

ON THE DEATH OF
EMERITUS PROFESSOR ROBERT A. McCABE

Robert A. McCabe, Emeritus Professor of the Department of Wildlife Ecology at the UW-Madison died 30 May 1995 at the age of 81 after an 18-month battle with lymphoma. His years of service as a graduate researcher, instructor, and faculty on the Madison campus spanned 55 years, 27 of which he served as a distinguished Chair of the Department. He was a student and close friend of Aldo Leopold.

Bob was born on Milwaukee's South Side, the eldest of 4 sons of working-class parents. Most graduates from his high school moved on to factory jobs, but McCabe set his sights on college. He entered Carroll College in Waukesha in 1935 with a football scholarship, but being too light for varsity play, he subsequently accepted an assistantship in biology and began his lifelong career as a scientist.

After earning his B.A. in Biology and Speech from Carroll College, Bob tried to enroll in the Zoology Department at UW-Madison in 1939. When asked what aspect interested him, he replied, "Game Conservation." "Go see Leopold in Ag" was the curt response. Having never heard of Leopold, and wanting to major in Zoology and not Agriculture, McCabe was devastated. After a despondent walk across campus, he finally found Leopold's office in a legendary old frame house at 424 University Farm Place. The welcome he received from Leopold was the beginning of a friendship and professional association that flourished until Leopold's death in 1948.

Bob was appointed student manager (1940-1942) of the Faville Grove Wildlife Area in Jefferson County and was employed as a biologist with the UW-Arboretum (1943-1945) before becoming an instructor in the Department of Wildlife Management (1945-1949). He received his Ph.D. in 1949 and became Department Chair in 1952, a position he held until 1979. He was intensely loyal to the Department and to his students. Throughout his career he fought for recognition and funding for both. All of his Ph.D. students went on to become full professors, department chairs, or top-level administrators of conservation organizations; his M.S. students formed the core of research and management divisions of state wildlife agencies, especially those of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Collectively, they represent a tribute to his judgement, nurturing, and teaching skills.

Bob McCabe's own research centered on wildlife and plant ecology, farm wildlife management, ornithology, and wildlife field techniques. Via his fabled wildlife techniques course he continued to teach field savvy to students well after curricula at other schools were confined to lab and lecture hall. He was among the first to use radio isotopes as markers under field conditions and infrared light to observe nocturnal behavior of animals. He pioneered the use of egg-white electrophoresis to test phylogenetic relationships--a basis for the concept of DNA/RNA affinities. Of his 140 plus publications, 65 are research, review, and educational papers. Their scope reflects their author's inquiring mind and diverse interests: classic works on gray partridge, homing of transplanted wood ducks, and studies ranging from house wren nesting to training for wildlife management. Following his retirement in 1984, he focused his attention upon the completion of two highly acclaimed books: *Aldo Leopold: The Professor* (1987), a tribute to his friend and mentor, and *The Little Green Bird* (1991), a meticulous study of the Willow Flycatcher.

(continued)

Among many special assignments, Bob chaired the National Academy of Sciences Subcommittee on Vertebrate Pest Problems, served on the U.S. Department of Interior committee to evaluate lead-iron shot, and served on the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Research Advisory Committee from its inception in 1952 until his death, chairing the group for 2 terms. Assignments abroad included a 1965 survey of wildlife training in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, research on impala in Kenya in 1967, and advisory work for Ethiopia in 1972. A year as a Fulbright Professor at University College in Dublin (1969-1970) took McCabe to Ireland and began an attachment that led to semiannual visits for 12 years, advising 6 graduate students there and consulting for Ireland's National Parks Department.

Professional society affiliations included the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology (President, 1973), American Ornithologists' Union (Fellow), Wilson Ornithological Society (Life Member), and Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters (President, 1979). Bob joined The Wildlife Society (TWS) in 1942, became a Life Member in 1955, worked on 8 committees, and served as President from 1976-1977. With his diligent work came well-earned honors: The Wisconsin Award from the Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society, the Wisconsin Historical Society's Award of Merit, and honorary degrees from Carroll College and Ireland's National University. Most appropriate and significant of all was the Aldo Leopold Medal, the highest honor bestowed by TWS and ultimate recognition of a wildlife professional, awarded in 1986.

Bob was fiercely loyal and devoted to Leopold, his Department, his students, and his family. In essence, he really had two families: the first by blood and the second by association at the University. He nurtured both and always led by example. He was also a man of deep contrasts: an avid hunter, book collector, art enthusiast and critic, land steward, and naturalist. And through it all, he displayed an abiding sense of humor. Those students and faculty who participated in the daily "brown bag" lunches in the Department for the past 50 years have counted these discussions, laced heavily with McCabe's wit, as among their most productive and enjoyable hours in academia.

Robert McCabe is survived by his wife Marie, 1 daughter, 3 sons, 4 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren. In *Aldo Leopold: The Professor*, Bob wrote that he and Leopold "... shared the same birthdate, a sweet tooth, and a desire to leave a legacy of good health, education and a degree of competence. I have attempted to provide this trilogy of obligation for my children." He was highly successful in this regard with both his biologic and academic families. The Department has established the Robert A. McCabe Undergraduate Scholarship for Academic Excellence through the U. W. Foundation, 1848 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53708-8860.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

Scott Craven

Lloyd Keith

Robert Ruff, Chair