

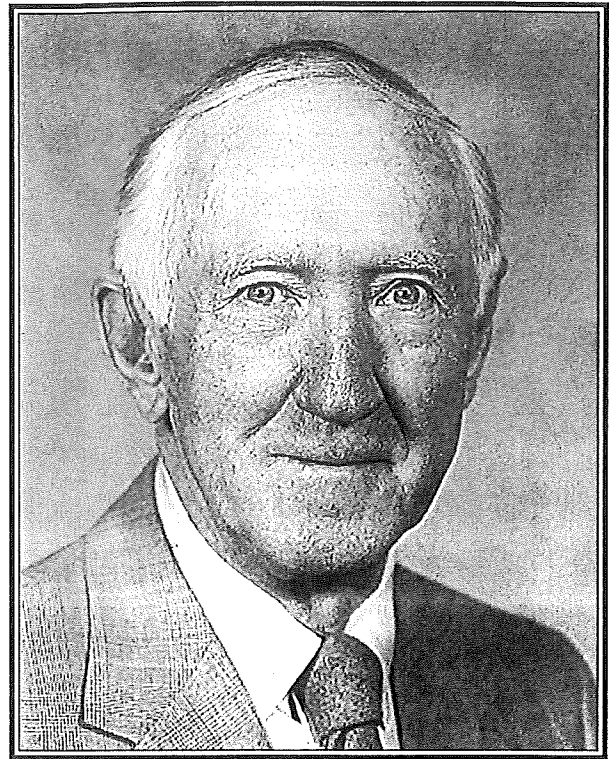
## Robert A. McCabe 1914–1995

On a soft June afternoon, a host of friends, students, and colleagues gathered with family in a chapel adjoining the University of Wisconsin (UW) campus in Madison to honor the quiet passing and memory of a cornerstone of the wildlife profession. Robert A. McCabe, student and close friend of Aldo Leopold; Emeritus Professor and distinguished Chairman of the Department of Wildlife Management/Ecology at UW for 27 years; scholar, sportsman, and gentleman, died 30 May 1995 after a relatively brief illness.

Bob was born on Milwaukee's South Side, eldest of 4 sons of working-class parents with eighth grade educations. As a boy he aided his family with earnings as a bootblack and fish-market helper. A football and track star in a high school where most graduates moved on to factory jobs, young McCabe set his sights on college. But that took money, it was the depths of the Great Depression, and jobs were nonexistent. While he waited for a break, a group of young workmen-cum-rabbit hunters introduced the city boy to what became a lifelong pursuit. For cleaning the group's rabbits, Bob was loaned a shotgun and a chance to join in following the beagles. A career-shaping bonus came from Mr. Schumacher, an older man whose home on the Bark River in rural Waukesha County was headquarters for the hunters. Mr. Schumacher tutored Bob in the arts of fishing, trapping, and other survival skills for tough times—good training for the future.

Bob entered Carroll College in Waukesha in 1935 with a football scholarship to cover the \$50/semester tuition and a dishwashing job to help pay room and board. When he proved too light for varsity play, an assistantship in biology replaced the scholarship. Bob met Marie Stanfield at Carroll, and they wed in 1941. He had 3 hunting beagles of his own by then, and Marie recalled a scene that is quintessential McCabe: The dogs were well trained (of course) and, when all went walking, Marie and the dogs couldn't cross the street until Bob commanded "over".

When Bob tried to enroll in the Zoology Department at UW in 1939 armed with a B.A. from Carroll College, he was asked what aspect interested him. He replied "Game Conservation," a term he felt he had newly coined, only to learn "that A.L. had used the term about the time I was born." "Go see Leopold in Ag," was the curt response and dismissal. Crushed—



he wanted zoology, *not* Ag and he'd never heard of Leopold—the despondent would-be graduate student saw his dream slipping away when he finally found the office of "Leopold in Ag," in an unimposing but 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. At Bob's memorial service, Nina Leopold Bradley spoke of the closeness between her Dad and Bob: "They each brought out the best in the other."

An instructor in the Department of Wildlife Management at the time of Leopold's death, Bob received his Ph.D. in 1949 and became Department Chairman in 1952. He held this position for 27 years, one of the longest chairmanships ever at UW-Madison. He brought to the task an intense loyalty to the Department and to his students. Throughout his career he fought for recognition and funding for both. All his Ph.D. students went on to become full professors, department chairmen, or top administrators of conservation agencies, a tribute to his judgment and his nurturing and teaching skills. It was his admirable (and most unusual in academe) practice never to add his name as coauthor to his students' publications—his way of ensuring maximum credit for "his boys."

It is perhaps no accident that 6 people associated with the Department as students or faculty thus far

have received the Aldo Leopold Memorial Award given annually by The Wildlife Society (TWS). Most students entered the department after the death of Leopold. While some of us did not have the good fortune of studying with Professor Leopold, we believed we were fortunate to be students under those who did, Bob McCabe among them.

Bob administered a department where decorum and protocol were practiced but also where comfort and friendship between staff and students were encouraged. Students addressed him as Bob and all other professors in the department by their given names, a practice instituted by Professor Leopold. Humor, give-and-take banter, and personal interactions also promoted strong working relationships and productivity.

Bob McCabe's own research centered on wildlife and plant ecology, farm game 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. Techniques were a forte: 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-some publications, 65 are research, review, and educational papers. Their scope reflects their author's inquiring mind and diverse interests: classic works on gray partridge (*Perdix perdix*, coauthored with Art Hawkins), homing of transplanted wood ducks (*Aix sponsa*), and studies ranging from house wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) nesting to training for wildlife management.

He was intransigent on conservation issues, only changing when incontrovertible evidence demanded it. He took heat on issues such as the lead-shot debate. And woe to a presenter, student and visitor alike, at the Department's seminar or brown-bag lunches if the presenter was not well prepared or showed faulty logic or study design.

Bob's hallmark persistence showed clearly as he honed his writing skills. Marie noted that his initial efforts were accurate but awkward, with no real sense of punctuation, grammar, spelling, or syntax. Guided by Leopold's critiques and peerless example, Bob more than conquered these problems, as vividly evidenced in his 2 books: *Aldo Leopold: The Professor* (1987, Rusty Rock Press, Madison, Wisc., 172pp.), a tribute to his mentor and friend, and *The little green bird* (1991, Rusty Rock Press, Madison, Wisc., 171pp.), a meticulous study of the willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*).

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, was secretary of several Wisconsin state boards, 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, Southern Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe), and South Africa, research on impala (*Aepyceros melampus*) 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 graduate students and consulting for Ireland's National Parks Department.

With the work came well-earned honors: The Wisconsin Award from the Wisconsin Chapter of TWS, the Wisconsin Historical Society's Award of Merit, and honorary degrees from Carroll College and Ireland's National University. Best of all, appropriately, the Aldo Leopold Medal, highest honor bestowed by TWS and ultimate recognition of a wildlife professional, awarded in 1986.

Professional society affiliations included the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology (President, 1973), American Ornithologists' Union (Fellow), Wilson Ornithological Society (Life Member), and Wisconsin Academy of Arts and Science (President, 1977). Bob joined TWS in 1942, became a Life Member in 1955, worked on 8 committees, and served as President from 1976–1977.

His interests included collecting old books and wildlife art. He became an acknowledged art expert, judging regional and national shows and contests, and serving as art critic for TWS. With an Irishman's love of land, he bought several properties over the years, including "Rusty Rock," 280 acres (113 ha) in the rolling hills of southwestern Wisconsin, managed and loved with typical intensity, and 65 acres (26 ha) of a mountainside near Killarney that will be given to the Irish national park that surrounds it.

Bird hunting was a hallmark passion with Bob McCabe. He rarely missed an opportunity to hunt with his current and past students on their study areas, where appropriate. We co-authors like to think that he was especially fond of the annual trips to West Texas quail country, hosted by Teer, as part of the "Unholy Four" (McCabe, Teer, Burger, and E. L. Kozicky), so styled by Bob (for no apparent reason!). A splendid wing shot, Bob competed only with himself. More than 2 misses in a row (a rare event)

brought silent contemplation but never a word about his gun, the wind, or any such excuse. His fervor was the same whether birds were abundant or nearly nonexistent, and he was legendary through his 70's for walking much younger companions into the ground.

Bob was fiercely loyal and devoted to Leopold, his Department, his students, and his family. He was a man of deep contrasts: an avid hunter yet an art enthusiast and 50-year observer of "the little green bird;" a rough taskmaster when necessary with his children and students, he delighted the neighborhood children with make-believe names. Bob was a stern critic, yet he had an abiding sense of humor. How many would cheerfully accept a picture of themselves clad in nightgown and nightcap, holding a candle, published in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* captioned "Our Retiring President?" Humor was a key to Bob's essence. Those who knew him well will always treasure the memory of those bright blue

twinkling eyes and wee leprechaun grin that preceded a quip or a warm greeting.

Robert McCabe is survived by his wife and helpmate Marie, daughter Colleen, sons Richard, Thomas, and Kevin (hunter-sportsmen all), 4 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. In *Aldo Leopold: The Professor* Bob wrote "In...A.L.'s essay 'Goose Music' is his statement, 'I have congenital hunting fever and three sons.' I too have the fever and three sons. A.L. and I also 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 successful. Memorial contributions may be made to the Robert A. McCabe Memorial Undergraduate Scholarship in Wildlife Ecology via the U.W. Foundation, 150 East Gilman, Madison, WI 53703, USA.—**George V. Burger**, 650 North Airlite Street, Elgin, IL 60123, USA; **James G. Teer**, Welder Wildlife Foundation, P.O. Box 1400, Sinton, TX 78387, USA.