

FREDERICK N. AND FRANCES HAMERSTROM

Fran and Frederick Hamerstrom are internationally renown for their work with prairie chickens and other wildlife. Their research was the basis for the conservation effort which saved the endangered prairie chicken from extirpation in Wisconsin.

Frederick Hamerstrom began his wildlife career at the Game Conservation Institute in Clinton, New Jersey in 1931. There he learned artificial propagation of game birds after having earned an A.B. degree at Harvard College. That same year he married Fran Carnes Flint. Thus was forged one of the most remarkable wildlife research teams known to the field of wildlife ecology. (Anderson, 1990)

Frederick was a Research Fellow under Dr. Paul L. Errington at Iowa State College from 1932 to 1935 where he and Frances studied pheasant nesting, winter ecology of bobwhite quail, and raptor food habits. Their paper, "The great horned owl and its prey in north-central United States," co-authored with P. L. Errington, won The Wildlife Society's first Terrestrial Publication Award in 1940. The first Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit was established at Iowa State in 1932; Dr. Errington was its first leader and Frederick Hamerstrom, its second graduate student, earned a M.S. degree, and Fran a B.S. degree there in 1935.

The Hamerstoms made their first research contact with prairie chickens in 1935 when Frederick became Project Game Manager for the U.S. Resettlement Administration Central Wisconsin Game Project near Necedah, Wisconsin. Although the prairie chicken was to become their major focal point in succeeding years, they also dealt with sharp-tailed grouse, ruffed grouse, sandhill cranes, furbearers, deer, food habits of great horned owls,

winter feeding, food and cover plantings, and development of water areas (Anderson, 1990).

The Hamerstoms were Research Fellows at the University of Wisconsin under Aldo Leopold, where Fran became the only woman ever to earn a graduate degree under Leopold in 1940, and Frederick only one of three ever to earn a doctorate under him in 1941. They continued their research on prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin during the spring seasons of 1941 through 1943, and then again in 1947 and 1948 while Frederick was Curator of the Edwin S. George Reserve. They also studied prairie chickens and sharptails in Michigan and predators and deer on the Reserve during this time. Frederick served in the U.S. Air Force from 1944 through 1946 as an Aviation Physiologist; Fran was a medical technician in Beaumont General Hospital.

The Hamerstoms' research on prairie chickens provided tools for other ornithological studies. They were among the first to color-mark wild birds by using the falconer's technique of imping cocks; thus they discovered that cocks were territorial on booming grounds. Fran irreverently wrote, to Aldo Leopold's delight, the following poem about the episode:

The prairie hen will wonder soon,
but not because her love goes boom.
Consider with what joy, she'll hail
the colored feathers in this tail. (Anderson, 1990)

Frederick was employed by The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources from 1949 through 1972 as Project Leader of the Prairie Grouse Management Research Unit headquartered in Plainfield WI; Fran was Assistant Leader and only the second woman ever employed as a wildlife professional in Wisconsin. Early in this period, the

Hamerstroms and Os Mattson, WDNR land manager for the project, formulated a management plan to "save the prairie chicken" in Wisconsin. This was published as "A Guide to Prairie Chicken Management," a WDNR Technical Bulletin that received The Wildlife Society's award for best publication of the year in 1957. The scatter-pattern plan of land management, introduced a new concept which has been applied for other species, including some of those in the rain forests. The plan was designed for the Buena Vista Marsh area in Portage County.

The Hamerstroms and Mattson, were also actively involved in implementing the first management efforts to maintain the grasslands in the face of the ever present natural succession of shrubs and trees that were persistently reclaiming the area. Land acquisition and subsequent management stopped the decline of the prairie chicken population on the Buena Vista Marsh and fostered its resurgence to the 1950 level by 1981.

They retired from the WDNR in 1972 but maintained an active interest in the population dynamics and management of the prairie chicken as Faculty and Research Associates (1972-1982) and Adjunct Professors (1982-present) at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. They urged such things as concern for the needs of wildlife and population control. They also conducted long-term studies of northern harriers and kestrels on the Buena Vista Marsh. The 25-year harrier study was published in a book by Fran entitled "Harrier, Hawk of the Marshes: The Hawk That is Ruled by a Mouse." The kestrel study, now in its 21st year, continues under Fran's direction.

The Hamerstrom's studied wildlife and conservation abroad and spoke at Universities and ornithological societies in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. They initiated a continuing study of Harris hawks in Texas and of an osprey population in

Sonora, Mexico.

Fran is an accomplished and noted writer. She has published at least 100 professional papers, in addition to about 100 reviews of ornithological literature, mostly in German. She has also published 10 enjoyable books, and a book of prose. Frederick Hamerstrom was a highly skilled technical writer and editor. In addition to editing the 10 books that were published by Fran, the last one only 2 days before his death, he refereed technical papers for several journals and was the Principal Referee for Raptor Research.

The Hamerstroms served on several graduate committees at UW-Stevens Point and thus were mentors for wildlife students in areas of research planning, design, execution, analysis, and writing. They also shared their knowledge and experience with numerous other wildlife apprentices in their own home which served as a classroom, library, laboratory, dormitory, research headquarters, and social center that often echoed with good music and laughter.

Besides their research, writing, and academic advising contributions, they have also been strongly involved in many state, national, and international organizations. Frederick's involvement includes the American Institute of Biological Sciences; Councilor of the Citizens' Natural Resources Association, Co-vice President for Science in the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts and Letters and twice President, Co-Chair of Research for the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology.

Fran Hamerstrom's professional organization involvements include the Authors Guild; British Ornithologists' Union' Chairman of the Legislative Committee from 1963-1970 for The North American Falconers Association; and Wisconsin Regional Writers.

Individually, and collectively, their awards of recognition for pioneering conservation

work and scholarship are many. For Fran they number among them: an honorary doctorate from Carroll College in Waukesha, WI; American Museum of Natural History-Chapman Award; the Joselyn Van Tyne Award in Ornithology, and the August Derleth Award for her book on their prairie chicken research, "Strictly for the Chickens." On November 16th of this year (1991), she received the Spacial Award from UW-SP's Sigma Xi national scientific research society.

Frederick's number of honors and awards would be too long to list here, but include the 1978 Environmentalist of the Year, College of Natural Resources, UW-SP; and the Wildlife Conservation Award from the United Peregrine Society. Together they have received the 1980 Wisconsin Award for Wildlife Research from the Wisconsin Chapter of the Wildlife Society, and the National Wildlife Federation's award for "Distinguished Service to Conservation." Recently, a Frederick and Frances Hamerstrom Award was created by the Raptor Research Foundation.

Frederick has been called a "modest gentleman" by his colleagues and a "quiet scientist" by his companion in both work and life of 59 years. For all their accomplishments and distinguished recognition, they lived very simply in a pre-Civil War home with few modern amenities. Frederick Hamerstrom died at the age of 80 in March of 1990.

Fran Hamerstrom continues as the "one with the get-up-and go." She has been proclaimed as the "internationally known naturalist, researcher and writer," and as "the grand lady of wildlife ecology." Currently, she is the visiting professor at Welder Wildlife Refuge in Texas. She intends on spending the late spring doing some writing on a remote island in the Mediterranean and then head off to Africa.

Sources:

Anderson, Raymond. Frederick N. Hamerstrom. Unpublished essay. 1990.

Long, Charles. Personal Interview. December 11, 1990. UW-SP.

Stevens Point Journal. Accent: "Hamerstrom Trainer to be honored for natural resources contributions." November 9, 1990.