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IN MEMORIAM: HARRY SCHELWALD SWARTH
1878-1935

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Plate 6

ON THE morning of October 22, 1935, at his home in Berkeley, California, Harry Schelwald Swarth, a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union, died of a heart ailment from which he had suffered for more than a year. His all too early passing is not only a great sorrow to his family and immediate associates, but also a great loss to the branches of natural history in which he was prominent, ornithology and mammalogy. His interest as an investigator in these fields, and his zeal as a worker, coupled with his ability as a writer, have made his record one that will surely last.

Son of Carina Themmen and Ernest Adrian Swarth, he was born in Chicago, Illinois, on January 26, 1878. In or about 1869, his parents with their first two children and a brother, Auguste Swarth, had come to the United States and settled in Chicago, where Ernest was on the Board of Trade. The family lost most of their possessions in the great fire of 1871, but received prompt assistance from an aunt in Holland. Some time before, they had made the acquaintance of George Frean Morcom,—an acquaintance that ripened into such a wonderful friendship that Morcom lived either with or near the Swarth family for the rest of his life. At the time of the fire Morcom fled with the Swarths from the deadly flames and camped with them in the cemetery that later became Lincoln Park.

The winter of 1885-86 was passed by the Swarths and their friend in Los Angeles where they had invested to some extent in real estate, upon which they were fortunate enough to make some profit; but they returned to Chicago in the spring. In the winter of 1891, however, the two Swarth families came back to California accompanied by Morcom, whose health was failing, and settled in Los Angeles. Happily this devoted friend regained his health and lived on for forty years.



Sincerely yours
Harry S. Swarth

The two families settled in the western part of the town where they were surrounded by evidences of the premature "boom" that had already collapsed. Here they were close to open territory which was ideal for collecting ornithological and mammalogical specimens, as well as for shooting cottontail rabbits, a sport in which Morcom took much interest. Having had opportunity in England to indulge in shooting and fishing, Morcom had lost no time upon his arrival in Chicago in locating good territory for such sport. He had formed in England a great friendship for the ornithologist, John Gatcombe, and he not only had many specimens of game birds mounted but soon took an interest in birds of all kinds. After his arrival in California, he commenced to make a collection of the birds of this coast.

The collections were kept in his living quarters in one of the Swarth houses, and the boy Harry always had access to them, as he had to the Morcom ornithological library as well. Morcom never became an adept in the preparation of his specimens, so Swarth "learned to make bird skins of a sort and thus became useful." Where he learned to do this, or if, indeed, he had a teacher, is not indicated in the available sources of information. It seems probable that the art was picked up from observing the work of Frank Stephens of San Diego with whom the Swarths and their friend were well acquainted and of whom they thought highly. Possibly he "just learned" along with some of his schoolboy friends in Los Angeles, who were also becoming greatly interested in birds, generally beginning with the usual urge for collecting birds' eggs.

From his own account of his boyhood, Swarth used to get up at daybreak and go out collecting until breakfast time, going to grammar school regularly, sometimes going collecting in the afternoon as well with Morcom, and making up the specimens before bedtime. After grammar school he attended the Baptist College in Los Angeles. His mode of life was an ideal one for an earnest, studious youngster who was developing an interest in natural history,—exploration with Morcom of new territory for treasures as yet unknown to them; a reference library at hand for the identification of their specimens; and with a keen pleasure in their close companionship and in their work. What better could one ask for?

At first, apparently all the specimens went into the Morcom collection, but later Swarth started a collection of his own, and finally the two collections were donated to the California Academy of Sciences where they have been distributed in the main collection. The first bird collected and skinned in California by Swarth seems to have been a female Southern White-headed Woodpecker (*Dryobates albolarvatus gravirostris*) taken in the San Bernardino Mountains on June 20, 1894. Other specimens were collected in the next few days which he evidently passed in the same locality, as shown by the card index of his collection. So industrious were these two

enthusiasts that it was only a comparatively short time before the distribution of the birds of the neighborhood was well worked out and new fields for distributional work were discussed.

The card index of the Swarth collection shows that he started it in 1894, but he was also preparing specimens for Morcom and continued to do so for the next ten years. The index also shows that several of his schoolboy friends of the middle '90's were graduating from egg-collecting and were developing an interest in the birds themselves, for a few of the bird specimens in the collection were from the hands of some of his companions, who later became prominent in the early activities of the Cooper Ornithological Club.

When Swarth was eighteen years old, acting under the advice of Major C. E. Bendire, he decided upon an exploring trip to the Huachuca Mountains, Arizona; and with three companions he set out for that destination in February, 1896, in a two-horse farm wagon. The party remained in the field throughout the spring and well into July. During this period Swarth developed such an interest in that region that it led to many explorations in other parts of the State in later years and to his becoming a leading authority upon Arizonan ornithology. In all, he made six trips to Arizona, on the last of which I had the good fortune to accompany him and to experience one of the pleasantest and most satisfactory collecting trips of my life. On this occasion the expedition motored through some of the territory over which the farm-wagon outfit had passed thirty-one years before, while Swarth enlivened the way by pointing out camping grounds of the earlier trip and made interesting comparisons of present conditions with the old.

As the boy grew into manhood it became evident that he was destined to be an ornithologist, and in 1904 he secured a position in the Field Columbian Museum at Chicago, where he became an assistant in the Department of Zoology under the late Charles B. Cory. Here he lived with his brother Charles, and on Sunday mornings they would rise early, take a street car to the end of the line, and put in the entire day birding, ever on the lookout for rare species. These outings always remained among his pleasantest memories.

In 1908, the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology was opened at Berkeley, California, and Swarth was offered a position there, which he accepted, as assistant in ornithology, becoming Curator of Birds two years later. He was delighted to return to the West and to find that he was to have a large amount of outside work. Meanwhile he had been developing an interest in other branches, not only of ornithology but also of mammalogy, in addition to the study of distribution and differentiation, although the study of these two branches and their inter-relationships always remained his chief interest. Early in his career it became evident that he was endowed

with a retentive memory and had the happy faculty of keeping ever in mind the less apparent but very important details pertaining to the differentiation of forms and races. To such an extent did he develop this faculty by long study, as he accumulated material in the field, or by loans from other museums, that he was able to solve many difficult problems concerning the identification and classification of certain groups, and in consequence to take up the revision of several of these groups, particularly of birds, but of mammals as well.

In 1913, he was called to Los Angeles to become Assistant Director of the Museum of History, Science and Art, but after three years, returned to Berkeley to his former position as Curator of Birds, where he remained until, in 1927, he was offered the position of Curator of the Department of Ornithology and Mammalogy of the California Academy of Sciences, left open at that time by my own retirement from active life.

The courtesy had been shown me of being allowed to name my successor. Since I was well acquainted with Swarth and with his standing as an ornithologist and mammalogist, I deemed it advisable to secure his services, if possible, especially as I knew of his great interest in the avifauna of the Galapagos Islands, and of the need for working out the difficult taxonomic problems that exist in that region, from which the Academy had obtained a large collection of specimens. On March 1, 1927, Swarth was accordingly installed as Curator of the Department of Ornithology and Mammalogy. He at once took up the Galapagos work and for the next four years devoted a large part of his time to it.

In 1930, he was elected one of the delegates from the American Ornithologists' Union to attend the seventh meeting of the International Ornithological Congress held at Amsterdam, Holland, in June of that year. This gave him the opportunity to visit England where he was cordially received at the British and Rothschild Museums. In these institutions he was given every facility to study their series and type specimens of Galapagos birds which greatly assisted him to complete his report. This came out in 1931, under the title 'Avifauna of the Galapagos Islands,' as volume 18 of the Occasional Papers of the California Academy of Sciences, and is the most valuable paper of its kind so far written.

In consequence of his knowledge acquired in this study, Swarth was made chief of the scientific part of the Templeton Crocker Expedition to the Galapagos in 1932, when he at last had the opportunity to study the avifauna of the islands in its own habitat. There he came to realize how important it was to have both the fauna and flora of the Galapagos Islands given much needed protection and he exerted himself to bring this about. He finally got in touch with the Ecuadorean Government through the assistance of Mr. Robert T. Moore, of Los Angeles, California, a man well

acquainted with influential people in that country, and after much correspondence the matter was brought to a successful termination.

At the time of the gold-mining excitement in 1898, Swarth had been persuaded by his fellow member of the Cooper Ornithological Club, William B. Judson, to accompany him to Alaska, an expedition in which Morcom was sufficiently interested to assist. Judson went to search for gold while Swarth, though he may have hoped to find some gold, went primarily to see the country and to study the bird life there. The trip north was made in a boat crowded with all sorts of men, and the interstices in the human crowd were filled with all sorts of dogs, that is, of all sorts except the sort that could pull sleds, as Harry put it. Practically all the men and dogs were seasick. After a wretched trip, slowed down by long spells of fog, the ship reached Wrangell in February, 1898. Swarth was far from well at the time of arrival, and was delighted to go ashore. He made a trip up the Stikine River, but soon found that he really was ill and that this wild country was no place for a man in his condition. Fortunately he was tendered a friendly hand by a man who was soon to return to California and who offered to look after him on the way home, an offer which was gladly accepted.

This visit to the Northwest Coast, however, made such an impression upon Swarth's mind that it led to his making several field trips to that region. His early visits included a number of islands and rivers from Juneau southward to Vancouver Island; his later ones extended into the interior. Finally he became so much interested in the Atlin region of British Columbia that he spent several summers there, taking his family with him for the outing. His early work on that coast, in 1909, organized and supported by Miss Annie M. Alexander, was on behalf of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology.

Several outstanding papers were the result of this work in southern Alaska and British Columbia. One of these, in which Swarth was junior author with Major Allan Brooks, was entitled 'A Distributional List of the Birds of British Columbia,' and appeared as number 17 of *Pacific Coast Avifauna*, published by the Cooper Ornithological Club in 1925. Of the last papers that he wrote, two were published in volume 23, 4th series, of the *Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences*, in 1936; one was a list of the birds of the Atlin region of British Columbia and the other upon the origin of the fauna of the Sitkan district, Alaska. Another paper, upon the mammals of the Atlin region, is in press at this writing.

Besides collaborating with Major Brooks, Swarth wrote papers in co-authorship with other well-known ornithological investigators, particularly with Joseph Grinnell. Swarth's bibliography by Dr. Jean M. Linsdale, preceded by a short sketch of the man himself, appeared in 'The Condor,' volume 38, no. 4, pp. 155-168, July 1936, with three plates.

Swarth had early encountered some of the complications that arose from the study of what were first called "geographic variations" and are now recognized as subspecies. Becoming greatly interested in these variations and the inter-relationship of certain groups, he made an intensive study of them, and his comprehensive work resulted in many papers that have been of great value in the classification of certain forms not only of birds but of mammals as well. Geographically these studies included Alaska, with many of its coast islands; British Columbia; Arizona; sundry parts of California; Lower California; the islands off the west coasts of the United States and Mexico; and the Galapagos Islands. The work on Lower California was in collaboration with Dr. Joseph Grinnell; in British Columbia partly with Major Allan Brooks. In connection with this work he described thirty species and subspecies of birds (one with Allan Brooks and six with Grinnell), and eleven species and subspecies of mammals, of which two were with Grinnell.

His interest in literature and his careful work in all that he undertook, combined to make the tasks of editing and reviewing one of Swarth's outstanding accomplishments. He edited the latest "Ten Year Index to The Auk" (1921-1930) and also was one of the proof-readers of the 'Check-list of North American Birds,' fourth edition. The first appearance of the initials "H. S. S." under a review was in 'The Condor,' volume 11, 1909, in which they appeared on four occasions. In volume 12 they were present eleven times, and thereafter he was recognized as a particularly painstaking and conscientious reviewer. Out of his two hundred and twenty-one titles, sixty-four were reviews; with one exception these appeared in 'The Condor' of which he was for many years associate editor, in fact, from 1910 until 1928.

A matter of keen interest to Swarth was the publication of his history of the Cooper Ornithological Club, which was brought out at the Club's annual dinner given in San Francisco in May 1929. It was easy to see what a pleasure the preparation of his material was to him,—a pleasure that I shared with him to a slight extent by being asked to assist photographically. Great was my surprise to find when the booklet came out that the last few pages were devoted to some of my supposedly humorous rhymicalities that had been read at Cooper Club dinners,—and this without his having given me a chance to polish up or to put the verses in better shape. He certainly did enjoy this little joke that he played on me.

In this history, which was published in 1929 under the title of 'The C. O. C. 1893-1928,' he gives a sketch of the formation of the short-lived Southern California Natural History Society of which he was one of the organizers in 1893. It soon disintegrated by members dropping out, joining the Cooper Club whose headquarters were at Santa Clara, California, and

holding meetings as members thereof in the southland. Such meetings were soon authorized as auxiliaries of the northern ones. As this did not work out quite satisfactorily a regular Southern Division of the Cooper Ornithological Club was finally established and "chapters" in other places were made permissible.

Swarth's name does not appear in the Club's register until 1897 for, as he modestly puts it in his history, he "attended meetings for a year or more with fair regularity before mustering up courage to ask if the Club would accept membership dues from him." He was gladly accepted within the ranks, and elected first treasurer and then secretary in Northern or Southern Divisions for many years. In 1921, he was made Vice-President and, in 1922, President of the Northern Division. He was ever ready to work for the Club, in which he took a great interest, but a certain nervous diffidence made him uncomfortable when presiding at meetings. Fortunately this diffidence in regard to some matters did not interfere with his confidence in his own observations and deductions. In fact, he was not only ready to serve but was always studying out ways and means for furthering the Club's interests and was one of our best workers.

When a child, Swarth suffered from an illness that weakened him seriously. From this he fortunately recovered at the age of fourteen, but it left him very quiet in disposition and very deliberate in thought and action. In fact, he was so quiet that he never cared to romp with his two children, but enjoyed reading to them selections from books he had enjoyed the most when young.

He was always painstaking and thorough, endowed with a retentive memory, so that his observations were distinctly reliable and his work was of a high order, valuable to present and undoubtedly to future generations of students of ornithology and mammalogy.

In addition to his life work, he was through his mother's influence greatly interested in literature, art and, though not a musician or even addicted to humming or whistling, in music. He was likewise indebted to his mother for a delightful sense of humor though, strange to say, he seldom laughed out loud; but he had a habit, of which he was probably unaware, of making little chuckling sounds from time to time,—and those of us about him early learned that, no matter how solemn his countenance, the immediate sequence of a chuckle was apt to be a keenly humorous observation that would bring tears to our eyes. Yet he never more than smiled!

He always kept in touch with certain booksellers, especially British, as the perusal of sale catalogues of old books was a joy to him, and the shelves of his home library have upon them a most interesting selection of his favorite authors. The book in his library that he most cherished was 'Birds through an Opera Glass,' by Florence Merriam Bailey, in which was

inscribed by Morcom, "Harry S. Swarth, April 25, 1890" and later by Swarth himself, "My first bird book! H. S. S."

In 1910 he married Miss Winifern Wood and lived in Berkeley, California, practically the rest of his life in the home he had purchased there. Mrs. Swarth and the two sons, George Selwyn and Morton Themmen, at times helped him in his field work, notably at Atlin, British Columbia, where the family passed several summers, but so far neither of the boys has followed in their father's footsteps, for George has taken up the study of law at Stanford University and Morton is still at school.

Swarth might have been made Director of the California Academy of Sciences; yet notwithstanding his long experience in museum work and his highly intelligent ideas concerning it, those of us who knew him well were aware that certain difficulties in carrying out his ideas and the petty trials connected with that position, would have been very wearing upon his nervous system. Also it would have interfered with his most valuable natural-history work which has been such a strong factor in maintaining the standing of the Academy. Upon the death of Dr. C. E. Grunsky, who as acting Director, followed Dr. B. W. Evermann, he was considered for the position, but in 1934 his failing health caused him to withdraw.

As set down under the heading "Biographical" in one of Swarth's notebooks, he held membership in the following organizations: Cooper Ornithological Club, 1897—; American Ornithologists' Union, Associate, 1900; Member, 1909; Fellow, 1916—; California Academy of Sciences, 1910—; Wilson Ornithological Club, 1910; Biological Society of Washington, 1914—; American Society of Mammalogists, 1919—; Sigma Xi, California Chapter, 1917—; Honorary Member, Audubon Association of the Pacific, 1927—; Corresponding Member, Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art, 1933—; "International Orn. Committee, July 6, 1934."

Swarth attended meetings of the American Ornithologists' Union whenever circumstances permitted him to do so and always upon his return told us of the great pleasure that it had been to him to meet so many of his ornithological friends and of the deep interest that he had felt in the papers and proceedings. The "A. O. U." meant almost as much to him as the "C. O. C." and he was ever ready to do anything and everything that he possibly could do to further its interests.

Although for eight years I was in close association with Swarth, many things about his life were naturally unknown to me, for information concerning which thanks are due to Mrs. Swarth and to his sisters, Miss Maud Swarth and Mrs. Clark R. Stanford.

From our midst has gone a man we can ill afford to lose. None who ever knew him well could fail to be his friend and to many, in his quiet way, he gave a helping hand. Treasured in our minds will be his memory.