

# In Memoriam



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## IN MEMORIAM: JAMES A. HANCOCK, 1921–2004

JAMES A. KUSHLAN

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James Allitt Hancock was born on 20 July 1921 in England and died on 22 February 2004. He became a Corresponding Fellow of the AOU in 1995. After school and a few years in business, he served in World War II as an officer in the Indian Army, eventually rising to Colonel. His wartime experiences increased his understanding and appreciation of all things Indian, including a working knowledge of Urdu (connections that would later allow him to study Indian herons and lead wildlife tours). On his return to England, he began a second career in the oil business. He rose to president of Edwin Cooper and to the board of its eventual corporate owner, The Ethyl Corporation. With manufacturing plants and customers in exotic and little-visited corners of the world, he scheduled his trips to include weekends that could be devoted to nature photography. These excursions were facilitated by his extensive business and developing ornithological contacts and often ended in wetlands and along coasts, habitats of the diverse tropical herons. Along the way, he made certain to meet with scientists and natural historians, whom he would engage in spirited debate about herons. He was particularly fond of seeking out talent among the younger crowd, and subsequently mentoring them.

Being of the old school, he decided to do a classic bird-family monograph, a first for the Ardeidae, in folio size, featuring full-page paintings and summary text. To collaborate on the text, he enlisted Sir Hugh Elliott and the artwork was entrusted to a then up-and-coming Robert Gilmore. *Herons of the World* (1978) was a huge success. A smaller edition, with me as co-author, new material, and a new format produced the oddly named *Herons*

*Handbook* in 1984, which seems to have inspired a generation of field work. With M. Philip Kahl, we then undertook to monograph the *Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills of the World* in 1992. James published books of his photographs, including a charming personal ode to wetlands in *The Birds of the Wetlands* (1984), *Herons and Egrets of the World, a Photographic Journey* (1999), and *Herons of North America, their World in Focus* (2000). His final collaboration, marking more than a quarter of a century since his first monograph, was *The Herons* (2005), which I co-authored. Hancock enjoyed intellectual challenges. He eventually proved, to a resistant establishment, the biological and taxonomic importance of the fleeting soft-part coloration of herons and that the topic could be studied photographically by amateurs. He challenged entrenched understanding of species and subspecies limits. His photographs were his guide; his masterpiece being his photographic revelation of sibling species within the supposedly well-known large white egrets. His photographs continue to appear, and his recognition as a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society was a source of pride.

His career as ornithologist, natural history photographer, and conservationist was well recognized. He served on the Council of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, was treasurer of the United Kingdom International Council for Bird Protection, and was president of the British Trust for Ornithology. Three of his most cherished recognitions were the Order of the British Empire for services to ornithology, presented to him by the Queen; the British Trust for Ornithology's Jubilee Medal; and—above all else—an honorary doctorate from the University of Southampton.

To those who study herons, or who merely appreciate them, James Hancock was our guide, our guru, our inspiration. Sometime well into mid-life (such transitions happen slowly), having accomplished all he cared to professionally, he began to focus his camera and his inimitable energies on herons, and from that point forward James's story line and that of an entire family of birds became inexorably intertwined.

His wonderful wife, Sylvia, his children and grandchildren, his travels, his friends, his home, his Hampshire countryside, and especially his trout streams were the other stuff of this very full life. Few amateur ornithologists have had such an effect on a specific area of ornithology as he. His is a breed that is fast disappearing, and his like certainly will not be seen again.

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## IN MEMORIAM: JOHN CALEEKAL GEORGE, 1921–2005

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John Caleekal George, AOU Life Member since 1968 and Elective Member since 1977, died after a brief illness on 1 April 2005 at the age of 83 in Guelph, Ontario. A disciplined scholar of international stature, his contributions to ornithology spanned six decades and two continents. To quote P. Jawaharlal Nehru on the death of Mohandas K. Gandhi, "What, then, can we say about him except to feel humble on this occasion?"

Born on 16 June 1921, in the State of Kerala, India, John George was the son of leading Indian zoologist Dr. C. J. George and his wife, Annama. Although John was initially drawn by his mother's interests to the arts and humanities, his father instilled in him a passion for biology. John attended university to study medicine, but soon switched to the biological sciences. He received a B.Sc. in Zoology and Botany (1942) and a Ph.D. in Zoology (1948) from Wilson College at the University of Bombay (Mumbai). At university, John was also a fine athlete, excelling in soccer, field hockey, cricket, badminton, and tennis. This would ultimately lead him to a lifelong interest in muscle biology. However, he first served in Calcutta as a zoologist in the Department of Anthropology of the government of a newly independent India.

Founding Head of the Department of Zoology at the newly founded University of Baroda in India from 1950 to 1967, John became a Professor in 1956. In 1953–1954, he was a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania and the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole in Massachusetts. He held a Fulbright at Washington State University in 1961–1962. In 1967, he became Professor of Zoology at the University of Guelph in Ontario, and he was named Professor Emeritus at Guelph in 1986. Cofounder in 1963 of the Indian Journal of Ornithology, *Pavo*, and co-author in 1966 with the late Andrew J. Berger of the textbook *Avian Myology*, John also contributed 12 book chapters and approximately 400 publications in a myriad of scientific journals and conference proceedings. His first publication was in 1943, his latest in 2004. The great majority of his works were studies of avian muscle, endocrinology, thermoregulation, toxicology, and migration.

John was cited for excellence in research by Sigma Xi, the Scientific Research Society. He was a Fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences. He participated in numerous national and international symposia and conferences and served on the Senate of the University of Guelph. He served as Chair of the Animal Biology Grant