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Earl Lee Hanebrink: In Memorium

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In Memoriam

Earl Lee Hanebrink, 1924-2003

Earl Lee Hanebrink passed away on January 23, 2003 at St. Bernard's Medical Center in Jonesboro, Arkansas. He is survived by two daughters: Kay Lynn Noell of Jonesboro, Arkansas and Lisa Ann Kessler of Cordova, Tennessee; one sister, Mary Buffa of St. Louis, Missouri, and three grandchildren, Holly Noel and Katie Noel, both of Jonesboro, and Kaylee Kessler of Cordova, Tennessee. He was preceded in death by his wife, Vernelia McCrady Hanebrink, his parents and two sisters.

Earl was born March 24, 1924 in the tiny rural hamlet of Egypt Mills, just outside of Cape Girardeau, Missouri. He attended Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri (B. S. E. in Biology and Agriculture, 1948), University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi (M.S. in Biology, 1955), and Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma (Ed.D. with emphasis in Ornithology in 1965).

As a corporal in the Military Police in the U. S. Army during World War II, Earl served in the Philippine Islands. Following the war and graduation from college, Earl taught high school at Parma High School (1948-1952) and Kennett High School (1952-1958) both in southeast Missouri. During these 10 years he found himself serving as a biology, geography, and science teacher as well as coaching junior high basketball and track. While teaching in southeast Missouri, Earl amassed quite a wonderful collection of reptiles, particularly snakes, and later brought much of his collection with him to ASU when he came to teach. He had assisted Paul Anderson with his 1965 book, "The Reptiles and Amphibians of Missouri," and indeed if one checks the Acknowledgements section, the name Earl Hanebrink will be found.

One of Earl's loves was writing, and during his career he published 91 popular articles and scientific papers on subjects ranging from plankton in Sardis Reservoir, Mississippi to fancy pigeons, including four books. In 1993 he authored the definitive "A History of Biological Sciences at Arkansas State University." During his 35 year teaching career at ASU he received 11 research grants and made 35 presentations to professional audiences. He was a member of 10 scientific organizations including Sigma Xi, Arkansas Academy of Science, National Audubon Society, Arkansas Audubon Society (Past President) and American Pigeon Fancier's Council of which he was a Past President. In addition, Earl had the honor of having a robber fly from South America named in his honor, *Ommatius hanebrinki*.

Dr. W. W. Nedrow hired Earl as an Instructor in the Biology Department at Arkansas State College in the fall of 1958 after Earl and his wife, Vernelia, had attended a Tri-Beta Banquet the previous spring at which she introduced him to Dr. Nedrow. Earl taught at Arkansas State University for 35 years before retiring in 1993. He once told me that "he had taught almost every course in the department at one time or another." Actually, documentation revealed that he had indeed taught 24 different courses while at ASU. His main undergraduate teaching responsibilities were ornithology, animal ecology, and wildlife management, while graduate courses included Literature and History of Biology and Ornithology. In addition to teaching, Earl served in a variety of capacities for the department including pre-medical advisor for freshmen and sophomores, sponsor for Tri-Beta, and general zoology coordinator, besides being the BSE advisor and MSE advisor and supervisor in science for years. He added hundreds of prepared bird skins to the ASU museum and started a card catalogue in 1965 with notes and distribution records of birds from northeastern Arkansas. He also added marine invertebrates, insects, and herps that he collected previously.

Earl was a man of many interests, chief of which were birds. In addition to his love of Arkansas native birds, he kept and raised show pigeons for years and he loved to show them off. Once during his course in genetics, he invited the author (then a junior) to come over and see his pigeons, including the intriguing "tumblers" which had been bred by monks Earl said for their non-ability to fly! To this day I still remember those pitiful tumblers trying to take wing to no avail! After retirement Earl traveled to the Galapagos Islands and South America where he added to his "life list" of birds and saw first-hand what Charles Darwin had witnessed years earlier.



In the early 1950s, Earl was a student of the renowned plant taxonomist, Dr. Delzie Demaree, while attending the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory at Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Earl related the following story in the "A History of Biological Sciences at Arkansas State University" which says so much about Earl's love of all nature. "Dr. Demaree took a look at me as I was getting on the boat with the binoculars, bird guides, insect net, insect killing jar, and sieve box, and said, "Now, big boy, you are going to have to narrow down to study one thing. You can't study all that on one field trip." Earl was clearly a naturalist at heart and found it hard to limit himself to one particular area of study. He did tell me how he finally narrowed down to ornithology as his primary love. It seems that one day in ichthyology class at Ole Miss, Dr. McGaha, the instructor, had made him and another student seine a chest high, nasty smelling, tannin-stained pool in a local stream. When they hauled the seine up to the bank, it contained a foul smelling croaker sack full of dead, rotting chickens and the stench was overwhelming. Earl assumed they were through for the day, but McGaha insisted that they get right back in the water and seine that pool, this time for fishes! Earl said that very afternoon after he returned to the Ole Miss campus, he decided to become an ornithologist and give up the water! Earl had a kind heart, a gentle nature, an all encompassing love of nature, and a singular compassion for student problems. All of us who were privileged to know him as he passed through our lives are grateful for his presence, and we miss him dearly.

-- Henry W. Robison, Department of Biological Sciences, Southern Arkansas University, Magnolia, AR 71754-9354