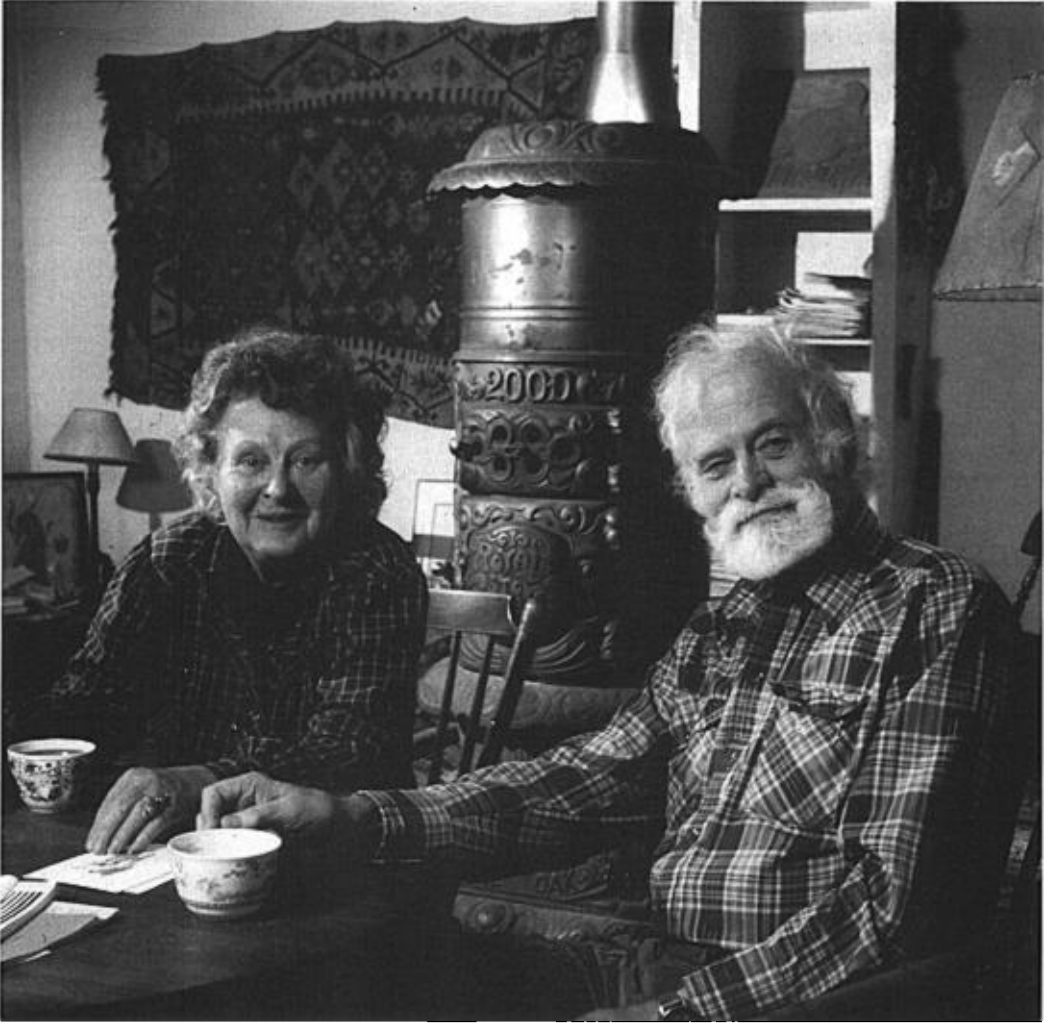


IN MEMORIAM: FRANCES HAMERSTROM, 1907–1998

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FRANCES HAMERSTROM, 1907–1998

With late husband Frederick at their Plainfield, Wisconsin, home in November 1989.
Photograph by *The Milwaukee Sentinel*.

Dr. Frances Hamerstrom (Elective Member 1978, Fellow 1982) of Plainfield, Wisconsin, and Adjunct Professor of Wildlife Biology at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, died in Port Edwards, Wisconsin, on 29 August 1998. Formerly of Boston, she was born Frances Flint

in Needham, Massachusetts, on 17 December 1907.

Fran (pronounced "Fron"), who from an early age longed to become famous so that she "did not have to hide how odd she was," spent nine years at the Milton Academy, in Milton,

Massachusetts, but did not graduate, and two years at Smith College (1926 to 1928), where she "flunked out" because, by her own admission, she was too interested in birds and boys.

She studied artificial propagation of game birds at the Game Conservation Institute in Clinton, New Jersey, from 1931 to 1932. She took a B.S. in biology at Iowa State University in 1935, where under Paul Errington she studied nesting pheasants and quail and feeding habits of birds of prey. Fran obtained an M.S. in wildlife biology at the University of Wisconsin in 1940, where she worked with Aldo Leopold, as his only female graduate student, on dominance in winter flocks of chickadees (*Wilson Bulletin* 54:32–42, 1942). She was awarded an honorary Ph.D. from Carroll College, Waukesha, Wisconsin, in 1961.

Fran married Frederick Nathan (Hammy) Hamerstrom, Jr. (an AOU member since 1939) in secret on 18 February 1931, and a second time in public on 10 June 1931. The two remained partners, both in science and in life, until his death in 1990 (J. T. Emlen, *Auk* 108:424–426, 1991). Fran and Hammy received numerous joint awards, including the Wildlife Society's terrestrial publication award (together with Paul Errington) in 1940 for their work with Great Horned Owl predation, and the National Wildlife Federation's Conservationist of the Year Award in 1970. The Hamerstroms are survived by their two children, Alan and Elva.

Fran's interest in birds initially was stimulated by the birds themselves—at age seven she held a funeral for a Blue Jay, and she trained her first raptor, an American Kestrel, at age 12—and was sustained thereafter by pestering a series of "museum men" (including Charles Johnson of Boston's Museum of Natural History) and by reading Charles Darwin, Ernest Thompson Seton, and Mark Twain. The science she published focused primarily on prairie grouse, which she and her husband studied for more than half a century, and on birds of prey, an assemblage that had fascinated her since childhood. Fran justifiably considered herself an ornithologist with broad interests, or better yet, a naturalist.

Throughout their careers, Fran followed Frederick in university education and professional positions. Even so, the two were full and equal partners whose obviously joint efforts and mutual professional respect managed to

raise the eyebrows of many of their mid-century counterparts. Fran's linguistic abilities, particularly in German and in French, provided her with a window to the European literature that she opened for more-insular North American ornithologists in a series of more than 100 reviews of foreign-language books and articles. Her work in support of European ornithologists (Allied and Axis powers alike) in the years immediately following World War II typified her global approach and understanding.

A rebellious daughter of wealthy parents, throughout her career Fran had a deep and abiding interest in leveling ornithology's playing field for aspiring ornithologists regardless of age, sex, or geographic origin. To this end, Fran spent a major portion of her professional life introducing traditional and nontraditional students to field ornithology and, thereafter, severely testing their mettle in the arena. Fran's ability to thrive outside of academe allowed her to complement ornithological research and teaching conducted therein. Her long-term studies of Northern Harriers, most of the results of which have been published (*Harrier, Hawk of the Marshes*, 1986), and American Kestrels, most of the results of which have not been published, provided the training grounds for dozens of interns, or "gaboons" as Fran called them, for the better part of four decades. Although not everyone who was exposed to Fran's unique approach to ornithological pedagogy achieved a productive career in the field, her success rate with apprentices ranks well above that of any academic institution of which I am aware. Her uncompromising attention to detail, together with her willingness to administer equally effusive praise and abject condemnation, will be sorely missed.

As ornithologists and scientists, the best we can hope to achieve in our careers is to reduce significantly the amount of critical unknown in nature, and to impart in those we leave behind the skills and ambitions to continue the process. I can think of few among us who rank as high as Fran Hamerstrom in this regard. Capable, determined, and displaying an active and creative mind until the end—the two of us spent three exceptionally productive days together at her desk (an antique dining room table next to a pot-bellied stove in a pre-Civil War home without indoor plumbing) outside of Plainfield, Wisconsin, a month before her

death—Fran's productive career spanned more than six decades. Fortunately for those who follow, Fran left a series of books detailing many professional and personal aspects of her career (*Strictly for the Chickens*, 1980; *Birding with a Purpose*, 1984; *My Double Life*, 1994). I wholeheartedly recommend them to my colleagues, both as models for writing their own memoirs, and as readings to suggest to those about to enter the field.