
January 1992

Henry M Stevenson, 1914-1991

Florida Field Naturalist

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Recommended Citation

Florida Field Naturalist (1992) "Henry M Stevenson, 1914-1991," *Florida Field Naturalist*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn/vol20/iss1/6>

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IN MEMORIAM

Fla. Field Nat. 20(1): 21-22, 1992.

HENRY M. STEVENSON, 1914-1991

Henry M. Stevenson, the senior authority on birds of Florida, died suddenly on November 4, 1991 at the age of 77. He was at the Tall Timbers Research Station, near Tallahassee, when he suffered a severe heart attack. His passing was a great loss for naturalists in the state.

Members of the Florida Ornithological Society will remember Henry as a friend and a central figure at their meetings. At the time of his death he was on the editorial board of the *Florida Field Naturalist*; he was the first editor of this journal from 1973 to 1976. Whenever there was a question about the status of a bird, someone would say "Ask Henry." To Florida birders the letters HMS are known less as a symbol for Her Majesty's Service than as Henry's initials after a special record published in *American Birds*.

Henry's primary interest was in the documentation of the migrations and distribution of birds and their subspecific taxonomy. He accumulated detailed information over the years from various sources and compiled a manuscript for a comprehensive book on the birds of Florida. As an example of his sources, he personally checked the data and identification of every specimen in museum collections that had been taken in Florida. One major source of information for the book was records from his own field cards for the past several decades. This information, expressed as birds per hour of field effort on foot or by canoe, was kept for various habitats and seasons by counties. It was used to estimate abundances and population trends. He recruited trusted volunteers to help with the project and often took along young enthusiasts.

For the last five years, Bruce Anderson, of Winter Park, had joined Henry in the writing effort as a coauthor for the book. Although Henry did not live to see his major work in print, the manuscript is expected to be published as *Florida Bird Life* in 1992 by the University Presses of Florida, Gainesville. I think it will be the most detailed state bird book ever printed, a permanent tribute to Henry's dedication to his goal.

Henry's interest in birds dated back to his boyhood in northern Alabama where he was raised in a large family, the son of a Methodist preacher. He was 18 years old when his first publication appeared, a note about a record of the Bell's Vireo in Alabama (1932, *Oologist* 49: 107-108). After graduating from Birmingham-Southern College in 1935 and obtaining a Master's degree from the University of Alabama in 1939, he went to Cornell University to study with Arthur Allen. In 1943 he was awarded a Ph.D. from Cornell for his study of the distribution of birds in winter in the southeastern states. In 1946 he took a faculty position at Florida State University. I met Henry in December of 1953, when I was on my honeymoon. My husband and I had volunteered to participate in the St. Marks Christmas Count and, wanting to spread the talent, Henry put us in separate parties.

At FSU Henry served as the major professor of nine graduate students. Together they built a fine teaching collection of specimens of birds and mammals, a collection that has been appreciated by succeeding generations of students. Of Henry's students, Horace Loftin, Bruce Means, and John Ogden are still in Florida. Storrs Olson, another of Henry's students is an avian paleontologist at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

Henry belonged to national ornithological societies including the Wilson Ornithological Society, the Cooper Ornithological Society, and the American Ornithologists' Union. He published in their journals and was an elective member of the A.O.U. Nevertheless, his focus was primarily on Florida. From the mid-1940s on, he contributed many notes to the *Florida Naturalist* and then the *Florida Field Naturalist*, and he compiled many seasonal summaries and Christmas Bird Counts for *Audubon Field Notes*, and then *American*



Henry M. Stevenson. Photograph taken in Tallahassee, Florida in 1990.

Birds. Henry's retirement from FSU in 1975 and his appointment as a Research Fellow at the Tall Timbers Research Station enabled him to focus even more intently on his studies. In 1977 the University Presses of Florida published his important reference book *Vertebrates of Florida, Identification and Distribution*.

Henry Stevenson was a modest man to whom spiritual values were very important. He was frugal, patient, self-sufficient, and loyal to his friends and family. He had an impressive bass voice and always sang in the church choir on Sunday morning. He will be missed by the many people who knew and admired him. We, who knew him primarily through his interest in natural history, send sympathy to his family: his wife RosaBelle; his sister, Alma Ledyard; his two brothers, Thomas and Leon; his daughter, Nell; and his three sons, Ernest, Henry Jr. and James—**Frances C. James**, Department of Biological Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306.