

# PHILIP ATLEE LIVINGSTON, 1901-1986

Franklin H. West, M.D.

President of the D.V.O.C. in 1956 and 1957, Phil was the most unforgettable character I've ever met. He had such a gift with words and ideas. He had an endless store of tales and a ready opinion on almost every subject you could think of, including politics and religion. His favorite bird story was about the Wood Thrush he found at Cape May on the Christmas census in the early 1920s. He was nearly laughed out of that January's D.V.O.C. meeting until Witmer Stone rose to his defense and the sighting was quickly accepted. Whenever we'd be birding at the shore, Phil could be counted on to have a ten-minute discussion at the seafood market on how the fish were running that season. He had a special talent of engaging total strangers in lengthy and interesting conversations. He almost always ended up learning something new.

He was a second father to me, and he treated me like a son. I was fortunate to enjoy his friendship for all of fifty years. Someone had told me there was a Penn Valley fellow who checked out Boy Scouts for their birding badges, so I sought him out in 1937 to check my work on Penn Valley birds, even though I wasn't a scout. He more than obliged by joining me on many May mornings to confirm my warbler identifications. I was trying to improve on the dates Witmer Stone had published in the *Evening Bulletin* on bird migration. Phil was both a help and an inspiration. He broadened my horizons from Penn Valley to Tinicum to Hawk Mountain to Cape May, with new life-listers on each trip we took. (He let me pay my share by cutting his lawn.) Through him I met Witmer Stone, Norman McDonald, Ed Weyl, Julian Potter, Herbert Beck, Fletcher Street, John Gillespie, Earl Poole and many others. I can still see Phil and Julian Potter slogging out over the Stone Harbor marshes to pin down a Snowy Egret in 1938—they were rare then. Phil sponsored me for club membership that year. The last member he proposed was Erica Brendel. He was delighted to do so. Phil loved the Cape May area and had a small cottage at the Point—the scene of many a lobster feast for his D.V.O.C. cronies. It was a cozy place to stay for the Christmas census after the annual gathering at Ernie Choate's the night before.

Phil's vocation was publishing. While still a student at Lower Merion High School, he edited the town paper in Narberth. This work helped finance his studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Graduated in 1923, he started a small school and camp catalogue publishing business that grew into the Livingston Publishing Company of Wynnewood. He guided its efforts mainly toward natural history subjects, especially ornithology. Livingston books can be found in most of our members' libraries today. The last of his many talks to the club was given on the subject of how to publish a book. His talks were witty, pungent and attention-getting, often with a humorous twist. He's still remembered at the Cape May Rotary Club for his talk on the sex life of the

fruit fly. Some of the books published by Livingston were *The Woody Flora of Taiwan* 1963, *The Birds of Columbia* 1964, *The Birds of Guatemala* 1970, *A Field Guide to Australian Birds* 1971, *Portraits of Tropical Birds* 1971 and *The Birds of Trinidad and Tobago* 1973. There were two waterproof books printed on plastic for scuba divers and duck hunters: *Fishwatcher's Guide to West Atlantic Coral Reefs* 1972 (illustrated by Peter Scott) and *Key to North American Waterfowl* 1972. Each publication bore the stamp of Phil's careful editing. His \$.02 field checklist of Eastern North American birds was in wide use for over thirty years. Paul Harris of Harrowood Books took over when Phil retired in the mid-1970s.

Most of his avocations were derived from his love of words and of the sights and sounds of nature. A great devotee of Stokowski and Ormandy, he attended the Philadelphia Orchestra for over sixty years. He was a Rotarian and past president of the Bala Cynwyd-Narberth club. He was a director of the Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve. Active in the Pennsylvania Forestry Association, he served two terms as vice president. He was given their conservation award in 1959. An avid horticulturist, he was a founding member of the Men's Garden Club of Delaware Valley. He was active in the American Rhododendron Society and received its Bronze Medal from the Philadelphia Chapter—he was particularly cited for his editorship of our book on eastern rhododendrons and azaleas, called *Hybrids and Hybridizers*, published in 1978. He didn't like the title—it was imprecise!

Phil joined the D.V.O.C. in 1922, and served the club in many ways, most notably as editor of *Cassinia*, chair of the Publications Committee, Book Club chairman, Council member, and President for two terms following Phil Street. He also belonged to the American Ornithologists' Union and the Wilson Ornithological Society. He was a good photographer and used his slides to illustrate talks on his adventures in natural history and horticulture. His business afforded him the means to travel, and, except for Asia, he went all over the world. He and Ernie Choate used to vie for who had gone the farthest, seen the most and who had the best pictures. Usually this ended in a draw, much to Phil's chagrin. His last long travel was to Antarctica on a Lindblad trip, where Bob Sehl kept an eye on him, for at 82 he was beginning to slip a little. He nearly missed the boat.

Phil and Mary Livingston were a couple for nearly forty years. Their son, Robert, grew up in the publishing business, where he is still today in Minneapolis. After Mary's death in 1978, Phil tended his home and garden in Penn Valley for a few more years until his health surrendered to Alzheimer's disease. He spent his last years in a nursing home, where he died on July 6, 1986. They are interred in the burial yard of All Saints' Church in Wynnewood, where he had helped design and complete the memorial garden plantings many years before. I miss them both, and unexpectedly, more each year.

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