

# In Search of Witmer Stone

Mick Jeitner and Linda Rowan

In 2003, I (MJ) purchased a copy of Witmer Stone's *Bird Studies at Old Cape May* (1937) which he simply called the "Studies." At that time, all I knew about Witmer Stone was that he was a founding member of DVOC and that he wrote the "Studies." I encountered this photograph when paging through this book for the first time.

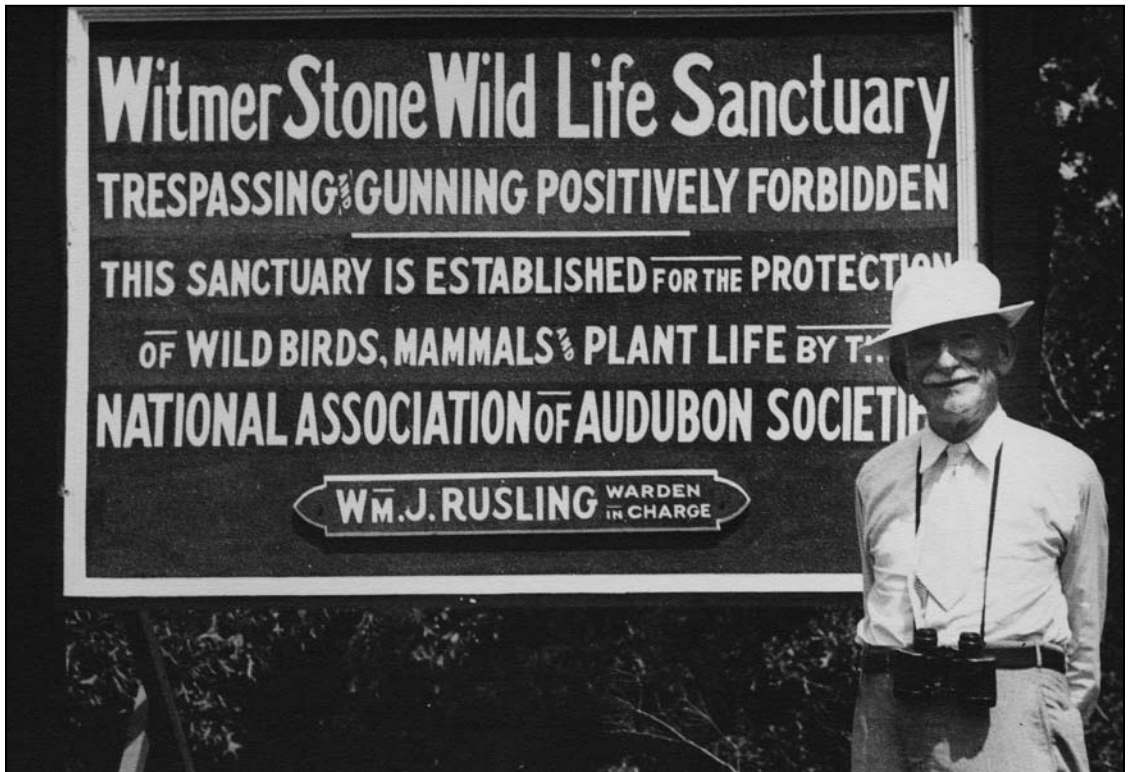
There was Dr. Witmer Stone standing by a sign which read "Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary." I wondered: Where is this sanctuary and why have I never seen this sign? For years I had been bird watching in Cape May, often on bicycle, and never encountered Stone's Sanctuary. Over the ten years since that day in 2003, through a gradual accumulation of facts and anecdotes, I have acquired an understanding of the

creation and demise of the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary.

Anyone who birds Cape May knows that in the fall when northwest winds prevail, birds stream into Cape May Point. Many of these migrating birds are reluctant to cross the 15 mile wide Delaware Bay, as the northwest wind would surely sweep them out over the ocean. This results in a concentration of a large number of birds at the Point.

In the "Studies," Stone (1937) described Cape May Point as "a bit of the Pine Barrens" and "almost entirely wooded" (p. 23). This inviting woodland was the perfect sanctuary for migrating birds with abundant food and shelter. In 1935 the National Associa-

Photo: Conrad Roland, ANSP Archive collection #457



Dr. Stone visits the sanctuary.

## In Search of Witmer Stone

Photo: From [www.capemay.com/Editorial/october05/sunsetbeach2.html](http://www.capemay.com/Editorial/october05/sunsetbeach2.html)



Cape May Magnesite Plant, 1942.

tion of Audubon Societies leased land from the Cape May Sand Company and established the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary at Cape May Point. The sanctuary started as 25 acres located on the south side of Sunset Boulevard (Alan, 1936). It quickly grew to almost 1,000 acres (Pough, 1942).

Sutton and Sutton (2006) have provided us background to the story of the sanctuary's demise. In 1941 the Second World War brought a new industry to Cape May Point. There was an increased need for magnesite for firebrick used in the manufacture of steel. A magnesite plant was built on 350 acres in the heart of the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary.

Over time the alkaline emissions shown here spewing from the plant's smokestack killed much of the acid-loving vegetation at Cape May Point. The destruction was so severe that the habitat no longer offered food and shelter for wildlife.

In 1959, all hawks were finally protected by law in New Jersey. Unfortunately during that same year, the lease on the land was dropped, and the sanctuary was abandoned. While the hawks were protected by law, the loss of the sanctuary removed a living monument to Dr. Stone.

After learning of the sanctuary and its loss, I was determined to see it restored at Cape May Point. At that time, I knew very little about Stone and would have to know much more in order to convince authorities to re-establish the sanctuary. *This began the search for Witmer Stone.* Who was he, and why was the wild-

life sanctuary named after him? At this point Linda Rowan joined me on this project.

### Roots

Witmer Stone has been spoken of as a born naturalist (Rehn, 1941). He started collecting specimens very early in life and by the age of 16 in 1882, he along with his brother and a few close friends formed the "Wilson Natural Science Association" (Stone, 1921). Weekly sessions were held and papers read. They were quite organized and professional for teenagers. This was a glimpse of things to come. Stone's interest across the entire spectrum of natural history was already evident by the varied collections held in their "museum," a room in his parents' home (Stone, 1921).

### Academy

Witmer Stone started his professional scientific career in 1888 at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (Academy). Below is a list of titles Stone held during his 50 years of service to the Academy as recorded in the Academy's (1939) Memoriam to Stone:

- Jessup Fund Student, 1888-1892
- Conservator of the Ornithological Section, 1891-1925
- Assistant to the Board of Curators, 1892-1908
- Member of the Board of Curators, 1908-1925
- Director of the Museum, 1925-1928
- Emeritus Director of the Museum, 1928-1939
- Vice-President of the Academy, 1927-1939
- Curator of Vertebrate Zoology, 1918-1934
- Curator of North American Birds, 1934-1938
- Emeritus Curator of Birds, 1938-1939

In addition he was offered the presidency of the Academy in 1918 and refused.

Many of his countless scientific papers were published in the Academy's Proceedings. Most of them on birds; however, there were also papers on botany, mammals, reptiles, mollusks, crustaceans, arachnids, and insects. He was a general naturalist. All the departments at the Academy claimed him as their own contending that Stone had done his best work in their field.

According to Rehn (1941), his most noteworthy accomplishments at the Academy can be found in his 20 years of work organizing and preserving virtually all

of the Academy's irreplaceable collections. In 1891, he assumed charge of the bird collection which had been badly neglected. He saved what was once recognized as the finest ornithological collection in the world: 25,000 mounted birds were deteriorating in their display cases since Cassin's death in 1869. He dismantled the birds, returning them to study skins. He reformed the labeling, cataloging, and storing of specimens and rescued not only the birds but also the sketchy information with which they were tagged.

The Memoriam to Stone in the Academy's 1939 Proceedings stated that "Stone's aggregate services to the Academy have never been exceeded" (p. 417). Considering the caliber of the men who preceded him — Leidy, Cassin, and many other distinguished scientists, this was quite a testament.

### DVOC

On February 3, 1890, seven men held the meeting which gave birth to the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club (DVOC). Witmer Stone was the newest member of the group, and it appears that he was the

doctor who delivered the baby. Spencer Trotter in his recollection of that night, declared that "We called in Witmer Stone who pulled the baby into the world and has been its guiding light ever since." Stone served as the club's second president for the year 1891 and continued to be active in the club until his death.

He forged the link between the Academy and DVOC. In 1891, he acquired section status for the ornithological department and brought DVOC within the legal structure of the institution which allowed the DVOC to hold its meetings in the Academy (Rehn, 1942). That same year the DVOC collection of Pennsylvania and New Jersey birds and their nests was presented to the Academy: thus the symbiotic relationship began, which continues to this day.

Stone knew that publishing was necessary to establish the scientific credibility of the club. He contributed to the editorship of the Proceedings which documented the first ten years of DVOC activities. He initiated the creation of *Cassinia* in 1901 and served for ten years as its Editor. This journal contains scientific papers, migratory records, abstracts of club meetings, local notes, club activities, and memoria of club members. *Cassinia* is an historic record of DVOC and essential to the stature of the club. He authored two major works published by DVOC: *The Birds of Eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey* in 1894 and the *Bird Studies at Old Cape* in 1937.

Stone's announcement of the formation of DVOC, published in *The Auk* in 1890 included the mission statement "to study of the birds of southeastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey with special reference to their migration in the valley of the Delaware River" (p. 298). These detailed migration records were published in the *Cassinia* for 40 years, and have continued to a lesser degree today through local notes, migratory bird counts, and Christmas Counts.

At the club's 20th anniversary George Spencer Morris (1909), one of the clubs founders, paid the following tribute to Witmer Stone: "No matter who may be president we all recognize him as the person behind the throne. With infinite tact he gives a push here and a pull there, as occasion requires, keeping us all in line. In our hearts we know that the guiding hand of Stone has made the DVOC what it is" (p. 9).

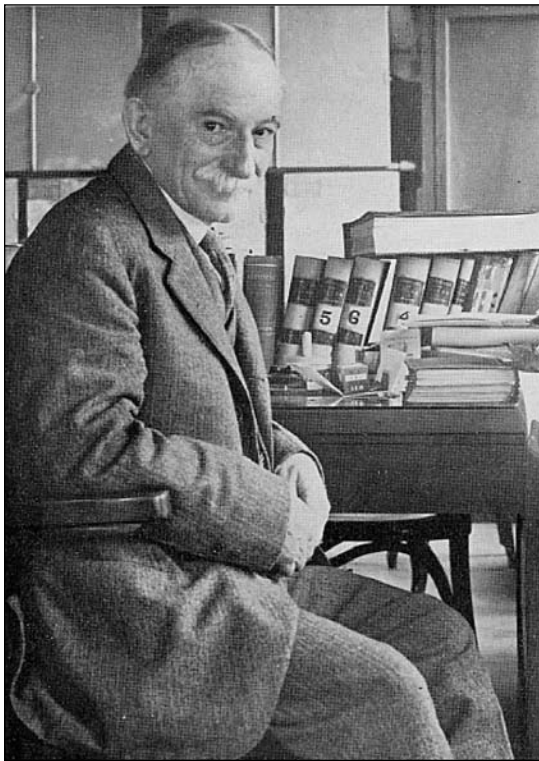


Photo: W. Huber, *Cassinia*, 1938-41, 31, frontpiece

Dr. Stone at his writing desk.

## In Search of Witmer Stone

Stone was surely the club's symbol of authoritative ornithology for which we owe him a great debt. At the same DVOC meeting where Stone's death was announced, a new draft of club bylaws, written by Stone, was adopted (DVOC, 1942). This was his final act of service to DVOC.

### AOU

Could you convince these men that shooting birds, as they had done all their lives, was wrong and they had to stop? This would be a major challenge to Stone's mission of bird protection.

The American Ornithologists' Union (AOU), the "supreme court of American ornithology," is an elite club formed at the very beginning of scientific ornithology in America. Dr. Witmer Stone was elected a member of the AOU in 1885. This brought him into personal contact with the giants of ornithology — Coues, Ridgway, Brewster, William Dutcher, and others. These men with their varied experiences, interests and opinions surely added to Stone's knowledge and understanding of ornithology. Stone admired Brewster's work and developed a lifelong friendship which included visits to Cambridge exposing him to the influence of the New England ornithologists known as the Nuttall Club (Rehn, 1941). No doubt Dutcher, already a strong voice for bird protection, helped forge Stone's commitment to saving the birds (Rehn, 1941).

According to Rehn (1941), Stone, when an AOU member, held the following positions:

- Member, 1885-1939
- Elected Fellow, 1892-1939
- Vice President, 1914-1920
- President, 1920-1923
- Member of Council, 1898-1939
- Chairman of Committee on Nomenclature and Classification, 1919-1931
- Editor of the 4th AOU Check-List of North American Birds
- Editor of *The Auk*, 1910-1936
- Chairman of Committee for the Protection of North American Birds, 1898-1901

In 1898 when Stone assumed chairmanship of the AOU's Bird Protection Committee, he took up the



Photo: From *Bird-Lore*, 1899, 1, p. 143

Founders of the AOU 1883.

crusade and suffered much criticism for his stand on bird protection. He was trying to find a reasonable path, between the *collectors* who demanded unlimited authority to collect whatever birds, eggs or nests they "damn well pleased," and extreme bird *protectionists* who demanded the total cessation of collecting on the grounds that birds had rights. The AOU membership itself was divided, and many members opposed the limitation of collecting specimens. In 1902 AOU's President-Elect Charles B. Cory was invited to attend an Audubon Society meeting; he declined stating, "I do not protect birds, I kill them" (Pearson, 1937, p. 71).

Stone was at the forefront in recognizing the need for bird protection laws. The transition from collecting to observing birds was difficult, but as we now know necessary. His bird protection work is not well known as it was his nature to avoid conflict. He chose diplomacy to accomplish his goals and found educating the public and legislators much more productive than public arguments and personal attacks. Rehn (1941) in his memoriam to Stone said, "In association with William Dutcher, he was a potent factor in securing effective legislation to protect birds" (p. 305).

Stone's accomplishments as chairman of the AOU Committee on Bird Protection included:

**1898** – With Stone's leadership, committee members drafted a new "model bird law" (Stone, 1899) modifying the original model law drafted in 1886 (Sennett, 1887) which was a guide for reform of state laws to protect birds.

**1899** – Stone wrote and published a pamphlet entitled, “Hints to Young Bird Students” discouraging the collecting of bird skins and eggs, a pamphlet co-signed by 10 other prominent members of his committee (Stone, 1899); the committee members were also working hand in hand with the Audubon Societies and promoted the establishment of *Bird-Lore* magazine to disseminate information on bird protection.

**1900** – Through the combined efforts of the AOU and Audubon Societies, the Lacey Act became law (Palmer, 1900).

**1901** – The vigorous and efficient enforcement of the Lacey Act was effectively shutting down illicit millinery practices and taking steps toward stamping out the feather trade (Stone, 1902).

On June 19, 1939, the AOU Council awarded the Brewster Memorial Medal posthumously to Dr. Witmer Stone for his work on the *Bird Studies at Old Cape May* (Rehn, 1939). Mr. Rudyard Boulton, AOU’s Treasurer, in notifying Mrs. Stone of the award of the Brewster Medal to Dr. Stone wrote that he well deserved the title “The Best Loved Member of the AOU” (Rehn, 1939).

### **Pennsylvania Audubon Society**

The following is a summary of the Pennsylvania Audubon Society (PAS) which was drawn from Robins’ (1899, 1900) documentation of bird societies in Pennsylvania in *Bird Lore*. The PAS was organized in October of 1896. This was the first society to be formed following the example set in Massachusetts. Witmer Stone was the President. He felt strongly that there should be no fees for membership, as the success of the movement depended on a large membership. The PAS’s purpose was to: 1) advocate legislation for the protection of birds, 2) further the study of ornithology, and 3) educate school children about the protection of wild birds.

PAS encouraged its members to be aware of bird protection legislation (Robins, 1901). They took an active role in urging members of Congress to support the Lacey Act. The fact that every Pennsylvania legislator voted for this bill is an indication of the political power of PAS’s members. That was only the beginning. They pushed legislation *against* the collection of

bird’s eggs, the use of birds and feathers by milliners, and the caging and selling of wild birds and *for* the protection of hawks.

A large part of PAS’s mission was the education of children about birds and the protection of birds. This was done through the public schools. Teachers were encouraged to request the special libraries which circulated throughout the state. By 1903 there were twelve traveling libraries of 10 books each (Robins, 1903). In 1910 a small collection of bird skins was also available with these libraries, thus teachers could use the skins to illustrate their talks (Fisher, 1910). The specimens were a gift from the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. Most likely Dr. Stone arranged for this donation due to his work at the Academy.

Given that such a large percentage of the 7,000 members were children, PAS was forced to make some changes to recognize these members. In 1911 the Audubon Pledge was revised to include its young and adult members (Fisher, 1911). Children also received a button when they joined along with the certificate that all members received. These changes were partly due to the establishment of Junior Audubon Clubs in the schools under the direction of the National Association of Audubon Societies (Fisher, 1912).

PAS had a cooperative relationship with the Spencer F. Baird Ornithological Club (Fisher, 1912). Many members of the Baird club also belonged to the PAS, and they would hold joint meetings four times a year to discuss observations, had illustrated lectures, and held an outdoor event during migration. This was given as an example of how other clubs could assist the Audubon Society. Sadly, by 1936 only four members remained, and PAS was disbanded (Academy of Natural Sciences, n.d.).

### **Collector/Protector**

Witmer Stone started collecting specimens as a boy. His 50 year career in ornithology revolved around collections of bird skins, eggs, and nests. This photo of Stone holding a collecting gun with a skinning knife in his belt is from the 1890 Academy Expedition to Yucatan and Mexico. All ornithologists of Stone’s era collected birds. Until the early 20th century, this was the only scientific method approved for the study of birds. The acceptance of the binocular and field notes

## In Search of Witmer Stone

as a credible scientific method came slowly. Dr. Witmer Stone was an early advocate for this new method.

George Spencer Morris (1893) gave an interesting description of Stone's bird gun, "Stone has a curious little contrivance which he calls a gun; in reality, it's kind of a cross between a peashooter and a sling

shot, but when handled by an expert like the owner, it becomes a deadly weapon and carries havoc into the ranks of swallows and seashores" (p. 43). He went on to say that "it goes up the sleeve nicely and is well suited for suburban collecting." It appeared that Stone was always at the ready to collect a bird specimen. (The gun in the picture is most probably not the one described.)

The pages of *Cassinia* and the Academy's *Proceedings* are sprinkled with reports from Stone's field trips to collect and study birds. Rehn (1942) wrote in *Cassinia* that "the field activities of Dr. Stone in behalf of the Academy were many and varied" (p. 3). He went on to mention hundreds of field trips to many locations across the United States as well as the Academy Expedition to the Yucatan and Mexico. Today there are 1,230 specimens collected by Stone in the collection at the Academy.

In 1896 Stone joined AOU's Bird Protection Committee. It should also be noted that in 1896, PAS was organized with Stone as president, their major goal being the protection of wild birds. In March of that same year, Stone (1896) delivered a lecture at Philadelphia's Academy of Natural Sciences entitled *Protection and Preservation of our Native Birds* in which he described the many ways that man was causing major declines in bird populations. It appears that 1896 was the year that Stone "came out" as a conservationist.

In the following years his work with committees, organizations, and politicians promoted development of policies and legislation. These efforts initiated many changes in favor of the preservation of birds. They also reflected major changes in public attitude and policy. It was time to make his case to the scientific community.

In 1923 Dr. Stone delivered an address to the Nuttall Ornithological Club (1924) entitled *The Ornithology of Today and Tomorrow* in which he described the changing focus of ornithology from the study of bird skins and eggs to the study of living birds and their habits. The Nuttall Club, the first organized ornithological club in America, gave birth to the AOU, which then gave birth to the National Association of Audubon Societies. Therefore the Nuttall Club can be seen as a parent of American scientific ornithology and a



Photo: DVOc archives

Stone as a young man collecting birds, 1890.

grandparent of the bird protection movement. The following are relevant excerpts from Stone's 1923 address at the Nuttall Ornithological Club (1924) meeting:

- “While we all realize that the collecting of specimens in the more remote parts of the world is still of the greatest importance, the collecting of specimens for special research purposes, in any locality, or for certain critical cases of identification, is still a necessity...” (p. 9)
- “The binocular field glasses furnish the means of bringing the bird close to the observer, and what is now needed, and what is being supplied is a series of descriptions of our birds based on field characters observable under such conditions, in place of descriptions drawn from a bird skin in the hand.” (p. 10)
- “I am not preaching mawkish sentimentality or advocating the abolishing of collecting, nor do I think reasonable collecting affects the abundance of the majority of species.” (p. 11)
- “At the same time let anyone, even an old collector — and I speak from experience — set out upon an intensive study of the birds of his immediate vicinity or of any limited area, with a good pair of binoculars, and he will be amazed at the amount of data on migration, behavior, habits, etc., that he can collect and the things he can learn, that skins would never have taught him. And yet he should have a handy collecting-gun in his sack.” (p. 11)
- “Let us once more consider the field ornithologist. We have referred to the present-day possibilities of field study, but there are other lines of work opening up for him which only a few years ago were practically unknown. The most important of these is bird-banding and the host of possibilities that it presents – the study of the individual as opposed to the species, migration, behavior, etc.” (p. 17)

### What an exquisite argument!

This was Witmer Stone speaking; world renowned ornithologist, respected colleague, and life-long friend to many of these men. The Nuttall Ornithological Club had invited him to be the speaker at the 50th Anniversary of their distinguished organization. He used this opportunity to persuade them to limit their collecting and hone the skills necessary to make accurate identification and observation of live birds. The 18 page address when read in its entirety shows the

progressive change in attitude experienced by Stone during his life-long immersion in all aspects of his science (Nuttall, 1924). It is, in our opinion, among Stone's finest writing.

### How many were convinced?

We hope that, as Stone suggested, some of them would soon put down their guns for good. However, we suspect that many of them picked up their binoculars, still carried their guns, and eventually practiced “reasonable collecting.” In his preface to the “Studies,” Stone in 1937 said, “There are today no collectors of bird skins in southern New Jersey” (p. ix).

### Cape May

Witmer Stone first visited Cape May in 1890. From that time on, he spent whatever time he could there, including two month stays every year from 1920 to 1937. These were working vacations. As a result of tireless research, he produced *Bird Studies at Old Cape May* (1937) which has long been considered the “Bible” of Cape May birding and is over 900 pages of detailed observations of Cape May's birds and habitats.

In his preface to the “Studies,” Stone (1937) declared that “the primary object in the preparation of the present work has been to furnish, for purposes of future comparison, as accurate a picture as possible of the bird life of Cape May during the decade, 1920 -1930” (p. vii). It included much more. The “Studies” also described an historic account of a very different Cape May than we know today. His descriptions of Cape May beginning in 1890 recounted a place not



Lighthouse at Cape May Point (circa 1890).

Photo: From <http://www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=389>

## In Search of Witmer Stone

easily accessible, requiring a slow journey by train or steam ship, with little local transportation, and no winter accommodations for visitors. Stone related that “his field work was carried on, on foot and one thought nothing of covering 10 or 15 miles on a day’s tramp” (p. x). He questioned whether the ornithological results of a day’s outing in the 1930s by automobile were as important or as thorough as in the pedestrian days.

In our favorite anecdote from the “Studies” (1937), Stone related that “On the beach at the lighthouse, in October, Mrs. Stone and I saw apparently the last stragglers of the night flight come in from the sea as late as 10:00 AM and Red-Breasted Nuthatches, and Brown Creepers alighted on our shoulders and backs as we stood on the sand, apparently taking us for tree stumps” (p. 41). He rarely mentioned Mrs. Stone, and this unexpected story of them in a unique shared moment is quite heart-warming.

In his chapter on Old Cape May, he spoke about the charm of Old Cape May. He wrote, “We delight in the heavily shaded streets surrounded by architecture of days gone by” (Stone, 1937, p. 3). He painted a pleasant picture with his description of fruit trees and the flowering shrubs and plants. He mentioned the close association of land and sea which made every farmer a fisherman or bayman at the proper season. Stone (1937) proclaimed, “These are the things that go to make up Old Cape May and create that distinctive atmosphere which lures one back season after season” (p. 4). This is just a taste of what is contained in the “Studies.” However it should be sufficient to establish that Stone not only studied, but he also loved Cape May.

### Slaughter and Sanctuary

When Witmer Stone first observed the spectacle of fall hawk migration in Cape May, it was accompanied by the continuous sound of gunfire. He said “the shooting of hawks during the autumn had become a regular pastime among certain so-called sportsmen” (Stone, 1937, p. 26).

Stone (1922) reported to the AOU that “during fall migration, with a northwest wind because of geography, spectacular flights of hawks concentrate in Cape May Point. Not only hawks but thousands of warblers, and other small birds gather” (p. 567). He continued



Photo: J. Hesse. In *Cassinia*, 1998-99, 68, p. 51

Dr. Stone bird watching.

with a description of hunters slaughtering thousands of birds in Cape May Point. Thus sounding the alarm, he insisted that something must be done.

At the DVOC meeting of February 4, 1926, member Mr. Henry Carey read several letters from correspondents deploring the destruction of hawks. Dr. Stone and Mr. Carey were appointed by the chair to look into the possible conservation of these birds. At the following meeting, a resolution was adopted and ordered sent to Dr. T. Gilbert Pearson, President of the National Association of Audubon Societies.

The following is an abridged version of what the resolution stated.

*In consideration of the fact that there is a decided diminution in the comparative numbers of hawks in the Eastern United States; that the American Game Protective Association last December decided upon a destructive campaign against hawks... Therefore, it is resolved by the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, upon the recommendation of the resolution committee (Dr. Witmer*



*Stone, Chairman), that hawks and owls are not only beneficial to crop growers, but are to be protected, on sentimental grounds, for the sake of nature lovers, who have equal rights with the sportsman and are quite as good citizens; that the pole trap for predacious birds is an abomination, since it also catches song birds; that hawk shooting with a decoy or during migrations is pernicious, and unfair, since it is impossible to distinguish until too late between harmless, legally protected species and those not protected by law; And that the president of the National Association of Audubon Societies shall be, and hereby is requested to take immediate action to prevent or discourage the campaign of so-called sportsmen against hawks and owls...(DVOC, 1926, p. 35)*

At the October 16, 1930 DVOC meeting, Mr. Carey called attention to a circular entitled "Compromised Conservation" in which the National Association of Audubon Societies was denounced because of their apparent indifference to bird protection (DVOC, 1932, p. 56). DVOC members who were also members of the National Association of Audubon Societies were requested to attend the annual meeting of the Audubon Society. Mr. Carey was later appointed as a special delegate to the annual meeting of the National Association of Audubon Societies to present a resolution to the effect that the DVOC endorsed the sentiment of those who insisted that the charges of indifference and inefficiency against the Audubon Society be openly and thoroughly discussed at the said annual meeting.

At DVOC's April 16, 1931 meeting, a letter from T. Gilbert Pearson of the National Association of Audubon Societies was read by the secretary (DVOC, 1935). The society offered to "defray the expenses of a man, familiar with hawks, to be stationed at Cape May during the fall hawk migration to cooperate with the local game warden in an effort to stop the killing of hawks and other birds protected by law" (DVOC, 1935, p. 56). Mr. Pearson suggested that DVOC select a man for this work, and it was agreed by the Club that every effort be made to find the right man for this work. The Club formed a conservation committee to keep in touch with the Cape May situation.

Pearson (1932) has provided a description of the next steps taken. In mid-September 1931, the National

Association of Audubon Societies placed a trained observer on the ground in Cape May for one month. The New Jersey Fish and Game Commission provided an automobile and assigned a game warden, C. E. Groves, to assist Audubon's agent plus another part-time helper from the Pennsylvania Game Commission. On the recommendation of DVOC, George B. Saunders was chosen to be Audubon's agent.

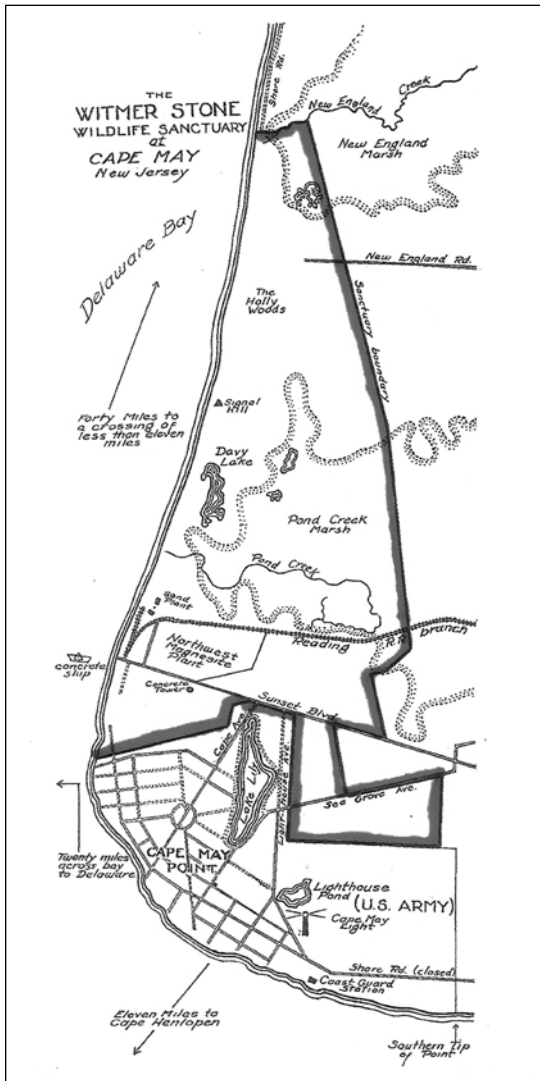
In a report to the National Association of Audubon Societies, Mr. Saunders (1932) confirmed that this annual hawk shooting campaign was carried on at Cape May Point. He said, "Almost all shooting takes place on a 300 yard section of this highway" (p. 171; i.e., Sunset Boulevard). Mr. Saunders and his associates patrolled the Cape May Point area from September 15 to October 15, 1931; they observed and reported that 1,007 hawks were killed during that time.

Saunders (1932) went on to say that, "Several days were devoted to a systematic campaign of education, in which the protected species shot were used as exhibits. It seemed unwise to ask for arrests before giving the gunners sufficient warning...Had arrests been made at the outset...the goodwill and cooperation of the gunners would have been lost" (p. 172). At the end of his report Saunders (1932) stated that, "It is probable that with such large flights of hawks, and so many gunners afield, a few protected species will be shot every season unless an official is there to see that the law is observed...It was the enforcement of the law, and not changes in attitude toward the hawks that reduced the number of gunners and their bags this season" (p. 171).

In 1932 the second season of investigation, Robert P. Allen was posted by the National Association of Audubon Societies at Cape May Point to observe the fall hawk migration and educate hunters. He was assisted by New Jersey Game Warden Groves' law enforcement powers. They were on the ground from September 15th to October 29th. They reported that "our educational policy of teaching the gunners which hawks are protected was again adopted" [and that] "of the 428 hawks killed, 20 were protected species" (Pearson, 1933, p. 73). Although these enforcement measures worked to save the protected species, many species still unprotected by law were fair game. The above mentioned 20 birds are deceptive, as the figure

## In Search of Witmer Stone

Map: Audubon Magazine, July/August, 1942.



Witmer Stone Wild Life Sanctuary, 1942.

excludes the unprotected birds: Sharp Shins, Coopers, Goshawk, Duck Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Woodcock, Flickers, and songbirds, etc. The actual number of birds killed was probably in the thousands. Clearly more needed to be done to stop the slaughter.

In 1935 the National Association of Audubon Societies established a new sanctuary at Cape May (Allen, 1935). We have already stated that the sanctuary encompassed almost 1,000 acres surrounding Sunset Boulevard. In 1936 a new law prohibiting shooting from state or county highways eliminated the last

gunning location within the sanctuary and completed the no kill zone. This sanctuary saved many hawks and other birds from the shotgun at Cape May Point by controlling the land on which the slaughter took place.

There can be no doubt that Dr. Witmer Stone's documenting and reporting Cape May bird life and the pressure he applied personally and through the DVOC to protect the birds compelled the Audubon Society to create the Sanctuary and laid the foundation for bird protection in Cape May. In his Memoriam to Stone, James A. G. Rehn (1941) wrote, "there most fittingly, the National Association of Audubon Societies has established the Witmer Stone Bird Sanctuary to permanently link our memory of the man, his service in the protection of bird life, and the place he loved and has made ornithologically famous" (p. 306).

### Our Quest

**November 2008:** We contacted Paul Guris, DVOC's President, and requested that DVOC mount an effort to re-establish the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary.

**January 2009:** DVOC established the Witmer Stone Sanctuary Committee and appointed Mick Jeitner as chairman and later Linda Rowan as co-chair. With the vision of a sanctuary sign on site, it was anticipated that most people would not know who Witmer Stone was or the history of the sanctuary. The need for educational signs to answer these questions was obvious.

**February 2009:** We contacted Superintendent of Cape May Point State Park, Lorraine McCay, and sent her a proposal to re-establish the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary. The proposal included renaming, as the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary, a portion of the old sanctuary which was already part of Cape May Point State Park, placing a replica of the original sanctuary sign on this location accompanied by two educational signs: (1) describing Witmer Stone, and (2) the hawk slaughter. She agreed that Stone deserved recognition and forwarded the proposal to the office of the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The renaming of the site could only be authorized by the commissioner. We solicited letters of support from fellow organizations. Letters of support were sent to Ms. McCay from: American Ornithological Union, Pennsylvania Society of Ornithol-



Today there are educational signs near Sunset Beach about the hawk slaughter and honoring Dr. Stone.

ogy, the Academy of Natural Sciences, Cape May Bird Observatory, and New Jersey Audubon. She forwarded the letters to the commissioner. After waiting several months with no word, we contacted Ms. McCay again. She assured us that our proposal was under consideration, but that these things take time. During the conversation, she said that she had the authority to place the wayside educational signs on the property, and she would be willing to work with us on the signs, however funding was an issue.

**August 2009:** A short description of the effort was presented at the August DVOC meeting to inform the club members about the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary project. A fund raising campaign was needed, as Cape May Point State Park did not have funds for additional educational signs. The presentation to DVOC club members marked the beginning of the fund-raising for the Witmer Stone Fund. Fund-raising took many forms including a flyer that was available at all DVOC meetings, notices in the 2010 and 2011 DVOC Membership Directories, and publicity on DVOC's website.

**November 2009:** The original concept for the signs was displayed at the DVOC banquet. When the signs were shown to park superintendent McCay, she suggested many changes. Most of the changes were due to the requirements for educational signs as required by the state of New Jersey, chiefly the limitation of the number of words to 150. This began the long process of revising and editing. The signs included the DVOC logo, the information that they were funded by the DVOC, and the club's website.

**September 2011:** Our final drafts of the signs were sent to the sign company. The signs were installed at the site on Sunset Boulevard later that fall.

**November 2011:** Superintendent McCay expressed interest in having the signs reproduced for installation on the Hawk Watch platform. The DVOC offered to purchase the signs. Thousands of people visit the hawk watch each year and this was a great way to promote the memory of Dr. Witmer Stone and our club.

**February 23, 2012:** We were notified that our proposal to rededicate the sanctuary had been turned

## In Search of Witmer Stone

down. This was totally unexpected and quite disappointing. The next day Cape May Point State Park Superintendent Lorraine McCay stepped in and offered to place a sign at the Sunset Beach location which would read, "Former site of the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary." We gratefully accepted this offer.

**Spring 2012:** The second set of educational signs was installed on the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point State Park.

**Fall 2013:** The final sign provided by the state of New Jersey that designated the area on Sunset Boulevard as the former site of the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary was installed at the location on Sunset Boulevard with the educational signs.

### Conclusion

Putting aside our personal feelings and stated goal of re-dedicating the sanctuary, the underlying purpose of this project, to bring recognition to Dr. Witmer Stone, has been accomplished. Today we have a total of five signs placed in two locations with Witmer Stone's name and achievements displayed: three signs at Sunset Beach and two signs on the Hawk Watch Platform

at the State Park. We are grateful to Lorraine McCay and the staff at the state park for supporting this project and helping to make it a reality. In our search for Witmer Stone, we found the complete ornithologist — a unique blend consisting of his excellent work as both closet and field ornithologist, held together by his literary skills, kind personality, and deep concern for conservation. He was an honorable man who worked tirelessly and effectively for his science at the Academy and for bird protection with the AOU, DVOG, and Audubon Societies.

### From obscurity Witmer Stone is back in Cape May.

To assure that this monument to Stone does not disappear again, the Witmer Stone Fund will be maintained by the DVOG. Donations will continue to be accepted to this fund, to guarantee the replacement of signs in the event of damage or weathering. Donations should be directed to the DVOG's Treasurer Bert Filemyr.

More information can be found at [www.dvog.org](http://www.dvog.org); click on "about" the club, then go to Committees, and then the main committee page of the Witmer Stone Sanctuary.

### Literature Cited

- Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. (n.d.) Collection 398. Pennsylvania Audubon Society. Papers, 1886-1937. Retrieved from [www.ansp.org/research/library/archives/0300-0399/coll0398/#indepth](http://www.ansp.org/research/library/archives/0300-0399/coll0398/#indepth)
- Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. (1939). In Memoriam: Witmer Stone (1866-1939). *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, 91, 415-418.
- Allen, R. P. (1935). Sanctuary established at Cape May. *Bird Lore*, 37, 438.
- Allen, R. P. (1936). Sanctuary or slaughter pen? *Nature Magazine*, 27, 175.
- DVOG, Abstract of the Proceedings, February 4 and February 18, 1926. (1926) *Cassinia*, 26, 35.
- DVOG, Abstract of the Proceedings, October 16, 1930. (1932) *Cassinia*, 28, 56.
- DVOG, Abstract of the Proceedings, April 16, 1931. (1935) *Cassinia*, 29, 56.
- DVOG, Abstract of the Proceedings, October 19, 1939. (1942). *Cassinia*, 31, 56.
- Fisher, E.W. (1910). State Audubon Reports: Pennsylvania. *Bird Lore*, 12, 300-301.
- Fisher, E. W. (1911). State Audubon Reports: Pennsylvania. *Bird Lore*, 13, 380.
- Fisher, E. W. (1912). State Audubon Reports: Pennsylvania. *Bird Lore*, 14, 442.
- Morris, G. S. (1893). A day in the salt marshes near Atlantic City [Presentation at DVOG meeting November 2, 1893]. Academy Archival Collection #42.
- Morris, G. S. (1909). The DVOG and its twentieth anniversary. *Cassinia*, 13, 7-10.
- Nuttall Ornithological Club. (1924). Witmer Stone presentation: "Ornithology of today and tomorrow." The fiftieth anniversary of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, December 1923, 7-25. Cambridge, MA: Author.
- Palmer, T. S. (1900). Palmer on legislation for the protection of birds. *The Auk*, 17, 314-15.
- Pearson, T. G. (Ed.). (1933). Cape May Hawk investigation. *Bird Lore*, 35, 73.
- Pearson, T. G. (Ed.). (1932). Report on the Cape May hawk situation. *Bird Lore*, 34, 171.
- Pearson, T. G. (1937). *Adventures in bird protection*. New York, NY: D. Appleton-Century.

- Pough, Richard H. (1942). The Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary. *Audubon Magazine*, 44, 201.
- Rehn, J. A. G. (1939). In appreciation of Dr. Stone. Paper read at DVOC meeting 19 October 1939. Academy Archival Collection #74.
- Rehn, J. A. G. (1941). In memoriam: Witmer Stone. *The Auk*, 58, 299-313.
- Rehn, J. A. G. (1942). Witmer Stone: 1866-1939. *Cassinia*, 31.
- Robins, J. S. (1899). Reports of societies: Pennsylvania. *Bird Lore*, 1, 65.
- Robins, J. S. (1900). Reports of societies: Pennsylvania. *Bird Lore*, 2, 95.
- Robins, J. S. (1901). Reports of societies: Pennsylvania. *Bird Lore*, 3, 42.
- Robins, J. S. (1903). Reports of societies: Pennsylvania. *Bird Lore*, 5, 72.
- Saunders, G. B. (1932). "Report on the Cape May Hawk Situation." *Bird Lore*, 34, 171-173.
- Sennett, G. B. (1887). Fourth meeting of the American Ornithologists Union. *The Auk*, 4, 58.
- Stone, W. (1894). *Birds of eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey*. Philadelphia, PA: Delaware Valley Ornithological Club.
- Stone, W. (1937). *Bird studies at old Cape May*. Philadelphia, PA: Delaware Valley Ornithological Club.
- Stone, W. (1890). The Delaware Valley Ornithological Club. *The Auk*, 7, 298-299.
- Stone, W. (1896, March 18). Disappearance of our native birds: Many causes uniting to bring about their practical extermination. The New York Times. Retrieved from [query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F40713FE3D5C15738DDDA10994DB405B8685F0D3](http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F40713FE3D5C15738DDDA10994DB405B8685F0D3)
- Stone, W. (1922). Hawk flights at Cape May Point, N. J. *The Auk*, 39, 567-568.
- Stone, W. (1899). Notes and news. *The Auk*, 16, 303.
- Stone, W. (1899). The report of the Committee on Bird Protection. *The Auk*, 16, 55-74.
- Stone, W. (1902). The report of the Committee on the Protection of North American Birds. *The Auk*, 19, 31-34.
- Stone, W. (1921). Stewardson Brown Memoriam. *Cassinia*, 24, 1-7.
- Sutton, C., & Sutton, P. (2006). *Birds and birding at Cape May*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books.
- Trotter, G. S. (December 14, 1909). "What the DVOC Means to Me." Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (Collection #601). Philadelphia, PA.

### Additional Literature Resources

- Allen, R. P., & Peterson, R. T. (1936). "The Hawk Migrations at Cape May Point, New Jersey." *The Auk*, 53(4), 393-404.
- Dunne, P. & Williams, K. (1982). "Hawk Shooting at Cape May, New Jersey." *The Cape May County Magazine of History and Genealogy*. 8.2. Cape May: Cape May County Historical and Genealogical Society, 107-116.
- Fisher, E. W. (1909). State Audubon Reports: Pennsylvania. *Bird Lore*, 11, 329.
- Huber, W. (1940). "Witmer Stone (1866-1939)." *Journal of Mammalogy*, 21(1), 1-4.
- Johnson, L. H. (1997). *One hundred years and still counting*. Bernardsville, N.J.: New Jersey Audubon Society.
- Jordan, J. (2003). *Cape May Point: The illustrated history; 1875 to the present*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer.
- Kastner, J. (1986). *A world of watchers*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Orr, O. (1992). *Saving American birds: T. Gilbert Pearson and the founding of the Audubon movement*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Palmer, T. S. (1902). *Legislation for the protection of birds: Other than game birds*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Skelton, K. G. (1952). "Cape May's firing line." *Nature Magazine*, 45(7), 370-383.
- Stone, W. (1909). *The birds of New Jersey*. Trenton, NJ: New Jersey State Museum.
- Street, P. (1988-1989). "A history of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, the first one hundred years." *Cassinia*, 63, 2.

### Mick Jitner and Linda Rowan

84 Dogwood Drive  
Levittown, PA 19055