

JAMES RHOADS GILLIN

JAMES BOND

On March 25, 1952, the Club lost one of its most prominent members, for on that date Jim Gillin was killed in a tragic automobile accident south of Wilmington, Delaware, together with his wife Florence.

Jim was the son of Thomas S. Gillin, a naturalist of distinction affectionately known to his friends as "The Squire," whose knowledge of the local fauna and flora was possibly unsurpassed. Jim's father was preeminently interested in ornithology and amassed an extensive collection of mounted birds, bird skins and eggs obtained in various parts of North America, Mexico and even South America. Most of this material was housed in a small "museum" in his garden and in the attic of his house. Jim was greatly influenced by his father's hobby, although he never to my knowledge collected birds or prepared or mounted bird skins. Instead he was attracted to egg-collecting at which he became most proficient. I once spent a week with him in the Poconos in early June and can say that I never saw a more indefatigable worker nor one with a keener eye to discern hidden nests. Due mainly to his prowess nests with eggs or young of 38 species were found during that week.

Like his father Jim was interested above all in the Raptores, although it seemed to me that the eggs of these birds meant less to him than their acquisition. Fearless by nature, he relished the difficulty, if not danger, of a high climb to a hawk's nest or the descent of a rugged cliff by rope to explore a falcon's aerie. In time he obtained a collection of birds' eggs that was among the finest in the country.

He became adept as an oologist as the following instance will illustrate. Several years ago a forest ranger collected an addled egg from a nest on the summit of Mt. Katahdin in Maine. It was thought that the egg was that of a pipit, but since no pipit had ever been reported nesting in the eastern United States it was sent to one of the larger museums for positive identification. This, however, was not forthcoming, for it was suggested that the egg might pertain to any of several species. Subsequently I showed it to Jim. I gave him no clue whatsoever, and even intimated that it might have come from Africa or Australia. Without the slightest hesitation he declared, "Why, that's a pipit's egg!"

I am sure that Jim's many friends will agree that enthusiasm and sense of humor were among his outstanding qualities; nor did these diminish with age as they do with so many of us. I well remember only a few years ago when, to the astonishment of ornithologists, a breeding population of Swainson's Warbler was discovered in the lush rhododendron thickets in the mountains of West Virginia. On hearing of this Jim made a point of going there for the purpose of finding a nest of this rare warbler. I was in Canada at the time and received word of his success by means of a post-card on which no words were written but instead were drawn 4 small circles enclosed by a larger circle. Since the eggs of Swainson's Warbler are immaculate, it was quite evident that he had found what he was looking for!

In addition to oological activities, Jim had varied interests, including Boy Scouting, Civil Defense and all matters of local government, in bird-banding, in the breeding of Cornish bantam chickens and blue Muscovy Ducks and in experiments with hybrid oak trees; but most of his time was devoted to his profession of nurseryman.

Jim was born at the old family homestead near Ambler on March 4, 1886. In 1911 he married Florence Malone Hibbs. There were no children.

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