



JOHN A. GILLESPIE

JOHN A. GILLESPIE

(1893 - 1956)

JULIAN K. POTTER

On March 12, 1956 the members of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club lost a wonderful associate and grand companion; a staunch supporter and valuable member of that organization. The sudden passing of John A. Gillespie was keenly felt by his fellow club members, his business associates and numerous friends. He became a member of the D. V. O. C in 1922 and was elected to active membership in 1926. He was elected secretary the same year and served in that capacity until 1937. He was elected vice president in 1939 and president in 1942.

John A. Gillespie's interest in birds blossomed shortly after his marriage in 1918 to Mabel M. Brown. Mrs. Gillespie, an ardent bird student in her own right, found in her husband a very apt pupil. It was not long after their marriage that they started to operate a bird banding station at their home in Glenolden, Penna. A subject discussed at a D. V. O. C. meeting held Feb. 15, 1923 was: "The Objects and Possibilities of Bird Banding as a Method in Ornithology" by members. The late Witmer Stone at that meeting introduced Gillespie, who led the discussion as an experienced bander. He then and there lived up to that introduction by discussing the Gillespie banding methods and results in a concise and illuminating manner.

In 1936, ever looking for new fields in banding which would yield valuable scientific data, he concentrated on the ringing of young Bald Eagles and Ospreys. Members of the club: Herbert H. Beck, E. J. Reimann, Frederick C. Schmid, Jr. and others, I am sure can very well remember how much interesting information, adventure and excitement resulted from these eagle and osprey banding expeditions. Fred Schmid, who did most of the difficult climbing to the nests, can recall with vividness, his eighty foot ascent to an eagle's nest in a giant tulip poplar in Great Bear Swamp in Cumberland Co., N. J. or his feeling of frustration when he gazed aloft at an eagle's nest in an unclimbable dead oak on Mt. Johnson Island in the Susquehanna River. Ninety-one Bald Eagles were banded during the late thirties, all within a hundred miles of Philadelphia. Four hundred and fifty-seven Ospreys were banded. Much information was obtained as to flyways, migration distances and longevity. One Osprey, banded in July reached Rio de Janeiro in the following De-

ember. Two months after John's death an Osprey was electrocuted on high tension wires in Cape May County, N. J. where it had been banded eighteen years before. Up to the time of John's death in 1956 the Gillespies had banded some ten thousand birds.

John became known to me in an unusual and interesting way. In May 1922 I received a message from him stating that he had seen a Yellow-crowned Night Heron along a creek back of his home. When I expressed doubts, "Come out and I will show it to you," he said. I went and on the second attempt, he showed it to me. From this meeting a strong and lasting friendship developed. During that same month he was introduced to the D. V. O. C. and in Cassinia there is recorded May 16, 1922; "Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Glenolden, Pa. (Gillespie),—see Auk." This was a rare find in those days when a Yellow-crowned Night Heron, in these parts was a scarce bird indeed. As a result of this introduction to the club, John became a staunch and firm supporter of all endeavors of the D. V. O. C., being especially generous in advising or helping the younger members in any way.

John Gillespie was an expert field ornithologist and a very proficient imitator of bird songs including such intricate songs as those of the Winter Wren and the Gray-cheeked Thrush. He was also, before the time of color photography a very excellent nature photographer. Several of his pictures appear in Stone's "Bird Studies at Old Cape May". One of a Barn Owl is outstanding; it was taken at night with old-time flash powder in an abandoned water tower as the owl came in and lit on the window sill holding a field mouse in its bill.

Gillespie was born in Philadelphia Oct. 30, 1893. He graduated from Germantown Academy in 1911 and subsequently spent two years at Pa. State College. He joined the Sun Oil Co. in 1916 and became a buyer in that company's purchasing department in 1922. He was past secretary and president of the Eastern Bird Banding Association and for many years examiner in bird study for the Boy Scouts. He was always active in the affairs of the EBBA and in the official organ (April 1956 number) of that Association appeared his last of many ornithological articles. It was an account of the appearance of House Finches at Glenolden. One male and two females had spent the winter at the Gillespie feeding station and had been detected by John among a group of Purple Finches,—a characteristically keen observation. John had little or no patience with collecting and indicated it in his last article by ending it in this way. "P.S. None collected".

In accordance with an often expressed wish, the remains of John A. Gillespie were cremated and his ashes scattered near the summit of Hawk Mt., Pa. on Oct. 6, 1956.

John Gillespie is survived by his wife, the former Mabel M. Brown, of Hyde Park, Mass.; a daughter Ruth (Mrs. John D. Cheda of San Luis Obispo, Calif.); and two sons: John, a former member of the D.V.O.C. who is a spectrographic analyst; and Lincoln who, on finishing college joined the Sun Oil Co. and is now (Nov. 1956) in the Service; and three grandchildren.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Many facts, dates and banding data were checked and correlated by Mrs. Mabel Gillespie to whom grateful thanks are due.

Collingswood, New Jersey.