



IN MEMORIAM

Oliver Payne Pearson
Professor of Zoology, Emeritus
UC Berkeley
1915 – 2003

Oliver Pearson, known to his friends and colleagues as “Paynie”, died on 4 March 2003 only a few days after he and his wife Anita had labored to fell and dissect a giant oak tree near their home in Orinda. He was truly a scholar and gentleman in the traditional sense of this expression. Although Pearson officially retired from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1971 as professor of zoology, emeritus, and director emeritus of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, he continued to serve the University and his professional community until his death.

Paynie was born 21 October 1915 in Philadelphia, and began his science career early, setting traps for small mammals at the age of 8 to 10. He published two papers in 1939, initiating a stream of steady publications, hardly missing a year through 2002, with several more papers published after his death. His publication list totals 101, but this fails to convey the tremendous impact that his research productivity had on vertebrate biology generally. Ten of his papers were cited more than 50 times according to the Information Sciences Institute’s database, and several were citation classics. Most impressive was his breadth of interests and competence. He published seminal papers in (one example given for each discipline): physiology (“Metabolism of small mammals, with remarks on the lower limit of mammalian size,” *Science* 108:44; 1948); ecology (“History of two local outbreaks of feral house mice,” *Ecology* 44:540-548; 1963); systematics (Oliver P. Pearson and J. L. Patton, “Relationships among South American phyllotine rodents based on chromosome analysis,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 57:339-350; 1976); biogeography (Oliver P. Pearson and A. K. Pearson, “Ecology and biogeography of the southern rainforests of Argentina,” pp. 129-142 in M. A. Mares and H. H. Genoways, eds., *Mammalian biology in South America*; 1982); reproductive biology (Oliver P. Pearson, E. R. Koford, and A. K. Pearson, “Reproduction of the lump-nosed bat (*Corynorhinus rafinesquii*) in California,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 33:273-320; 1952); community ecology (“The prey of carnivores during one cycle of mouse abundance,” *Journal of Animal Ecology* 35:217-233; 1966); and behavior (“Habits of the lizard *Liolaemus multiformis* at high altitude in southern Peru,” *Copeia* 2:111-116; 1954). His research mostly concerned mammals, but he also published important work on birds, reptiles, amphibians, bamboos, and most recently on the familiar banana slug.

Pearson’s undergraduate degree was from Swarthmore College (1937), and he earned both an M.A. (1939) and Ph.D. degree (1947) from Harvard University. In 1947 he was appointed instructor in zoology at UC Berkeley, and in 1948 he was also appointed assistant curator of mammals in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, thus initiating a 56-year association with the University. An even longer collaboration began in 1944 when he married Anita Kelley, who supported and complemented all of his professional endeavors. By 1955, Paynie had achieved tenure with his appointment as associate professor and associate curator. Then in 1957 he decided to “retire” so as to spend more time on his research, which increasingly was taking him to South America for long field seasons. He was given the title of lecturer in zoology and research associate in the museum. In December 1966, he returned to the professorial track as acting director of the museum and professor of zoology. Three and a half months later he was made director, a demanding administrative

position he held until 1971. At that time he retired a second time. As mentioned, his research and active involvement with the museum continued until his death.

Pearson began his research career with three published papers based on two trips to Panama that he took with his undergraduate advisor Robert K. Enders. His first independent project was on the toxic bite of the short-tailed shrew. There followed a productive period of work on the reproductive biology of a variety of carnivores, while continuing his interest in shrew biology. Another area that soon attracted his attention was comparative metabolic studies of various vertebrates, including hummingbirds. After that his research became so eclectic that it defied classification. For many years he worked in the altiplano and deserts of Peru, and later switched his attentions to Argentina, especially the vicinity of Bariloche. A classic project involved a functional and descriptive account of the entire biota of the Atacama Desert, a region so arid that its only moisture comes from fog. He also contributed importantly with his studies of population outbreaks involving several species of rodents in the Peruvian deserts.

His work in South America led him to pursue several major works on the systematics of various groups of mammals. Back in California he made major contributions to predator-prey theory with innovative research on California voles and their numerous predator species. In Argentina he studied bat reproduction and in 1976 began a long-continuing investigation of the rodent fauna along the eastern side of the Andes. He was particularly interested in the infrequent, massive, and coordinated flowering of bamboo with its subsequent dramatic effects on small mammal populations, which in turn had secondary effects throughout the community. In typical fashion, he greatly increased understanding of the ecological relations in that region, even though it was not until 2001 that he could witness a repeat of this massive bamboo flowering.

Throughout his career at the University, Pearson was an effective and much appreciated teacher at all levels. His signature course early on was a unique offering in the reproductive biology of vertebrates (1949-1956). Another innovative course was a field course featuring the then new techniques of karyotyping. He also contributed often to the well-known course in vertebrate natural history, and participated in a variety of graduate and undergraduate seminars. Perhaps he was best known for his long tenure in teaching the department's introductory course for non-majors (Zoology 10). Paynie also served as vice chairman of zoology in 1953-54, was acting chairman in 1968, and, as mentioned, served competently as director of the museum during a critical period in the museum's history. Perhaps his single most influential teaching assignment was in 1964-65, when he was invited to spend a year at the Universidad de Buenos Aires as a visiting professor of ecology. There he taught a seminar in ecology attended by a large group of students who went on to become leaders in this field. In short, he effectively launched the field of modern ecology in southern South America, and its blossoming today is a tribute to this effort. From that time forward, Paynie was honored as the "father" of ecology in that part of the world. In recognition of this and his many other contributions to South American ecology and mammalogy, he was awarded an honorary doctoral degree from the University of La Plata in 2000. The following year, he was honored at the first biennial meeting of the ecological societies of Argentina and Chile (Bariloche 2001).

Oliver Pearson was also active in professional organizations, especially the American Society of Mammalogists. He was a long-term, dedicated, and effective contributor to the society, receiving its H. H. T. Jackson Award in 1984 for his extraordinary service. He was elected an honorary member in 1979. He served as a trustee from 1969 through 1984, helping to develop and enhance the financial foundations of the society, was elected a director for over 17 years during the period 1952 to 1990, and was vice president from 1969 to 1972. He also served on various of the society's committees, most notably the Committee on International Relations. During his chairmanship of this committee, he was influential in initiating the International Theriological Congresses, the first of which was held in Moscow in 1974. These popular conferences continue to the present as International Mammalogical Congresses. Pearson was also active in the Cooper Ornithological Society, in which he served on the Investment Committee (1972 to 1987); he was an elected director from 1969 to 1971 and was awarded honorary membership in 1979. He was elected director of the San Francisco Zoological Society for 1959-60 and served as councilor for the Save the Redwoods League. Other honors include honorary memberships in the Sociedad Argentina para el Estudio de los Mamíferos (1983) and the Comité Argentino de Conservación de la Naturaleza, and election as a fellow of the California Academy of Sciences in 1964.

Paynie will be remembered as a particularly kind and generous person who gave unselfishly of his time and expertise. He was also an expert photographer and extraordinary gadgeteer, inventing and producing much of his own field and laboratory equipment as well as teaching tools. In the last category was a pinball machine-like apparatus designed for teaching some statistical concepts. He was a special friend and colleague, and we

treasure our memories of sharing much of our professional careers with him. A special 981- page festschrift honoring his contributions was published in 2007 that included papers by 63 former students and colleagues. Paynie is survived by his wife Anita, four children (Peter K. Pearson, Carol A. Ralph, Sandia C. Ivey, and Alison P. Pearson), and five grandchildren.

William Z. Lidicker Jr.

James L. Patton