



IN MEMORIAM

Frank Alois Pitelka
Professor of Zoology, Emeritus
UC Berkeley
1916 – 2003

Frank Alois Pitelka, a keystone of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ) and the Department of Zoology since arriving at the University of California, Berkeley as a Ph.D. student in the fall of 1939, died of prostate cancer on 10 October 2003. Frank retired in 1985 but continued to come regularly to campus until 2000, when failing health forced him to move to his daughter's home in southern California.

Frank was born in Chicago, Illinois, on 27 March 1916. His ornithological career spanned 50 years, beginning during the 1930s while he was growing up in suburban Chicago. Although he always dismissed his upbringing as nonacademic, Frank began his professional ascent early on by joining the Chicago Ornithological Society, with which he took numerous field trips and began serious ornithological observations. During his college years Frank published eight notes in *The Auk* and a detailed account of the breeding biology of the black-throated green warbler in the *Wilson Bulletin* (52: 3-18, 1940).

After graduation from the University of Illinois, Frank spent the summer of 1939 at the University of Washington's Oceanographic Laboratories in Friday Harbor and then moved to UC Berkeley for graduate work with Joseph Grinnell in the MVZ. Unfortunately, Grinnell died before he arrived, and so Frank became a student of Alden Miller, Grinnell's former student and successor as the director of the museum.

A venerable MVZ tradition during that era involved staff and students making extensive field collecting trips throughout western North America and Mexico. Frank eagerly joined several of these expeditions, and for his Ph.D. investigated variation and speciation in *Aphelocoma* jays (*Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool.* 50: 195-464, 1951), a genus that includes the locally common California scrub-jay. Presumably he chose this small genus, which currently is divided into five species, because of its taxonomic complexity. It was, however, a fortunate choice for another reason: several species in this genus are extremely social, and behavioral observations Frank made during his collecting trips kindled an interest in the evolution of social behavior that was to form one of two major foci of his research career.

Frank's second major research focus was population regulation. This interest developed soon after he finished his Ph.D. in 1946 and was hired as an instructor in zoology and assistant curator of birds in the MVZ. Gradually his attention shifted from taxonomy to ecology, spurred along by an invitation to work at the recently established Arctic Research Laboratory (later the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory, or NARL) in Barrow, Alaska. Thus began Frank's 30-year annual migration between Berkeley and Barrow as he and his students studied the legendary population cycles of lemmings and their avian predators (*Ecol. Monogr.* 25: 85-117, 1955), later expanding to studies of the behavior and ecology of other Arctic-breeding birds, particularly calidridine sandpipers (*Amer. Zool.* 14: 185-204, 1974).

Frank was a naturalist, proudly and unabashedly the product of an earlier generation of field biologists, for whom the collecting of specimens, distributional data, life histories, and behavioral observations were of paramount importance. He was especially in his element in the stark natural beauty of northern Alaska, where he enthusiastically trundled across the tundra to collect vagrants and observe the social and reproductive behavior of the avifauna. Over the many years of his work at NARL, Frank became one of the station's most durable and colorful summer residents.

Frank's bibliography encompasses 215 publications. His professional awards include the William Brewster Memorial Medal (1980) from the American Ornithologists' Union, the Mercer (1953) and Eminent Ecologist (1992) awards from the Ecological Society of America, the Fellow's Medal of the California Academy of Sciences (1997), the Distinguished Teaching Award (1984) and Berkeley Citation (1986) from UC Berkeley, and a Lifetime Alumni Achievement Award from the University of Illinois (1993). He was a Guggenheim Fellow at Harvard University; a visiting scholar in Charles Elton's laboratory at Oxford University in 1949-50 and again in 1957-58; an elected fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America (1959), American Association for the Advancement of Science (1960), California Academy of Sciences (1961), and Animal Behavior Society (1989); a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University (1971); and a professor in the Miller Institute for Basic Research in Science (1965-66). Because of Frank's Czech heritage, the honor that he treasured most was an honorary doctorate in biological sciences from Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic (1997).

These accomplishments only begin to touch upon Frank's greatest impact on science, which was in the realm of nurturing students, their ideas and careers. The main tangible manifestations of this are the six M.S., 37 Ph.D., and 11 postdoctoral students whom Frank mentored. Many of the ideas of the American branch of the field of behavioral ecology were nurtured in Frank's lab during the 1970s. A list of Frank's doctoral students who were primarily involved in avian work was published as part of the academic family tree for Loye and Alden Miller (*Condor* 95: 1065-1067, 1993), and Frank's postdoctoral students are listed in an announcement of a celebration that his students and colleagues held in honor of his 80th birthday (*Condor* 98: 671-672, 1996).

Once Frank accepted a student, he typically became a lifelong friend and ardent supporter, providing critical intellectual assistance and emotional support when needed, and gently but consistently nudging them to get out into the field and on with their research. Always taking the big picture and keenly aware of developments in the field both current and past, Frank invariably was able to put whatever idea his students were currently smitten with into its broader perspective and historical context, humbling and yet inspiring them to scurry excitedly back to work.

This approach enabled Frank to transmit to students not only his appreciation for "old-fashioned" natural history but also his enthusiasm for good science in general. He was particularly eager to foster scientific interchange between his students and the international scientific community. To that end, he hosted dozens of campus visitors and organized several small, focused meetings including The Great California Woodpecker and Acorn-storing Symposium (*Condor* 76: 230-231, 1974) and an international symposium on shorebird behavior and ecology (*Studies Avian Biol.* 2: 1-261, 1979). Conversely, Frank exhibited considerable disdain for anything that impeded good science, as well as political decisions based on emotion or public opinion rather than solid scientific evidence.

Frank's undergraduate teaching centered on ecology and social behavior. He started a course in animal ecology in 1946 when the teaching of ecology was still rare in American universities. In 1960, he and Herbert G. Baker of the Department of Botany pioneered another innovation in the teaching of ecology by offering a course combining the perspectives of plant and animal ecologists. In conjunction with his colleague Oscar H. Paris, he initiated a weekly lunchtime graduate seminar in the mid-1960s ("Ecology Research Reviews") that remains a tradition in the Department of Integrative Biology today. In addition to his courses in ecology, he started a popular course in animal social behavior, focusing attention on a field that later became sociobiology.

Frank's curatorial responsibilities in MVZ continued until 1962, when he became chair of the Department of Zoology, a post he held from 1963 to 1966 and again from 1968 to 1971. He subsequently continued his involvement with the MVZ as a research ecologist, and served as associate director of MVZ for Hastings Natural History Reservation, part of the University's Natural Reserve System, from 1982 until 1997, long after he officially retired. He was active in a number of professional societies, particularly the Cooper Ornithological Society, the American Ornithologists' Union, and the Ecological Society of America. He

served on numerous federal committees and panels, and held editorial positions with *Ecology* (editor, 1962–1964), *The Condor* (associate editor, 1946–1962), and *Studies in Avian Biology* (editor, 1984–1987).

Beyond his influence through his own students, Frank's larger-than-life personality made him an important and respected influence on the careers of numerous young ornithologists, ecologists, and behavioral ecologists throughout the world. He was invariably a colorful and enthusiastic participant at meetings, asking penetrating questions, adding insightful comments, and always making it clear to everyone around him that getting to the heart of a research question was the key to having a good time.

In addition to his deep commitment to and involvement in science, Frank was intrigued by artistic beauty and achievement in a myriad of forms, from the ability to express himself in several languages (using appropriately colorful and amusing gestures and expressions) to his devotion to grand opera, which he and his wife Dorothy attended regularly in both San Francisco and in Europe until her death in 1994. He was also a notable lover of fine food, frequenting many of Berkeley's chic restaurants regularly enough to be greeted by name upon arrival and then escorted to his favorite table. Frank also enjoyed fine wines, and in selecting these he brought to bear the same devotion and scrutiny he exercised in his scientific work. Frank knew precisely how to squeeze a cork and sniff a vintage — and didn't think twice about sending a bottle back if it failed to meet his expectations.

Frank's influence on ecology and behavior, both at Berkeley and throughout the U.S., continues to be felt, and will be missed by those of us who were fortunate enough to have him as a colleague. Frank, and Dorothy Riggs, who married as graduate students at Berkeley, are survived by their three children: Kazi, a professional violist in Altadena, California; Louis, an ecologist and director of the University of Maryland's Appalachian Laboratory in Frostburg; and Vince, a ceramicist and professor at the Appalachian Center for Craft in Cookeville, Tennessee.

Walter D. Koenig
William Z. Lidicker Jr.