



## IN MEMORIAM

Boyd W. Walker

1917 — 2001

Professor of Zoology- Fisheries, Emeritus  
Los Angeles

Boyd W. Walker (born May 26, 1917, deceased September 19, 2001) was for 31 years (1949 - 1980) an active, valued and respected member of the faculty in the (initially) Department of Zoology, later the Department of Biology, UCLA. During his period of active service he was also the senior faculty member in a special research unit that had been established in the late 1940s by the California State Legislature (Zoology - Fisheries Program). The small but (then) generally stable budget of that unit provided him with sufficient resources and logistical support that he rarely needed to apply for extramural funding for his research and teaching activities. This, combined with his life experiences prior to joining the faculty, produced in him a world view and general mode of dealing with people and circumstances that was uncommonly humane, independent, objective, clear-eyed, and realistic.

He was born in Manhattan, Kansas, to an academic family. His father was at the time head of the Department of Agricultural Engineering at Kansas State University (he later became head of the equivalent department at UC Davis, where Walker Hall bears his name). The family moved to Davis when he was ten years old, and it was there that he developed his lifelong interest in fishes. He began his undergraduate studies in zoology at Davis, then transferred to UC Berkeley and from there to the University of Michigan. His advisor for both his undergraduate degree and for his master's degree (received in 1942) was Carl Hubbs, a world leader in the field of ichthyology.

He was an Army veteran of World War II who saw extensive combat in the European Theater, including the Battle of the Bulge. He volunteered for the Army in 1942 as a private in the infantry. He was discharged in 1946 with the rank of Major, having served as an anti-tank commander in the 99th Division. Soon after returning to civilian life he became a doctoral student in ichthyology at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO), UCSD, where he again studied under the direction of Carl Hubbs, who had moved from Michigan. He received his Ph.D. in 1948 (SIO degrees at that time were actually awarded by UCLA, since UCSD did not then exist).

His dissertation topic was a study of the habits of the beach-spawning grunion, a small relative of the silverside fishes (in the family Atherinopsidae) that is a part of southern California folklore. Much of the research was done at Scripps beach. Marking and counting grunion involved the aid of numbers of faculty and students. Those participating were given certificates giving them, among others, the privilege of "spawning on the beach at high tide." His work remains the definitive study of the habits of this fish that fascinates visitors and inhabitants alike. A documentary film about grunion life history that he helped to make also remains a perennial part of many ichthyology classes.

After graduation he joined the faculty at UCLA. He then began his study of the fishes of the Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez) that was a major on-going interest for the rest of his career. At that time little scientific collecting of fishes had been done in the Pacific Ocean waters of Mexico since the turn of the 19th century. He and his students built a large and important collection of eastern Pacific fishes, much of which has since been transferred to the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. This work resulted in the discovery of many new species of fishes and produced large amounts of information about fish distributions,

abundances, ecology, and behavior.

In the 1950s he headed the Salton Sea Project financed by the California State Department of Fish and Game (DFG). The project resulted in the benchmark publication "Ecology of the Salton Sea", published as a Fish Bulletin by the Department. This work provides a database that is one of the scientific foundations for current debates about the management and future of the Salton Sea.

Most of his other publications dealt with the taxonomy of various fishes. He was not a prolific publisher of research papers, preferring to guide his students to high quality and significant projects. He believed strongly in field studies of fishes, and took his students and collaborators on many extensive field trips along the west coasts of California and Mexico and as far afield as the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador.

He was a noted teacher at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. His rigorous undergraduate ichthyology course was well attended, and his graduate courses and seminars challenged his students and interested others. He supervised about 20 doctoral students and about 10 master's students. Most of his students went on to careers in academia, several becoming leading figures in systematic ichthyology, evolutionary biology, physiological ecology, and animal behavior. His influence is still being felt in these fields. He was both academic mentor and friend to all.

He devoted large amounts of time and effort to a wide range of service activities. At UCLA he did more than his full share of committee work, including chairing several committees that helped plan various life science buildings. Outside the university he was an important participant for many years in the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (ASIH). He served ASIH in many capacities, both appointed and elected, including a one year term as president.

He met his wife, Maryev, in summer 1940 and they married while he was on leave from the Army in 1943. They had four children and presently six grandchildren. As a couple they shared many active interests, from fly-fishing to gardening to Native American handicrafts to beads. For many years they were traders on the Navajo reservation and at various pueblos and at home they were dealers in Native American artifacts. In 1997 they donated a major collection of almost 4,000 Zuni carvings to the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. In 1974 they loaned one of his former doctoral students the funds needed to start a semi-professional journal about beads (now called ORNAMENT) that is still being published.

He was an inspiring scholar, a fine role model, a good citizen, and a good person. Those who knew him miss him.

Malcolm S. Gordon  
Donald G. Buth  
Richard H. Rosenblatt