

In Memoriam

FRANK ALOIS PITELKA, 1916–2003

Frank Pitelka, in whose honor the ISBE's research award for the best student paper published in *Behavioral Ecology* was established, died of prostate cancer on 10 October 2003. Frank was born in Chicago, Illinois, on 27 March 1916. He earned his B.S. at the University of Illinois (1939) and his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley (1946), where he remained for his entire academic career. He retired in 1985 but continued to come regularly to campus until 1999, when failing health forced him to move to his daughter's compound in southern California.

Frank's ornithological career spanned 50 years, beginning during the 1930s while he was growing up in suburban Chicago. Although he always dismissed his upbringing as distinctly non-academic, 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 Bull.* (52: 3-18, 1940).

After graduation, Frank spent the summer of 1939 at the University of Washington's Oceanographic Laboratories in Friday Harbor and then moved south to the University of California at Berkeley for graduate work under Alden Miller in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ). 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). Presumably he chose this small genus, which currently is divided into five species, because of its taxonomic complexity. However, it turned out to be a fortuitous choice for another reason: several of these jays 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. 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 his acceptance of an invitation to work at the recently

established Arctic Research Laboratory (later the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory, or NARL) in Barrow, Alaska. Thus began an annual migration between Berkeley and Barrow that Frank undertook for 30 years 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 from 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. As described memorably by David W. Norton (in *Fifty years below zero: tributes and meditations for the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory's first half-century at Barrow, Alaska*, Univ. Alaska Press, 2001), 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 over 150 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, a distinguished teaching award (1984) and the Berkeley Citation (1986) from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Lifetime Alumni Achievement Award from the University of Illinois (1993). He was a Guggenheim Fellow, a visiting scholar in Charles Elton's laboratory at Oxford University in 1949-50, an elected Fellow of the Animal Behavior Society (1989), served on numerous federal committees and panels, and held editorial positions for various journals and organizations including *Ecology* (editor, 1962-64), *The Condor* (associate editor, 1946-62), and *Studies in Avian Biology* (editor, 1984-87). 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. In terms of ideas, many of the roots and shoots of the American branch of the field of behavioral ecology were fertilized 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 their life-long friend and ardent supporter, providing critical intellectual assistance and emotional support when needed, and gently but consistently nudging us to get out into the field and on with our research. Frank would look over his half-rim glasses with a twinkle in his eyes, raise his eyebrows and ask, "Well, doctor, what's going across your desk these days?" 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 we were currently smitten with into its broader perspective and historical context, humbling and yet inspiring us to scurry excitedly back to work.

Frank's nurturing approach enabled him 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 such as *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 a considerable disdain for anything that got in the way of doing good science, as well as political decisions based on emotion or public opinion rather than solid scientific evidence.

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 San Francisco and in Europe (they were particularly fond of Italy and Italian opera) until her death in 1994. Frank and Dorothy, who met 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.

One of Frank's most memorable characteristics was his love of good conversation over fine cuisine. He frequented 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 may be the only person we've ever dined with who knew precisely how to squeeze a cork and sniff a vintage—and who didn't think twice about sending a bottle back if it failed to meet his expectations.

One of *Nature* magazine's favorite questions for scientists it profiles is "What persons, living or dead, would you most like to dine with?" Three choices come easily to our minds: Niko Tinbergen, David Lack, and Frank Pitelka, with our guess being that Frank would not only match his elder's insights and wit but most likely choose the best restaurant at which to dine. The passing of "Papa Frank" is truly the end of an era. He will be greatly missed by his family, students and the behavioral and ornithological communities.

NOTE: This is a modified version of a memorial statement that is forthcoming in *The Auk*.

Walt Koenig

*Hastings Reservation
University of California, Berkeley
38601 E. Carmel Valley Rd.
Carmel Valley, CA 93924, USA*

Paul Sherman

*Department of Neurobiology and Behavior
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853, USA*