

1997 DORIS HUESTIS SPEIRS AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS IN CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGY

Hugh James Boyd



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The Society Of Canadian Ornithologists's 1997 award for outstanding contributions to Canadian ornithology, The Doris Huestis Speirs Award, was presented to HUGH JAMES BOYD, Scientist Emeritus and former Director of Migratory Birds Branch of Canadian Wildlife Service (Environment Canada), on 9 August 1997 within the science program of the 16th S.C.O. annual Meeting at Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario. The award honours the exceptional lifetime achievement in avian science and research & management that Mr. Boyd has made to knowledge, conservation, and preservation of Canadian birds and the habitats they occupy.

Hugh Boyd is distinguished for both his scientific work on migratory birds and his research management skills over the last 50 years in Canada and Europe, particularly on geese, shorebirds, and seabirds. Mr. Boyd's gracious personality and mural modesty provides little evidence of his outstanding accomplishments in the areas of avian science and the conservation of birds. For the last 30 years in Canada, he has provided leadership in the quest for knowledge on birds by government and university scientists, including major long-term research programs on geese, waterfowl, seabirds and shorebirds. He encouraged the acquisition of new information on the biology of birds using sound scientific methodologies, and also the processing and interpretation of data gathered, and the application of research findings to ecosystem conservation and management. His research, described in over 180 scientific papers, including three books and monographs, ranged widely, from avifaunal surveys on oceanic islands to long-term survival rates and population studies of ducks,

geese and shorebirds (see selected list below). Mr. Boyd has played central roles in developing integrated and coherent programs between Canada and the United States for the management of Noah American waterfowl and the international promotion of the conservation of wetlands. His influence on avian science and management spans numerous countries and two continents.

Hugh Boyd, born and raised in Bristol, England, studied zoology, microbiology and chemistry at the University of Bristol, following military service with the Royal Navy in 1943-44. His first wildlife position was in 1948, as Warden of the Lundy Bird Observatory, Devon, renowned for its seabirds, particularly the Atlantic Puffin. In 1949 he was appointed Resident Biologist for the Severn Wildfowl Trust (now The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, WWT) at Slimbridge. His major task was to establish a waterfowl monitoring and banding program to provide the scientific information necessary for development of conservation policy. During this work, Mr. Boyd executed detailed studies of the biology and behaviour of waterfowl, with particular focus on White-fronted Geese. In 1953 he published a seminal work in *Behaviour* entitled "On encounters between wild White-fronted Geese in winter flocks". By 1960, monitoring programs on ducks, geese and swans were in operation, studies that provided important new information on patterns of distribution, abundance, population dynamics and habitat use. Results from these long-term programs have been used to protect species populations, create protected areas, and in conserving critical wetland sites throughout the United Kingdom. Before leaving for Canada in 1967, he spent two years designing and initiating research projects in Scotland as part of the ICSU International Biological Programme. This wealth of research and management experience proved invaluable for the formidable tasks awaiting him with the Canadian Wildlife Service as Research Supervisor of Migratory Birds in Eastern and Arctic Canada.

From 1967 to 1974 Hugh Boyd expanded C.W.S.' horizons incredibly. First, by his insistence on the pursuit of scientific excellence and the use of science-based evidence to formulate conservation policy. And second, by his determination to move C.W.S. beyond ducks and geese into the vast unknown worlds of songbirds, seabirds and shorebirds in Canada. Apart from the intellectual thirst for more knowledge about birds, Mr. Boyd displayed great sensitivity towards finding out the impacts of human activity on major bird groups over wide geographic regions. For example, after the discovery of oil on the north slope of Alaska in 1968, he was quick to set up a seabird program to prepare for the offshore oil exploration that would soon occur in eastern Canada. Similarly, he established a shorebird program well in advance of the James Bay hydro development to ensure information on shorebirds in Hudson and James Bays was adequate to measure changes. One of his crowning achievements during this early period was the development and support of the La Prouse Bay Snow Goose research project, initiated in 1968 under direction of Fred Cooke, which has become one of the longest and most productive field studies of a bird population in the world, comprising more than 25 years of research. Most of these programs would not have happened without Hugh Boyd's wisdom, promotion and particular approach to scientific and environmental problems.

In 1975, Mr. Boyd became Director of Migratory Birds for C.W.S., and in this role initiated numerous key monitoring schemes, statutes and regulations. He spearheaded international agreements on waterfowl conservation and management, and used his sharp wit to jolt associates into new ventures. These included Canada's becoming a member of the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau, membership that proved critical to wetland conservation in the Western Hemisphere and to ensuring Canadian adherence to the Ramsar Convention -The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. He also encouraged collaboration between Canadian scientists and those in other countries, particularly where Canadian birds wintered or research interests overlapped, such as Russia, Denmark (Greenland), Iceland, United States, and several countries in Central and South America. After 1980 when he stepped down as Director of Migratory Birds, he occupied many positions, Senior Policy Advisor, Senior Scientist, Acting Director (Ontario Region), and Chief of Migratory Bird Research. He officially retired after March 1991, but received ongoing status as Scientist Emeritus within weeks of his retirement.

Hugh Boyd's published works centred chiefly on waterfowl behaviour and ecology. He pioneered studies on impacts of human activities and climatic variability on geese and ducks in North America and abroad. Particular focus has been on the effects of hunting and agricultural practices, and the ecological implications of global warming to distribution patterns, survival rates, and reproductive performance. More recently, he is exploring the influence of climate change on arctic breeding birds including shorebirds. Of special note is Mr. Boyd's rate of publication. His productivity remained at a high level throughout his working career, despite enormous administrative burdens associated with Director and Research Manager positions. Of 188 scientific papers he published, the first appeared in 1947, on the breeding performance of Coots, and the last five in 1997, including the first Doris Huestis Speirs Lecture entitled "***Looking Backwards, Looking Forwards: 30 Years of Canadian Ornithology***" (see below). Altogether, more than 3.8 papers per annum were published over 50 years, with the mean rate in 1995-97 over 4.3 published papers per year. An enviable publication record by a research scientist and research manager *par excellence!*

Mr. Boyd has been honoured for his scientific and conservation achievements worldwide. In 1992, he was made a Research Associate of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust for his encouragement of young scientists within that organization. In 1996, the Director-General of WWT, together with Lady Scott, awarded him the ***Peter Scott Medal*** for his exceptional contributions to wildfowl and wetland conservation on two continents. The significance of this award is made still greater in that Mr. Boyd received the first ***Peter Scott Medal*** to be presented, an award established in 1996 to commemorate Sir Peter Scott's commitment to using scientific understanding and knowledge as a basis for wildfowl and wetland conservation policy. Selection of Hugh Boyd as the first recipient of this medal could not have been better.

The Society of Canadian Ornithologists' most prestigious **Doris Huestis Speirs Award for Outstanding Contributions to Canadian Ornithology** is presented to honour outstanding lifetime achievement in any discipline of Canadian ornithology. **Mr. Hugh Boyd** exceeds these criteria from several viewpoints. His contributions to avian science and conservation on two continents are

exemplary and of immeasurable value. Moreover, he is without question the "engine" that drove avian research in Canada for more than 20 years. Both university and government scientists are indebted greatly to him for his considerable effort and success in moving avian research forward. Thus, the Society of Canadian Ornithologists, and all its members, take great pleasure in presenting the 1997 Doris Huestis Speirs Award to **Hugh Boyd** for his outstanding contributions to ornithology and the birds of Canada.

[Committee Members: A.W. Diamond, D.N. Nettleship (chair), S.G. Sealy]

Selected publications by Hugh Boyd:

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