

A fair amount of Taverner's time was given to identifying specimens collected for the museum by himself and others as well as specimens sent to him for determination by private individuals. Throughout his life he maintained a coolly critical attitude to the naming of subspecies based on minor variations among populations; he personally was not convinced of their validity. In his *Birds of Eastern Canada* he innovated by giving a vernacular name to the species as a whole rather than treating each subspecies separately with a name that often obscured species relationships. This was a departure from the standard nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union's *Check-list of North American Birds* which was regarded by some as heresy but by



Taverner skinning a specimen at Pt. Pelee.
Photo courtesy John L. Cranmer Byng.

others as common sense. In the 1957 edition of the Check-List the practice of giving one vernacular name for the species as a whole, and no vernacular names for subspecies, was adopted - ten years after Taverner's death. Four papers by Taverner can serve as examples of his taxonomic research namely on Red-tailed Hawks (Taverner 1927, 1936), Canada Geese (1929) and the Canadian races of the Great Horned Owls (1942).

Another way in which Taverner influenced ornithology during his own era, though less obviously, was through the massive correspondence with a network of friends and contacts which he con-

tinued for forty years. Much of it was ornithological talk, but there is enough human interest to make it worth reading provided that one can forgive the erratic spelling, skimpy punctuation and uncorrected typing errors. Taverner wrote in a relaxed style, flavoured with slang phrases, and salted with humour which tended to bring out a similar response in his friends. Only in official letters was the wording formal, but this was not Taverner's natural style. He regarded it as part of his duty to be in touch with as many ornithologists as possible, exchanging bird news and stimulating others in their ornithological work. William Rowan was one of these, and wrote from Edmonton 'Your letters are one of the big treats here in this isolated corner' (Rowan to Taverner, 2 July 1923). Taverner's correspondence in the National Museum in Ottawa and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto contain extremely interesting letters exchanged with ornithologists as different as Arthur Bent, Allan Brooks, Mack Laing, Dewey Soper, William Rowan and, near the end of his life, Louise de Kiriline Lawrence.

Taverner's family life, like his personality, was a little unusual. He lived with his mother and half sister, in the Ottawa house which he had designed, until his mother's death in 1924. In 1930, at the age of 55, Percy married Martha Wiest, a widow who was a long-time friend of the family from their Detroit years. This opened wider horizons in his life. Since Martha was a trained pianist and Percy was fond of music, the Taverners often held musical evenings at their home. They also bought a car and travelled. Percy was a man of exceptional manual skill combined with artistic feeling which showed clearly in his recreations: book binding, photography and gardening. He also built a cottage at Blue Sea Lake in Québec to an original design of his own.

Taverner's close friends enjoyed his company for his keen sense of humour and, despite his stammer, for his conversation. He had a modest personality and lifestyle without a trace of self-importance.

He could be very stubborn when supporting a cause which he believed to be right, and his strong views sometimes embarrassed his friends. Taverner was not the kind to attract honours, but he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1935.

As a museum builder he was way ahead of the facilities available to him, and as a popularizer of ornithological knowledge he was in the very first rank.

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