

The Master Turtler

ARCHIE FAIRLY CARR JR. — 1909-1987

Archie Carr, conservationist, biologist, lecturer, writer, teacher, and past Chairman of the SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group, died on 21 May at his home in Micanopy, Florida.

Archie was Graduate Research Professor of Zoology at the University of Florida, Gainesville. He received the University of Florida's first PhD in Zoology in 1937. From then until the mid-1980s, he taught ecology at the university, except for short leaves of absence to teach in Honduras (1944-1949) and Costa Rica (1956-1957). He was author of more than 100 scientific papers, and numerous books, including *Handbook of Turtles* (1952), *High Jungles and Low* (1953), *Guide to the Reptiles, Amphibians, and Fresh-Water Fishes of Florida* (1955, co-authored with C.J. Goin), *The Windward Road* (1956), *The Reptiles* (1963), *Ulendo* (1964), *The Land and Wildlife of Africa* (1964), *So Excellent a Fish* (1967), and *The Everglades* (1973). He won many awards for his popular treatises. He was a superb writer. The verbal pictures he created enabled the reader to share in his wonder of nature, his thrill in witnessing some natural spectacle, be it the excitement of watching a green turtle nest on a remote beach halfway round the world, or treefrogs singing of sex in a pinewoods breeding pond, or the blight-caused loss of Spanish moss in his Florida backyard. People loved Archie. They came from all over to meet their favourite nature writer, and a legion of graduate and undergraduate students became devotees.

Archie said he first developed an interest in sea turtles while working on the *Handbook of Turtles*. That interest never diminished in 30 years of pursuing these reptiles throughout the Caribbean, on both shores of Central America, and on remote islands off Australia and in the mid-Atlantic. To most people he was 'Mr Sea Turtle'. Many of the people who work with sea turtles today are former students. Virtually all are correspondents. Little wonder that the SSC turned to Archie when it needed a chairman for its Marine Turtle Specialist Group, a position he held for almost two decades.

The more that Archie and his colleagues learned about sea-turtle biology, the more impossible the task of conserving these sea-going reptiles seemed to become. What other conservationists are faced with the task of conserving an animal that takes 30 to 50 years to reach sexual maturity, Archie persisted. He met with legislators to persuade them to protect

rookery beaches, with wildlife officials to develop management programmes for the species, and with industry leaders to curtail the overexploitation of the resource for short-term economic gain. He was most persuasive when pleading for an end to the frivolous diversion of sea-turtle meat from tropical coastal people to supplying the dinner tables of the wealthy in Europe and North America. He was convinced the coastal people could have the protein they needed without destroying the resource base, if turtles were only killed for local consumption and not for sale, as they had been for generations before commercial exploitation arrived.

Archie disliked personal confrontation. He made his point through the logic of his argument, not through loud tirades or personal attacks, and he was as much admired by opponents as by supporters. He had an extraordinary sense of humor, which often showed through his writings, witness this description of the conservative morphology of turtles in *Handbook of Turtles*:

'The Cenozoic came, and with it progressive drought, and the turtles joined the great hegira of swamp and forest animals to steppe and prairie, and watched again as the mammals rose to heights of evolutionary frenzy reminiscent of the dinosaurs in their day, and swept across the grasslands in an endless cavalcade of restless, warm-blooded types. Turtles went with them, as tortoises now, with high shells and columnar, elephantine feet, but always making as few compromises as possible with the new environment, for by now their architecture and their philosophy had been proved by the eons; and there is no wonder that they just keep on watching as *Eohippus* beget Man o' War and a mob of irresponsible and shifty-eyed little shrews swarmed down out of the trees to chip at stones, and fidget around fires, and build atom bombs.'

For his research on sea turtles, and his conservation efforts in their behalf, Archie was awarded the Gold Medal of the World Wildlife Fund (1973), the Edward W. Browning Award (1975), the Order of the Golden Ark (1978), the Gold Medal of the New York Zoological Society (1978, shared jointly with his wife, Marjorie), appointed SSC member of Honour (1984), and named Eminent Ecologist by the Ecological Society of America (1987). To honour Archie and to carry on his work, in 1986, the University of Florida established the Center for Sea Turtle Research, directed by Dr Karen Bjorndal, one of Archie's former students and present Chairman of the SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group.

Archie's conservation interests were not limited to sea turtles. He felt just as passionately about other species, and he was convinced that

wild creatures and wild places are important to the well-being of mankind. When he began his efforts on behalf of turtles more than three decades ago, he was the only zoology professor at the University of Florida who was a practising conservationist. He did his research and then took that extra step by using his findings to forestall the loss of wild diversity. The general feeling in the department at that time was that conservation was all right for the wildlife professors, but zoologists were supposed to be involved in 'pure', not applied, research. However, in the last five years, with the rise of conservation biology as a legitimate discipline, Archie's dedication has been vindicated. He was not out of step. He was a pioneer. It just took that long for the rest to catch up.

Archie will not again lead quiet discussions on a Costa Rican mountain top or visit remote crocodile farms in Papua New Guinea, but through his writings he will continue to convert people to the cause of conservation, and the ongoing programs he established will continue to save sea turtles.

F. WAYNE KING

Richard Fitter writes: 'Master Turtler' was the title given to Archie Carr by another master turtler, the late Tom Harrison, and Archie was indeed the man everyone thought of as soon as sea turtles were mentioned anywhere in the world. We in the SSC were fortunate that at the Lucerne General Assembly of IUCN in 1966 our then chairman, Sir Peter Scott, was able to persuade him to chair our new Marine Turtle Specialist Group. Later, Archie was helped in his task by Tom Harrison as co-chairman (one of the few really successful co-chairmanships in our history) and outlived Tom to remain chairman until 1985. At all times he has been the inspiration of all marine turtle workers, both within and outside the SSC.

His outstanding contribution to turtle research and conservation was to found the Caribbean Conservation Corporation in 1959 and direct its Green Turtle Research Station at Tortuguero on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. Only quite recently was he able to solve one of the great mysteries of turtle biology: where do hatchling turtles spend their first three or four years. In *BioScience* in 1986, he demonstrated that they swim straight out to sea to spend these years in 'downwellings', areas where several currents converge and in which they circle the Atlantic in the Gulf Stream and its eddies. His superb book *So Excellent a Fish* (1967) ranks as one of the half-dozen outstanding natural history books of the century.

DR SALIM ALI 1896 - 1987

Dr Salim Ali, the doyen of India's ornithologists and conservationists, who died in June, will be chiefly remembered for his predominant part in the ten-volume *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan*, which he produced with the assistance of Dr Dillon Ripley between 1968 and 1974. At the time of his death, he was still working on volume 6 of a revised edition.

Born in Bombay in 1896, he worked for virtually the whole of his adult life as an ornithologist, making numerous expeditions to all parts of the subcontinent. This extensive field work was the basis of his many books, not only on the birds of regions such as Kerala and Sikkim, but also of his pioneer field guide, *A Book of Indian Birds* (1941), supplemented by *Indian Hill Birds* (1949). He was for many years a pillar of the Bombay Natural History Society, and finally its President. Among many other achievements, he played a key part in saving the world-famous Bharatpur Sanctuary in Rajasthan.

He was much honoured in his own country, notably by being made Padma Bhushan for distinguished service to Indian ornithology, and later a member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper legislative chamber. His many international honours and awards included IUCN's John C. Phillips Medal in 1969, the Insignia of Officer in the Netherlands Order of the Golden Ark in 1973 and the J. Paul Getty International Prize for Wildlife Conservation in 1976. He was particularly proud of being the first non-British recipient of the Union Medal of the British Ornithologists' Union in 1967. Indeed, in his very readable autobiography, *The Fall of a Sparrow* (1985), he was able to list 18 awards, 'to prove to Doubting Thomases like some of my late lamented elders that even such a seemingly futile occupation as birdwatching is not entirely barren of rewards if pursued with persistence and dedication' — a remark that was typical of his wryly humorous approach to life.

RICHARD FITTER

Zafar Futehally, who spent many hours with Salim Ali in the field, writes: Salim Ali's capacity to spot birds always amazed people. Once we came across a few yellow-wattled lapwings *Vanellus malabaricus* in a fallow field. Salim stood a while scanning the ground and then said 'Aha, there is a nest', and advanced 150 yards until he