IN MEMORIAM

C. Stuart Houston, 1927–2021

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Published September 19, 2022

C. Stuart Houston, a physician who also made major contributions in two other disciplines, ornithology and Canadian history, died July 22, 2021 in Saskatchewan, Canada, at the age of 94. He joined the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU) in 1943 and was an Elective Member (1959), Fellow (1989), and Life Member of the society. He also served for over 20 years as the In Memoriam Editor of The Auk. He received the Marion Jenkinson Service Award from the AOU in 2004.

C. Stuart (Stu) Houston was born in Williston, North Dakota on September 26, 1927 to Clarence Joseph and Sigridur Christianson Houston, both of whom were physicians. In 1928, the family moved to Yorkton, Saskatchewan, where his parents established a medical practice. Stu grew up in Yorkton and graduated from Yorkton Collegiate Institute. At the age of 12, he was given a copy of Tavernier’s Birds of Canada, which he thought was an extravagance at $3.50! Shortly thereafter, he became acquainted with a local botanist, Isabel Priestly, who introduced him to the local birds on weekly bird walks. When he was 15, the newly organized Ducks Unlimited paid him a dime for each duck he banded. Although he was underage for a permit, this was during WWII and trained biologists were unavailable. By the time he was 18, he had banded 4,500 birds. These experiences set his course in ornithology.

Following graduation from the Yorkton Collegiate Institute, Stu enrolled at the University of Manitoba where he earned BA and MD (1951) degrees. He married Mary Isabel Belcher in December 1951 and began the practice of general medicine in Yorkton. After 8 years, he moved the family to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, to begin a residency in radiology at the Saskatoon Royal University Hospital. He then spent a year at Harvard’s Children’s Hospital in Boston specializing in pediatric radiology. Following completion of that program, he accepted a faculty appointment in the Department of Diagnostic Radiology at the University of Saskatchewan in 1964. He attained the rank of Professor in 1969, served as Head of the Department from 1982 to 1987, and retired as Emeritus Professor in 1996.

By 2014, Stu, with the frequent assistance of Mary, had banded 150,283 birds belonging to 211 species, with 3,945 individuals of 84 species being recovered. He cultivated a small army of individuals, mostly farmers, to notify him when they located an owl nest on their property, and an equally large number of people who volunteered to climb to owl or hawk nests. He authored (or co-authored) four books on Saskatchewan birds, and published over 300 articles in ornithological and natural history journals. The culmination of his ornithological work was the publication of Birds of Saskatchewan (Nature Saskatchewan, 2019), which he co-edited with Frank Roy and Alan Smith, and for which Stu wrote several species accounts.

He also wrote copiously on the history of western Canada, including 13 other books he authored or...
co-authored. Four of these were on the history of natural history study in western Canada, including books on the naturalists who accompanied Sir John Franklin on his 1819 and 1825 expeditions. Several other books dealt with the history of early medicine in Saskatchewan.

Stu received numerous honors for his many achievements in addition to those mentioned above. He served as President of the Saskatoon Natural History Society. He was awarded the Saskatchewan Order of Merit (1992) became an Officer of the Order of Canada (1993), and was presented the Roland Michener Conservation Award from the Canadian Wildlife Federation. Stu was the fourth recipient of the Gold Medal from the Canadian Association of Radiologists (1997).

Mary predeceased her husband in 2019. Their four children Stanley (b. 1952), Margaret (b. 1953), David (b. 1957), and Donald (b. 1959) survive.