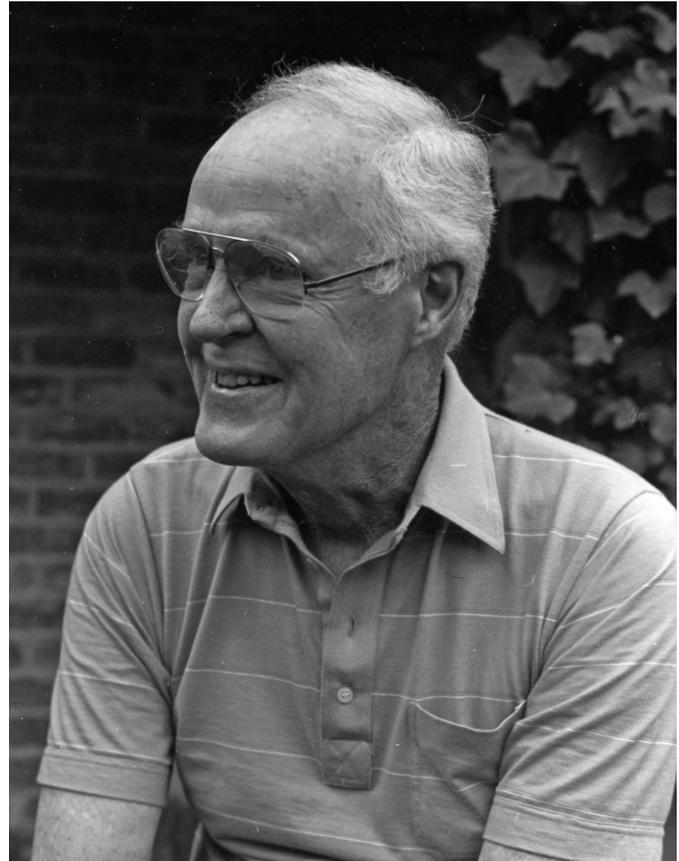


OBITUARY

OLIVER PAYNE PEARSON: 1915–2003

Oliver Payne Pearson, mammalogist, scholar, educator, and gentleman, died at the age of 87 on 4 March 2003, only a few days after he and his wife Anita had labored to fell and dismember a giant oak tree near their home. He was affectionately known by the nickname “Paynie.” A monumental festschrift in his honor (Kelt et al. 2007a) memorializes him as “the quintessential naturalist,” and a series of 8 reminiscences were published by colleagues working in South America (SAREM 2003). His death is a major loss for the American Society of Mammalogists, the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (University of California, Berkeley), a host of professional colleagues, and the science of vertebrate biology in general.

Paynie Pearson was born on 21 October 1915 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the 3rd son of Olive Payne Coming and Forrest Garfield Pearson. He attended Swarthmore College (B.A. 1937), where he came under the influence of Robert K. Enders. From 1937 to 1938, he was a Research Assistant at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, where he was mentored by Francis Harper. Entering the graduate program at Harvard University, he obtained an M.A. in 1939 and a Ph.D. in 1947. His thesis advisor was the reproductive physiologist Frederick L. Hisaw. His graduate studies were interrupted by World War II. When the war started, he filed for conscientious objector status and in the spring of 1941 was assigned to work in “timber cruising” in upstate New York. Soon thereafter he discovered that his mentor Robert Enders had a federal grant to study “fur resources,” and had requested that Pearson be transferred to this project. So it was that he returned to work in Ender’s lab at Swarthmore. Here he met an undergraduate, Anita Kelley, who he married in 1944. Anita subsequently supported and complemented all of his professional endeavors. When the war ended in 1945, Pearson returned to Harvard (spring 1946) to complete his doctoral studies. In 1947 the couple moved to the University of California, Berkeley, where Paynie began a 56-year association with this institution. He was 1st appointed Instructor in Zoology and 1 year later he also became Assistant Curator of Mammals in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. He was promoted to Assistant Professor in 1949, and by 1955 had achieved a tenure promotion to Associate Professor and Associate Curator of Mammals. Then in 1957 he decided to “retire” so as to spend more of his time on research, which was increasingly taking him to South America for long field seasons. He was given the title of Lecturer in Zoology and Research Associate in the Museum. In 1964, he was elected a Fellow of the California Academy of Sciences. With the unanticipated



O. P. Pearson: about 1990.

early death of the Museum’s Director, Alden H. Miller, in October of 1965, Pearson was recalled to full-time duty. He was appointed Acting Director of the Museum and Professor of Zoology in December 1966. Just 3 and a half months later, he was made the Museum’s 3rd Director, a position he held until 1 July 1971 when he retired a 2nd time. Then, as Professor and Director Emeritus he actively continued his research program and maintained his involvement with the Zoology Department and the Museum until his death. In addition, Paynie served the Department as Vice-Chairman in 1953–1954 and as Acting Chairman in 1968. Although he was not particularly fond of his administrative duties, he generously and competently responded to important needs.

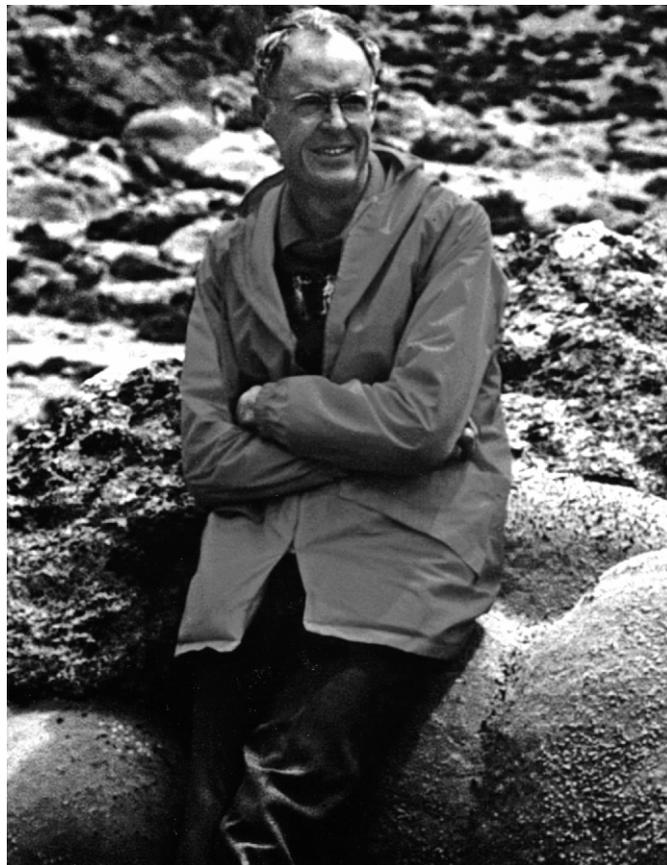
Pearson’s research publications spanned 66 years and featured a steady stream of papers for a total of 101 with quite a few being extensively cited (Kelt et al. 2007b). His research



O. P. Pearson in 1947 when he applied for a position at the University of California, Berkeley.

was remarkable for its breadth, with publications in mammalian ecology, natural history, reproductive anatomy and physiology, taxonomy, comparative physiology, and population dynamics. He also investigated avian natural history and physiology, reptile and amphibian physiology and natural history, biogeography, and at least 1 paper on bamboo and 1 on the banana slug (*Ariolimax columbianus*). Much of his work was centered on the Andean region of South America, especially in Peru and Argentina, with his 1st field trip to this region lasting from November 1939 to June 1940. Between his numerous migrations south, he also made significant contributions with his research in his home base of central California.

Paynie began his science career early, setting traps for small mammals at the age of 8 to 10. In 1939, he published his first 2 papers (and another in 1940), which were based on the results of 2 field trips to Panama with his undergraduate advisor, R. K. Enders. After that, his research focused on shrew biology and reproduction in carnivores. His 4th paper (1942) on the toxic nature of the bite of the short-tailed shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*) brought him early recognition as an up-and-coming young mammalogist. He then turned his attention to a long series of projects on metabolism in small mammals and hummingbirds, the published results of which began with a paper in *Science* in 1946. By 1947 he was already writing review papers on metabolic physiology, 1 of which appeared in *Science* in 1948,



O. P. Pearson in 1971 in the field in Peru (13 km NE Tarata, Tacna, 4,500 m) sitting on a yareta (*Azorella compacta*).

and he wrote 3 semipopular papers for *Scientific American* and *Scientific Monthly*, including 1 on shrews. Soon the results of his investigations in South America started to appear, and these were very diverse, reflecting Paynie's broad interests and skills as a naturalist. His work on small mammals and hummingbirds in California got off to a good start with an important, and still classic, paper (1952) on Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*; in the paper he used the name *C. rafinesquei* [sic]), and then with a report (1958) in *Science* on vole (*Microtus*) runways. Always the innovator of new tools for his research, he devised a system of camera plus clock and triggering device that allowed him to automatically monitor traffic in vole runways. With this apparatus he obtained much unique data, and many insights into life in the grasslands, not to mention a number of classic papers. A series of contributions on population dynamics encompassed his work in both North and South America. These included remarkable reports on carnivore-rodent relations that he was able to quantify in pioneering ways. He was also intrigued by the nonperiodic irruptions of rodents that he observed on both continents. And, one pervasive theme of his research in Argentina was to unravel the timing and impacts of the rare mass flowering of bamboo on mammalian populations as well as other community components. The ensuing outbreaks of rodents (ratadas) following these episodes of bamboo flowering are of special significance in southern South America, and also occur in Asia.

His last publications on this topic were in 2002 and 2007 (Sage et al. 2007). For a complete listing of Pearson's bibliography, see Kelt et al. (2007b).

In addition to his service to the Museum and the Department of Zoology, Paynie was active in several professional organizations, most especially the American Society of Mammalogists. In 1979 he was awarded the Society's highest honor by his election as Honorary Member. His long-term, dedicated, and effective contributions to the Society were recognized by his receipt of the H. H. T. Jackson Award in 1984 for extraordinary service. Especially noteworthy was his service as a Trustee, mostly as Chair, from 1969 to 1984; in this position, he effectively guided the development and enhancement of the Society's financial foundations. He was Vice President from 1969 to 1972 and an elected Director for more than 17 years during the period 1952–1990. On 1 or more occasions he declined a nomination to run for President. He also served on a number of the Society's committees, especially the Committee on International Relations. During his chairmanship of this committee, he was pivotal in initiating the International Theriological Congresses, the 1st of which was held in Moscow in 1974. These successful congresses continue to be held every 4 years, and are now called International Mammalogical Congresses. A lasting honor by the Society was the establishment in 2003 of the Oliver P. Pearson Award, which recognizes his continual and steadfast support for Latin American mammalogists. The \$5,000 award is given annually to a young professional mammalogist who holds an academic position in Latin America, and who is within 5 years of receiving the Ph.D. degree.

Other professional societies that benefited from Paynie's talents include the Cooper Ornithological Society. He served on their Investment Committee from 1972 to 1987, was an elected Director from 1969 to 1971, and was awarded Honorary Membership in 1979. He was also elected Director of the San Francisco Zoological Society for 1959–1960, and served as a Councilor for the Save the Redwoods League.

Throughout his career at the University of California, Pearson was an effective, innovative, and much-appreciated teacher. Two of his courses were unique inventions. One was his signature course early in his career on the reproductive biology of vertebrates (1949–1956). The other combined field trips with the then new techniques of karyotyping (1968–1970). Beyond that, he contributed to our well-known course in Vertebrate Natural History, taught the nonmajor introductory zoology course, and participated in a variety of graduate and undergraduate seminars (see also Lidicker and Patton 2007). Arguably, his single most-influential teaching assignment was in 1964–1965 when he was invited to spend a year at the Universidad de Buenos Aires as a visiting Professor of Ecology. There he taught a course in ecology attended by a large group of students who went on to become leaders in this field. Until this singular event, ecology as an academic discipline was essentially nonexistent in this region. In short, he effectively launched the field of modern ecology in southern South America. Its blossoming today is a tribute to this pioneering effort. From that time forward, Paynie was honored

as the “father” of ecology in this part of the world. In recognition of this and his many other contributions to South American ecology and mammalogy, he was awarded an honorary doctoral degree from the Universidad de La Plata in 2000. The following year he was honored at the 1st biennial conference of the ecological societies of Argentina and Chile (Bariloche 2001). Other related honors included honorary membership in both the Comité Argentino de Conservación de la Naturaleza, and the Sociedad Argentina para el Estudio de los Mamíferos.

Paynie will be remembered as a particularly kind and generous person who gave unselfishly of his time and expertise. He liked to refer to himself modestly as “un simple atrapador de ratones,” but the reality was quite different. He was passionate about science, about understanding the natural world through the eyes of small mammals (mice and shrews mostly), and about encouraging researchers to explore the wonders of South America. He was an independent and critical thinker who liked innovation and loved to tackle difficult problems in physiology and ecology with homemade equipment for both laboratory and field (and even teaching) purposes. His love of gadgetry is consistent with his considerable artistic talents; he worked in wood carving and especially photography. For decades he was the unofficial photographer for the Department of Zoology, taking periodic group photos as well as numerous faculty portraits. His office was informal and typically cluttered, and he liked to use the floor for his out-basket. After returning from Argentina in November of 2000, Paynie suffered an embolism in his lower leg. A vein graft was not successful and he was given a choice of another grafting attempt or amputation. He chose the latter. Before his leg could properly heal and he could walk with a prosthesis, he learned that the long-awaited synchronous bamboo flowering was underway in Argentina. Not to be cheated out of finally experiencing this rare phenomenon that he had been anticipating for decades, he went back to Argentina with his wife and 1 daughter, and with the help of Richard Sage he was able to observe the outbreak of rodents that this flowering had triggered. This incident underscores his drive and dedication to learn from and understand our natural world.

Paynie was a relatively private person when it came to his personal life, but nevertheless maintained numerous close friendships. For us he was a special friend and colleague, and we treasure our memories of sharing much of our professional careers with him. For 1 of us (WZL), his early retirement in 1957 provided an opening for a coveted academic position. For the other (JLP), he was the one primarily responsible for recruiting him to Berkeley in 1969. Paynie is survived by his wife of 59 years, Anita, as well as 4 children (Peter K. Pearson, Carol A. Ralph, Sandia C. Ivey, and Alison P. Pearson), and 5 grandchildren.

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