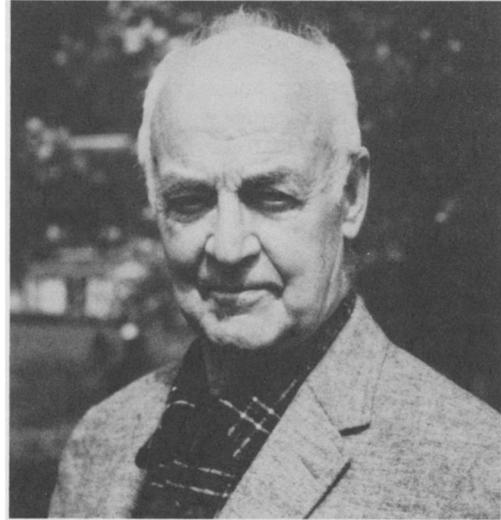


William J. Hamilton, Jr. died in Ithaca, New York on 27 July 1990. He was President of the Ecological Society of America in 1955-1956; he also served as the Society's Secretary (1939-1941) and as the Zoological Editor of *Ecological Monographs* (1951-1955). Bill's research focused on vertebrates, especially mammals, and as was true of many animal ecologists of his generation, he had a strong allegiance to organizations devoted to the study of particular animal taxa. He was President of the American Society of Mammalogists in 1951-1952.

Bill was born 11 December 1902 in the Borough of Queens, City of New York. Throughout his youth he honed his skills as a general naturalist by observing the biota that then thrived in the open landscape at the city's edge. He trapped muskrat, dug clams, collected snakes, gathered watercress, and studied nesting birds in areas that are now polluted and paved over. As with many naturalists of his era, scouting played an important formative role; he spent three summers working for Daniel Beard, the founder of the Boy Scouts of America, at a camp in Pennsylvania.

Bill entered Cornell University in 1922, where he remained for his entire college education and professional career. He received his B.S. in 1926, his M.S. (in entomology) in 1928, and his Ph.D. (in vertebrate zoology) in 1930. Bill's major professor was the herpetologist Albert Hazen Wright; Francis Harper, who was then a young instructor at Cornell, also had a strong influence. Following completion of his doctoral dissertation, on the biology of the star-nosed mole, Bill was appointed as an Instructor. He progressed steadily through the ranks at Cornell until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1963. Bill's only extended absence from Cornell was during his enlistment in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, where he was commis-



sioned a captain in 1942 with duties involving rodent and typhus control. He served a brief time as the military governor of Mannheim, Germany and returned to campus in 1945 with the rank of major. At Cornell, Bill was one of the major figures in a group of professors, including Arthur A. Allen in ornithology and Edward C. Raney in ichthyology, who developed a strong tradition in the study of vertebrate natural history and evolution. Several current leaders in animal ecology, behavior, and systematics can trace their roots back to Cornell in the 1940s and 1950s when this tradition, which placed great emphasis on extensive field studies of the local fauna, was in its heyday.

Most of Bill's publications were descriptive accounts, based on years of field observations and numerous dissections, of the food habits, life history, habitat modifications, abundance, and behavior of particular species. Today, when we

place great emphasis on experimentation and statistics, it would be easy to dismiss the ecological significance of such work. But more careful examination reveals that most of these papers go well beyond their descriptive titles to explore some larger issue in depth. For instance, a paper on the food habits of larval newts turns out to be an early study on the relationship between the abundance of prey in the environment and its occurrence in the predator's diet. The breadth of Bill's contributions to ecology is reflected in Allee, Emerson, Park, Park, and Schmidt (*Principles of Animal Ecology*, the standard reference on animal ecology during the 1950s) where ten of his natural history papers are cited to support various generalizations. Probably Bill's most widely cited ecological investigation was his work on the population dynamics of microtine rodents (published in the *Journal of Agricultural Research* in 1937). Charles Elton sought out Hamilton when he was writing his classic book, "Voles, Mice, and Lemmings: Problems in Population Dynamics," because he felt that Bill's investigations provided some of the most comprehensive data then available on what remains a central problem in animal population ecology. Bill's extensive knowledge of mammals was brought together in his own book, *The Mammals of Eastern United States*, first published in 1943, with a second edition in 1979; it is still widely consulted because the species accounts are so readable and informative.

Bill felt strongly that the results of research should be accessible to a broad audience. He wrote in a bold, concise style; his papers were never laden with gratuitous references or distracting details; and he often engaged the reader or listener with his famous sense of humor. Reading Hamilton reminds one of an era when ecologists spent more time in the field—exploring, observing, describing, reflecting—in short, getting to know and understand particular species and communities in great detail, and having fun in the process. A deep concern with practical problems is obvious throughout Bill's work. Many of his major investigations focused on species that were economically important pests and game animals. He was a co-author of *Conservation in America* (first edition 1939; second edition 1949), one of the most successful early textbooks on conservation, and in 1948 he was a founding member of the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell. He played a major role in the establishment of the E.N. Huyck Reserve at Rensselaerville, New York

where Charles Kendeigh and Eugene Odum carried out their early work. Bill served as Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board at the Huyck Reserve from 1938-1955.

Throughout central New York Bill's garden was renowned for its great variety of interesting plants. He was an authority on several groups of cultivated plants and he received the LePiniec Award of the American Rock Garden Society for his work in introducing new horticultural species to North America and for his demonstration that many bulbs could be grown beyond their suspected hardiness zone. Cornell has honored Bill by establishing an endowed lecture series on horticulture in his name.

In 1928 Bill married Nellie Rightmyer, a malacologist who established Cornell's shell collection, and they had three children. June C. Hamilton has continued her father's horticultural interests; she is an herbalist and the proprietress of Hamilton's Antiques and Perennials in Wolcott, New York. Ruth Hamilton Fisher, of South Dennis, New Jersey, is a well-known environmental activist. William J. Hamilton III, Professor of Environmental Science at the University of California, Davis, is noted for his work on bird navigation, animal coloration, primate behavior, and the ecology of the Namib Desert.

Bill was a legendary and complex character. His name comes up often in conversations because people enjoy recounting his many pranks and tall tales. He had a vigorous and commanding presence; one quickly sensed that he expected people to think clearly and arrive at their own conclusions, and that he disdained pretentiousness. He was generous and thoughtful, and he had a deep commitment to the study of nature. In his last lecture to the Section of Ecology and Systematics, as well as in his last publication, he urged people to keep a journal in which they recorded each day some original observation of nature. Bill kept such a journal all his adult life. Ecology would probably profit if more of us followed his example.

A more complete account of Bill's life, including his entire bibliography, will be published in the *Journal of Mammalogy* (James N. Layne and John O. Whitaker, Jr., in press).

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