



Harry Schelwald Swarth (1878 -1935)

Biographical Sketch by Hany Abdoun, Archives Intern

Harry Schelwald Swarth was born in Chicago, Illinois on January 26, 1878. During his childhood, Swarth showed great interest in birds and natural history. After grammar school, he attended the Baptist College in Los Angeles and began collecting birds in 1894. In February 1896, while only eighteen years of age, Swarth along with companions made a trip to the Huachuca Mountains, Arizona. While in Arizona, Swarth developed such an interest in that region that it led to five more trips to different regions of the state and his emergence as a leading authority on Arizona Ornithology.

In 1904, Swarth was appointed Assistant in the Department of Zoology at the Field Columbian Museum in Chicago, Illinois. In 1908, he returned to the West Coast to become Assistant in Ornithology at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at U.C. Berkeley. In 1910, he was appointed the Curator of Birds at that institution. In 1913, he became Assistant Director of the Museum of History, Science and Art, Los Angeles. After three years, however, he returned to his former position as Curator of Birds in Berkeley. In 1912, Swarth became a member of the California Academy of Sciences.

In 1927, Swarth was appointed Curator of the Department of Ornithology and Mammalogy at the California Academy of Sciences. In June 1930, he was elected to attend the 7th annual International Ornithological Congress, held in Amsterdam, Holland. This gave him the opportunity to visit England, where he was received at the British and Rothschild Museums and conducted research that enabled him to complete the Avifauna of the Galapagos Islands, published in 1931.

In 1932, Swarth led the scientific staff of the Templeton Crocker Expedition of the California Academy of Sciences to the Galapagos Islands. Many new species were recorded on this trip and Swarth realized the plants and animals needed more protection. He got in touch with the Ecuadorian government and the matter was discussed; however, little action was taken.

In 1934, Swarth was considered for the position of Director of the California Academy of Sciences, but his failing health caused him to withdraw. On the morning of October 22, 1935, Harry Schelwald Swarth died of a heart ailment.

Sources Consulted:

The Auk, vol. 54, April 1937.

The Condor, vol. 38, August 1936.