

Ornithologist honored with Rowan Memorial Library

The department of zoology plans to commemorate its first chairman, Dr. William Rowan.

Room CW 306 of the Biological Sciences Centre on campus will be named the Rowan Memorial Laboratory in

honor of the man who served as chairman of the department from 1921 to 1956.

Dr. Rowan, who died in 1957, was also noted for his research work in the field of experimental ornithology.

Research in both ornithology and mammalogy will be carried out in the laboratory.

The dedication ceremony, with Dr. J.R. Nursall, current chairman of the department of zoology presiding, will take place Friday, November 21 at 5:15 p.m. Dr. Rowan's wife, Reta, and daughter, Mrs. Jo Harrold Blench, both of Edmonton, and other members of the family from out of town, will be the honored guests.

The ceremony, which is open to interested members of the public, will be followed by a banquet at the Inn on Whyte at 7:30 p.m. Robert Lister, who worked with Dr. Rowan on many experiments and who is a member of the Edmonton Bird Club, will be the keynote speaker.

Dr. Rowan was born in Basle, Switzerland, in 1891. He spent the majority of his early life in England and came to

Alberta in 1908. After working for a time as a cowboy, he returned to England to finish his formal education.

His skill in drawing was developed at the Slade School of Art. This talent was later used to produce sketches of birds and mammals which were notable for their flow of line. A drawing of whooping cranes was selected by the Canadian postal service for use in their wildlife series of postage stamps. Some of his sketches have been enlarged and will be permanently displayed in the Rowan Memorial Laboratory.

Dr. Rowan lectured in zoology for a year at the University of Manitoba prior to coming to the U of A in 1920. A year later, with the rank of associate professor, he founded the department of zoology.

His preference for ornithology led him to conduct experiments in his back yard and in his aviary in the North Saskatchewan River Valley, on the effects of light on bird migration. By subjecting Juncos (sparrows) to increasing or decreasing amounts of artificial light he determined that the cyclical development of their gonads - organs in which reproductive cells develop - is dependent upon seasonal fluctuations in day-length. In striving to discover the secret of migration, he reasoned that a gonadal hormone might be the trigger which sets off an inherent migratory impulse.

The results of his experiments were not conclusive owing, Dr. Rowan felt, to the small size of the birds. He decided to repeat the experiments using crows and the capture, treatment, release and recapture of these birds attracted widespread publicity and made Dr. Rowan possibly Canada's most famous ornithological figure.

Dr. Rowan was a Member of the British Ornithological Union, a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. In 1946 he was awarded the Flavelle Medal of the Royal Society of Canada in recognition of his investigations. The medal will be on display in the laboratory.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Dr. Rowan's first published article on the relation of light to bird migration and developmental changes.

As a result of his influence, zoologists at the U of A will be conducting further experimentation into the effects of light on animal life.

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