

## Witmer Stone

### *President*

Witmer Stone was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on 22 September 1866. His parents were Frederick D. Stone and Anne E. Witmer. He developed an interest in natural history at an early age and as a small boy was a regular visitor to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, where he was later to spend his entire career. While a student at the Germantown Academy in 1877, he and several schoolmates founded the Wilson Natural Science Association. Regular meetings were held at which formal papers were presented, and scientific collections were maintained. Included among the mammals were specimens he collected during summers spent at his uncle's home in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He was married to Lillie May Lafferty in 1904.

He received A.B. and A.M. degrees from the University of Pennsylvania in 1887 and 1891, respectively. His first position following graduation was that of assistant in the library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, where his father was librarian. In 1888, he became affiliated with the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia where he served in many capacities until his death on 23 May 1939. He was Conservator of the Ornithological Section (1891–1918); Assistant Curator (1893–1908) and Curator (1908–1918) of the Museum; Executive Curator (1918–1925); Director (1925–1929); Emeritus Director (1929–1939); Curator of Vertebrates (1918–1936); Honorary Curator of Birds (1938–1939); and Vice-president of the Academy (1927–1939).

Although Stone authored 19 publications on mammals, he was primarily an ornithologist. Reflecting his broad interest in natural history, he also conducted research on plants, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and land molluscs. He published two books on mammals: *American Animals* coauthored with W. E. Cram and *The mammals of New Jersey*. His other mammal publications included descriptions of several new taxa; reports on collections from Alaska, Sumatra, western United States, and Ecuador; and studies of the Hawaiian rat and pumas in western United States. One of his best known ornithological works is *Bird Studies of Old Cape May*, which earned him comparison with Thoreau and Burroughs as a writer. A major botanical contribution was *The Plants of Southern New Jersey with Especial Reference to the Flora of the Pine Barrens*.

One of his major accomplishments as curator of the bird and mammal collections at the Philadelphia Academy was rescuing many valuable historic specimens that had been exposed to moisture, mold, and insects and the dust and grime of the city while on exhibit. He also performed the monumental task of salvaging and rehabilitating E. D. Cope's large collection of reptiles, which came to the Academy after Cope's death. The state of preservation of many of the valuable specimens was questionable and the alcohol had to be poured off carefully before the condition of the specimens could be determined. J. A. Rhen, who assisted him in the task, wrote that "the tedium of this work was greatly enlivened by Stone's vivid classification and nomenclature of the various color shades and consistencies referred to as 'gorum,' 'gee,' and 'goo,' to be found in the five-gallon glass jars used to receive the discarded solution."

Witmer Stone was a Charter Member of the ASM. He was a member of the original Council and served as Vice-president prior to assuming the presidency. Two important standing committees established during his tenure as President were the Editorial and Membership committees. He also was an active member of the American Ornithologists' Union, serving as Editor of the *Auk* from 1912 to 1937. Among honors he received was an Honorary Sc.D. and the Alumni Award of Merit from the University of Pennsylvania.

#### Obituary

Huber, W. 1940. Witmer Stone (1866-1939). *Journal of Mammalogy*, 21:1-4.