



---

## **In Memoriam: Derek Goodwin, 1920–2008**

Author: Jackson, Jerome A.

Source: *The Auk*, 127(4) : 955

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2010.127.4.955>

*The Auk* 127(4):955, 2010  
 © The American Ornithologists' Union, 2010.  
 Printed in USA.

## IN MEMORIAM: DEREK GOODWIN, 1920–2008

JEROME A. JACKSON

*Florida Gulf Coast University, 10501 FGCU Boulevard South, Ft. Myers, Florida 33965, USA*

At his birth on 26 February 1920 in Woking, Surrey, England, Derek Goodwin was named Richard Patrick Goodwin; he never knew why his parents called him Derek, but that is how he was known for his entire life. He developed a love of birds at an early age and was successful not only in turning an avocation into a career as a research ornithologist, but in guiding ornithological science at one of the world's greatest museums and in popularizing ornithology through careful observations, strong links to aviculture, and prolific writing. Derek died on 14 May 2008.

From at least the age of 13, Derek kept doves and a diversity of other birds in an aviary at his home. He became an astute observer of bird behavior, and one of his early articles was based on observations made as a teenager. His first employment was working for his father, a tailor, and in a mail-order business. On his 21st birthday, Derek was called for military duty in World War II, and he served in the Middle East, where his avicultural background was put to use in the British Middle East Pigeon Corps.

On a brief return to England in 1945, Derek purchased a copy of *Avicultural Magazine*, and when his military service ended in 1946, he followed the advice of a friend to seek its publisher in offices associated with the British Museum. He was immediately hired as “temporary attendant” in the Bird Room, a position that became permanent and from which he rose through the ranks to become principal scientific officer for birds at the Museum—never having had academic training in ornithology. Derek retired from the British Museum in February 1982.

By 1946, Derek had published in *Avicultural Magazine* and *British Birds*; a steady stream of publications in *Ibis*, *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, *Behaviour*, *Journal für Ornithologie*, *The Auk*, *The Condor*, *Emu*, and other journals followed. His last journal publications were in *Avicultural Magazine* (2003) and *Feathered World* (2008). Derek is best known for three books, *Pigeons and Doves of the World* (1967), *Estrildid Finches of the World* (1982), and *Crows of the World* (1976), each of which was published in multiple editions by the British Museum and by Cornell University Press.

Throughout his career, Derek excelled in three fields: aviculture, behavior, and systematics. He was a bird ringer (bander). He developed a strong relationship with the London Zoo and studied behavior of birds there as well as in his own aviary and in the field. In addition to his behavioral studies, he focused much attention on systematics and, though not especially quantitative, his insight has often been proved correct by recent molecular techniques. Derek's writings reached audiences ranging from middle school to professional ornithology. His own favorite book, *Birds of Man's World* (1978), focused on the birds that are closest to humans—pet birds and those wild birds that live in close association with us.

His behavioral studies of birds led to publication of *Instructions to Young Ornithologists II: Bird Behaviour* (1961), which is still an excellent high school- to college-level introduction to the scope and interpretation of bird behavior. He also collaborated with others on a clear and thorough book for middle school children: *Curiosities of Bird Life* (1962), which was later published under the title *Bird Life for Young People* (1969) with the same authors in a different order. Derek was a mentor to noted British scientists Rob Hume, Aubrey Manning, and Desmond Morris. Several North American ornithologists, including Richard F. Johnston and Luis Baptista, acknowledged the significance of his influence.

Derek was not only incredibly curious, but a bit eccentric. He once sliced his finger with a razorblade and offered his bleeding finger to a Red-billed Oxpecker (*Buphagus erythrorhynchus*) in the London Zoo to see how it would respond (very excitedly and quick to come to the blood). He also had a unique sense of humor. When a particularly aloof visiting ornithologist stayed at his home overnight, Derek asked him what he would like for breakfast. “A small poached egg,” the visitor replied. When the visitor sat down for breakfast, Derek served him a poached waxbill egg on a postage-stamp-sized piece of toast.

When it came to the birds he loved, Derek was strongly opinionated. He often championed introduced exotic species and “took up the cudgels” against efforts to eradicate them. He also expressed fears that programs to reintroduce such predators as the White-tailed Sea Eagle, Red Kite, and Northern Goshawk might spell doom for introduced populations of such species as the Golden and Lady Amherst pheasants and the Mandarin Duck.

Derek was elected a Corresponding Fellow of the AOU in 1960. In 1977 he became a corresponding member of the Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft (German Ornithological Society). He was awarded the British Ornithologists' Union's Union Medal (1972) and the Willard F. Hollander Merit Award medal (1976) for his contributions to pigeon genetics. (The latter award was established by Carl Graefe, an American surgeon who was an active contributor to the *Pigeon Genetics News Letter*.) A unique population of Cook Islands Fruit-Doves from Atuii Island was described as a new subspecies and named in honor of Derek (*Ptilinopsis rarotongensis goodwinii*; Holyoak 1974). Birds were the clear focus of Derek Goodwin's life: he readily shared his passion and knowledge with all, recognizing changes in the world and changes in bird populations and diversity, and he was always an ambassador for the future of birds.

I thank David Conlin, Paul Boulden, Janet Hinshaw, Jeff Downing, Wilmer J. Miller, and Dave Rinehart for help with references and details used in preparing this memorial.