

Florence Merriam Bailey (1863-1948)

By Alan Contreras

Florence Augusta Merriam Bailey was an ornithologist and nature writer whose fieldwork contributed significantly to the knowledge of the birds of Oregon. Best known for *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States* and *Birds of New Mexico*, she was called the First Lady of American ornithology. She was the first woman elected as a fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union (1929); and in 1931, she won that society's highest award, the William Brewster Memorial Award.

Born in Locust Grove, New York, in 1863, Florence Merriam attended Smith College. Her brother, zoologist C. Hart Merriam, worked for and eventually was director of the U.S. Biological Survey. Florence Merriam met and married one of the survey's field workers, mammalogist Vernon Bailey, and they spent decades as the only well-known husband-and-wife wildlife collection and survey team in the country.

Bailey did her fieldwork in Oregon in 1898 on Mount Hood, and more extensively at Garibaldi on the Oregon Coast and on the McKenzie River, both in the summer of 1914. She documented the habitat and behavior of many Oregon birds, including the Western Screech Owl, the Dipper, the Brown Creeper, and the Common Nighthawk. She also gathered data in the state for her *Handbook*—first published in 1902, revised four times, and printed eleven times (the latest in 1935). In addition, a portion of a chapter in her biography is devoted to her time in Oregon. Florence and Vernon Bailey's work in Oregon was commemorated by the naming of Mount Bailey in the southern Oregon Cascades, a name assigned in 1992 by the Oregon Geographic Names Board.

Bailey's observations were included in the first well-researched publication on the birds of western Oregon, Alfred C. Shelton's *Distributional List of the Birds of West Central Oregon* (1917). She received five citations in Gabrielson and Jewett's *Birds of Oregon* (Oregon State College, 1940) and nine in George Jobanek's *Annotated Bibliography of Oregon Bird Literature* (1997). Her books include *A-Birding on a Bronco* (the first book to feature art by Louis Agassiz Fuertes), *Birds through an Opera Glass*, *Birds of Village and Field*, *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States*, *Birds of New Mexico*, *Wild Animals of Glacier National Park* (with Vernon Bailey), and *Birds of the Grand Canyon Country*.

Florence Augusta Merriam Bailey died on September 22, 1948.

Sources

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