

OBITUARY

LUCIEN HARRIS, JR. (1899-1983), A Tribute

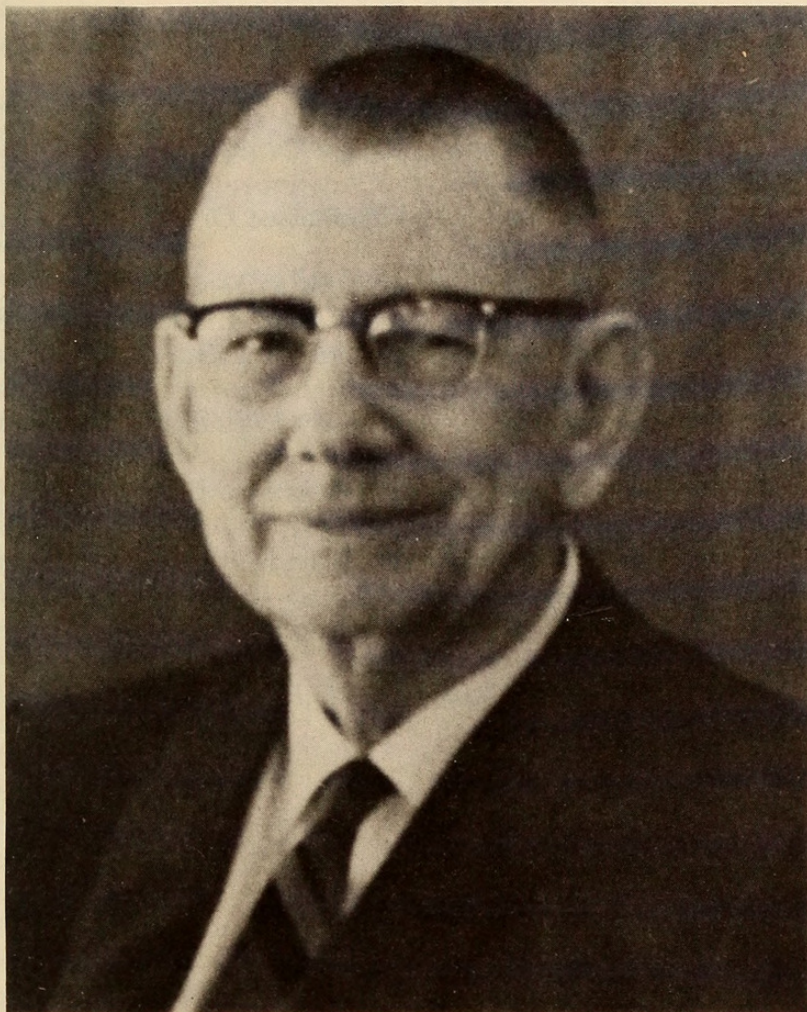
One of the country's most dedicated naturalists in recent times, Lucien Harris, Jr., spent a lifetime in the study and conservation of the natural history of his native state, Georgia, and the Southeastern region, and inspired all who knew him by his wealth of knowledge and experiences, and his quiet manner coupled with a unique intensity of spirit that radiated from the man.

Lucien Harris, Jr. was born on 9 September 1899 in Atlanta, Georgia to a long line of Georgians, his grandfather, Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908), the southern folklore writer and author of the endearing Uncle Remus stories, being the most famous. Lucien grew up in Atlanta, graduated from Boys' High School and subsequently attended the University of Georgia, in Athens. After brief military service during World War I, he married Louise Nichols in 1919 and settled permanently in Atlanta. Over the next three decades the Harrises traveled extensively throughout the United States. Although an outdoors person by nature, Lucien established his career in the publishing field and served as the Southeastern Manager for Macmillan Publishers for many years. In that capacity he was directly involved with the logistics of the publication of *Gone With the Wind* and became a lifelong friend of its author, Margaret Mitchell. However, throughout his adult life, very often accompanied by Louise and their two sons, Lucien Harris III and James Robin Harris, Lucien spent virtually every moment he could find on field trips, to collect and study the butterflies and moths of the state and region.

Lucien's fascination with nature and wildlife no doubt was sparked by the picturesque stories of the animal characters in his grandfather's books, with which he was familiar from his early childhood. However, in his childhood and adolescence he became keenly interested in the observation of birds. During his teens, Lucien regularly went on bird walks with a family friend and a source of great inspiration, Wallace Rogers, who was a Methodist minister and also a nature photographer of considerable talent, with whom Lucien would later collaborate in co-authoring (along with Woolford B. Baker) a series of three volumes, *Southern Nature Stories*, directed at introducing children in the primary grades to the world of nature.

While observing the birds during those forays, Lucien also became interested in butterflies, which were abundant throughout Georgia in those years when most of the state was still undeveloped. Before he was out of his teens he found himself building a serious collection and dedicating increasing amounts of his time to collecting specimens over a continuously widening area of the state. In his twenties he established friendships with lepidopterists and other naturalists in the state and in the region, notably Dr. P. William Fattig, an entomologist, and Woolford B. Baker, a botanist, both at Emory University, Dr. F. Strohecker, an entomologist at the University of Miami, and Fred Naumann of Forsyth, Georgia, an enthusiastic lepidopterist. In 1929 Lucien called an informal meeting at Emory University of his friends in various branches of science who shared an interest in natural history and conservation and founded what came to be the Georgia Society of Naturalists, and he served as its president for a number of years. The group met regularly, published bulletins and organized field trips to explore diverse areas of Georgia, the largest state east of the Mississippi. One of those areas was the Okefenokee Swamp, and it was through the untiring efforts of Lucien and the Georgia Society of Naturalists that the swamp was designated a National Wildlife Refuge. It was also through the efforts and negotiations of the Society and of Herbert Lee Stoddard, Sr., one of its members, that the Tall Timbers Research Station, near Tallahassee, Florida, was founded. Today, its main building houses the Herbert Lee Stoddard, Sr. bird collection, and the Lucien Harris, Jr. butterfly and moth collections, containing virtually all the specimens he collected between 1930 and 1970.

As Lucien's interest in Lepidoptera grew to a full-time preoccupation in his teens and twenties, he became keenly aware of the dearth of publications on the butterflies and moths of the region. Indeed, there had been only one major book on Georgia's butterflies, the two volume study, *The Rarer Lepidopterous Insects of Georgia*, published in London



LUCIEN HARRIS, JR., 1899–1983

in 1797 by Dr. James Edward Smith, and illustrated by Georgia's pioneer naturalist, John Abbot (1751–1840). In a real sense Abbot, who collected and reared many of the butterfly species of Georgia and depicted them in their natural size and colors, with their caterpillars, chrysalids and foodplants, became Lucien's mentor, and for years his goal was to collect and document all the Georgia species painted by Abbot, even into the 1950's and 1960's, when collecting with fellow lepidopterists John C. Symmes, Stanley S. Nicolay and Fred Naumann. In the process, as many new records were added to those of Abbot, and new information was amassed on life histories, foodplants, distribution, etc., Lucien undertook to update Abbot's publication. In 1931, *A List of the Butterflies of Georgia* was published, being essentially an annotated checklist of the species taken in the state up to that time. A revised edition, edited by Austin H. Clark, was published in 1950 as *The Butterflies of Georgia, Revised*, containing substantial new material and a comprehensive bibliography prepared by Mr. Clark. These two publications, along with extensive new records by Lucien and many other collectors in the 1950's and 1960's, laid the groundwork for his culminating work, *The Butterflies of Georgia*, published in 1972 by University of Oklahoma Press. This volume, in the format of a field guide, covers and illustrates every species of butterfly known to occur in Georgia (NOTE: Four new species, *Erora laeta*, *Mitoura hesseli*, *Euphyes dukesi* and *Urbanus dorantes*, have been added to the state's fauna since the book's publication.). As many collectors have long since realized, however, the book has validity for virtually the entire Southeastern region, and it includes information on distribution, life history, foodplants, habitats and capture records for each species listed.

In *The Butterflies of Georgia* is a detailed account of the discovery by Lucien, Lucien

III and J. P. Knudsen of what turned out to be a new species of giant skipper (*Megathymidae*), which was described and named *Megathymus harrisi* by H. A. Freeman in 1955, in recognition of Lucien's achievement.

In addition to these accomplishments, Lucien was a charter member of the Lepidopterists' Society, a founding member of the Georgia Ornithological Society, an associate member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, as well as a member of the Florida Audubon Society, the Tennessee Ornithological Society and the Georgia Academy of Science.

Lucien Harris, Jr. died on February 22, 1983, in a Decatur, Georgia nursing home after a long illness. He is survived by his wife, Louise, his sons Lucien III and James Robin, and their respective children. In addition to the greater part of his collection of butterflies and moths contained in the Tall Timbers Research Station, his material collected up to 1930 is housed at the Emory University Museum, Atlanta and the balance at the Fernbank Science Center, Decatur, Georgia.

It has been truly rewarding and inspiring to have known Lucien Harris, Jr. personally, to have experienced his contagious enthusiasm for the butterflies and other wildlife he knew so intimately, and to have received his friendship and comraderie. I am also deeply indebted to both Lucien Harris III and James Robin Harris for the information and photograph they provided me for the preparation of this tribute.

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