

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
OSMOND BRELAND**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Osmond Breland, professor emeritus, zoology, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

**IN MEMORIAM
OSMOND BRELAND**

Osmond Breland, professor emeritus of zoology, died on December 17, 1984. He was 74.

Professor Breland was born on September 17, 1910, in Decatur, Mississippi. He earned a bachelor's degree from Mississippi State University in 1931 and a PhD from Indiana University in 1936.

Thousands of school children have sharpened their reading skills on magazine articles written by Oz Breland. Breland was a stickler for facts about animals, and his clear, plain talk was just the stuff for beginning readers, new graduate students, or dull faculty meetings. Breland always told his graduate students that "[w]riting with simple declarative sentences is far better than having dangling participles like...well, you understand." Clarity in writing was a big deal to him.

To entertain a general audience with animal facts, Oz collected and dispelled myths. Perhaps more than most scientific men, Oz Breland realized that the majority of people are more interested in nonsense than in sense about the natural world. In his own folksy way he stopped more nonsense than 20 scientists who stick to professional journals. His articles often appeared in popular publications such as *Audubon Magazine*, *Natural History*, and sportsman magazines. His book *Animal Facts and Fallacies* was published in 1948, *Animal Friends and Foes* in 1957, and *Animal Life and Lore* in 1963. He was working on another volume when he retired.

Breland's scientific contributions are all entomological but diverse. He and his graduate students studied the life histories of numerous Texas insects, describing new species, new behaviors, new structures. Breland was always interested in parasites, especially insects like gall wasps and mosquitoes. As a graduate student at Indiana University in the 1930s, he worked on gall wasps with Kinsey before the latter turned to human sex research. Breland and others at Indiana collected gall wasps extensively in Mexico in the mid-1930s. He was a fellow of the Entomological Society of America, and a member of the Sigma Xi honorary organization and numerous scientific societies. He was listed in American Men of Science, Leaders in American Science, World Who's Who in Science, and other references.

Breland joined the UT Austin faculty in 1938 as an instructor, was promoted to assistant professor in 1942, to associate professor in 1946, and to professor in 1950. In the early 1940s, Breland was given the "opportunity" by Professor T. S. Painter to teach comparative vertebrate anatomy. He responded by writing a textbook best seller, *Manual of Comparative Anatomy* (McGraw Hill), and he taught an arduous course with his newly-acquired skills as a vertebrate anatomist. During World War II he worked with the medical entomology branch of the U.S. Army in Panama and began a career-long interest in the biology of mosquitoes, including those that are disease vectors. Later, at UT, Breland and his graduate students intensively studied the larval biology and breeding sites of Texas mosquitoes. Oz authored numerous taxonomic works, such as "Keys to the Larvae of Texas Mosquitoes," which remain useful for the important task of identifying mosquitoes. Breland was interested both in the basic biology of these insects and in the problems of diseases vectored by certain species. He consulted closely with mosquito control groups and authored works on factors that might influence reintroduction of yellow fever virus in the U.S. He was president of the Texas Mosquito Control Association.

The last phase of Breland's scientific career involved the cytological study of insect sperm production. He and graduate student Everett Simmons discovered the bizarre spermatostyles in whirligig beetles, at which time Breland joyously exclaimed, "Eureka, eureka!" These structures are attached to masses of sperm that cooperatively propel themselves into the female spermathacae. Recent interest among evolutionary biologists in problems of sperm competition has brought attention to Breland's discovery.

After his eyesight and health decline made research increasingly difficult, Oz served as departmental graduate advisor. While the typical green graduate student was probably taken aback by such a down-to-earth greeting committee, the perceptive ones grew to appreciate Breland's lack of reverence for graduate-school nonsense. He helped them walk the double-talk "mine fields" of bureaucratic rules and regulations. A former student, Everett Simmons, describes his character as fulgent (glisteningly bright).

After retirement, Oz continued to hold daily court in his small coffee room. He continued to work on his latest insect fact book. He seemed pleased that notices of faculty meetings could be shot into the trash without guilt, even though his absence made them infinitely more boring.

He truly loved The University of Texas.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professor Lawrence E. Gilbert (chair) and Everett Simmons, D.V.M.

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Natural Sciences, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on January 5, 2001. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: <http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/>.