

1997

Karl Patterson Schmidt

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Ralph G. Schwarz

SCHMIDT, KARL PATTERSON. Born Lake Forest, Illinois, 19 June 1890; died Chicago, 26 September 1957. Herpetologist, zoogeographer, taxonomist.

FAMILY AND EDUCATION

Oldest son of George Washington Schmidt, professor of German at Lake Forest College. Awarded Haven Medal as scholastic leader of class upon graduation from Academy of Lake Forest College (1906). After first year at college, father moved family to Wisconsin to start a family farm. Took correspondence classes through University of Chicago. B.A., 1916, Cornell University. Honorary D.Sc., 1952, Earlham College. Married Margaret Wightman, 1919; two children.

POSITIONS

Farmer, Clark County, Wisconsin, 1907–1913. Teaching assistant, Cornell University, 1913–1916. Research assistant, American Museum of Natural History, 1916–1922. Served in U.S. Army, Camp Grant, Illinois, 1918. Curator, Division of Amphibians and Reptiles, Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago), 1922–1940, chief curator of zoology, 1941–1955, curator emeritus of zoology, 1955–1957.

CAREER

When James G. Needham, Schmidt's former biology teacher at Lake Forest, moved to Cornell, he encouraged his former student to return to his studies from family farm. At Cornell, lived in Needham's house and assisted in some of his classes. Originally planning to be a geologist, changed focus to herpetology during a four-month job (1915) with Pardee Oil Company near swamps of Louisiana.

Offered assistantship in Department of Herpetology at American Museum at recommendation of Mary C. Dickerson, working on collection from Congo expedition, about which he wrote two papers in the museum's *Bulletin* (vols. 39, 49). At Field Museum, built one of the foremost herpetological departments in

world. Led or participated in many scientific expeditions, including Santo Domingo (1916), Puerto Rico (1919), Honduras (1923), Brazil (1926), and the Pacific Islands (1928–1929).

Wrote over 200 articles and books, for both specialists and general public, including seventy-five articles on new species of reptiles and amphibians. Author of *Homes and Habits of Wild Animals* (1934), *Our Friendly Animals and Whence They Came* (1938), *Field Book of Snakes of the United States and Canada* (with D. Dwight Davis, 1941), *Principles of Animal Ecology* (with W. C. Allee and Alfred E. Emerson, 1949), *A Check List of North American Amphibians and Reptiles* (6th ed., 1953), and *Living Reptiles of the World* (with Robert F. Ingar, 1957). Translated several important German works into English, including Richard Hesse's *Tiergeographie auf oekologischer Grundlage*, which he completely revised with W. C. Allee as *Ecological Animal Geography* (1937; 2d ed. 1951). From 1941 to 1955, edited the zoological publications of the Field Museum. Contributed articles to *Chicago Naturalist*, *Texas Geographic Magazine*, *Copeia*, and *Scientific Monthly* and served as an editor for *Biological Abstracts*, *Copeia*, *American Midland Naturalist*, and *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Although he made no important discoveries and promulgated no important new theories, he was universally held in high esteem by fellow biologists.

MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Work on coral snakes and crocodiles. Regional studies and geographical distribution of reptiles and amphibians. Turned herpetology from a hobby into a branch of biology. Influenced numerous young biologists as editor, teacher, author, and curator.

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 Wright, A. G. *In the Steps of the Great American Herpetologist Karl Patterson Schmidt* (1967).

John A. Drobnicki

SCHMITT, WALDO LA SALLE. Born Washington, D.C., 25 June 1887; died Takoma Park, Maryland, 5 August 1977. Zoologist, carcinologist.

FAMILY AND EDUCATION

Second of five children of Ewald, an engineer, and Fanny Mathilde Hesselbach Schmitt. Graduate of Central High School, Washington, D.C., 1907. B.S., George Washington University, 1913; M.A., University of California, Berkeley,

**BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF
AMERICAN AND CANADIAN
NATURALISTS AND
ENVIRONMENTALISTS**

EDITED BY

*Keir B. Sterling, Richard P. Harmond,
George A. Cevalco, and Lorne F. Hammond*



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