

Profile: Bill Reeder • Zoologist, Library Advocate, and Scholar



William G. Reeder's interest in animals and natural history, as well as his love of old books and libraries, began in his childhood in Los Angeles, CA. Bill clearly remembers a grade-school teacher who helped the young students provide scientific names for the plants in the school's garden; this seemingly simple event significantly influenced Bill's relationship to the natural world. During the same years, his father was a high school teacher of book binding, and Bill accompanied his father and his father's graphic arts club on trips to museums and libraries.

This confluence of nature and old books proved pivotal. Bill's interest in old books greatly influenced his interest in animals and systematics, and his interest in animals greatly influenced his love of beautiful old natural history books. At an early age, Bill began collecting seashells along the beaches of Los Angeles. His high school was only a few blocks from the Los Angeles County Museum and a shop where a bookseller sold used books. He visited both frequently. His mollusk

collection must have been quite good, evinced by the fact that as a high school student, he traded his shell collection for several rare books, one of which had woodcuts from the 1500s. The stage was set for Bill's major life pursuits.

Bill became focused both on animal systematics, zoological museums, and historically important books as he continued through college at UCLA, and during his Ph.D. work in the 1950s at the University of Michigan.

In 1957 Bill was hired as a faculty member by the Zoology Department and later as the Director of the Zoology Museum at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He taught the Biology of Vertebrates, Field Zoology, and Introduction to Zoology. About 25 graduate students did their theses and dissertations with his guidance. Bill strongly believed that libraries and especially Special Collections should be used and appreciated by university students, and collaborated on class trips with librarians John Tedeschi, Robin Rider, and the staff who would ferret out volumes, some containing beautiful woodcuts of animals from expeditions around the globe. Bill and Tedeschi became good friends during those years. Their friendship and mutual respect catalyzed their joint efforts through the Friends of the University Libraries for many years.

In 1978 Bill resigned his professorship at UW–Madison and moved to the University of Texas at Austin where he became Director of the Texas Memorial Museum and professor of Zoology.

In 1993, Bill retired from the University of Texas and returned to Madison to be near family. Tedeschi recommended that Bill be placed on the Friends of the Libraries board as an ex-officio member; he served in this capacity from 1993–4 through 2000–1 as a Special Consultant. At this same time, Bill's generous funding to the library enabled specific purchases for Special Collections of books about the History of Science. He also gave books from his personal collection to Special Collections. He became a regular member of the Friends Board in 2001, vice president in 2002, and president from 2003 through 2006. As his term as president came to close, he volunteered as a researcher at the UW–Zoological Museum in 2005; that work continued through the 2020s.



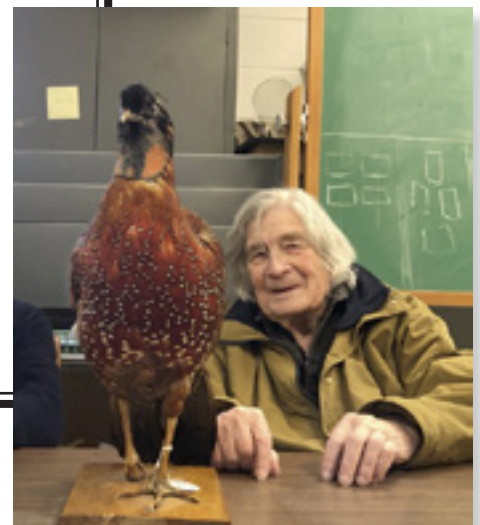
Obit

William G. "Bill" Reeder • 1929 –2026

Bill's passing was not unexpected but still shocking, a relief to those who knew of his last few months of decline, an acute and distressing event to those still anticipating a visit to talk and show off the Museum's new activities of the year.

He was a life's flashpoint for so many graduate and undergrad students, igniting or directing the direction of our lives into biological sciences, those whom he mentored and those who took his field course, from which came natural historians who went on to influence zoology to this day.

He gave us an undying love of the natural world.



*Bill Reeder with Asian pheasant in March 2019
Photo by Katy Reeder at the Zoological Museum,
Noland Hall, Madison, WI.*