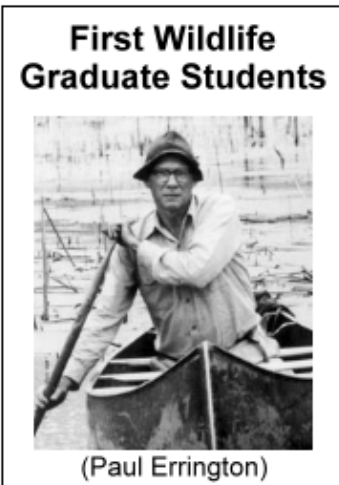


# The First Graduate Students in Wildlife Management

Jim Bailey



Who were the first graduate students in the early days of wildlife education in the USA? I can't say that I know for sure, but surely four of the earliest were those in a program developed by Aldo Leopold with funding provided by the Sporting Arms & Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute (SAAMI). I base this conclusion largely on history related around 1960 by Professor Ralph Terry King at the State University of New York, College of Forestry and Natural Resources.

Leopold spent his early Forest Service career in Arizona and New Mexico. He had attracted national attention by emphasizing a need for game management within an agency that had yet to fully understand or emphasize much of wildlife management. In 1924 he was transferred to the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin. Leopold left the Forest Service in 1928 to work on private contracts that emphasized his emerging interest in game management. (The term "wildlife" would come into general use in the following decade, in part through Leopold's efforts.) Much of this work was funded by SAAMI which then had a Game Restoration Committee. In 1933, Leopold was appointed to a "Chair of Game Management" at the University of Wisconsin, with funding from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation.

Leopold envisioned a development of college-level education programs in wildlife management across the United States. At the time, most professional training in applied biology resided in academic departments related mostly to economic aspects of agriculture or forestry. Applied wildlife management was not yet considered sufficiently important or rigorous for a graduate-level program (as noted by Curt Meine in his biography of Leopold, 1988). To promote education in wildlife management, and university programs in wildlife research, Leopold convinced SAAMI to fund graduate students to work under selected faculty at four universities.

These four graduate students were Paul Errington at the University of Wisconsin, Ralph T. King at the University of Minnesota, and Ralph Yeatter at the University of Michigan, each beginning their studies in 1929; and David Gorsuch, who began at the University of Arizona in 1930.

Paul Lester Errington began his graduate program under Professor Leon Cole. King said that Errington augmented his graduate stipend by trapping furbearers. Leopold, not

yet on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin, mentored Errington, whose research focused on bobwhite quail, seemingly serving as what we would call an “outside committee member” today. Errington completed a PhD degree in 1932.

Ralph Terry King did graduate work under Dr. Chapman at the University of Minnesota. King studied ruffed grouse on the Cloquet Forest in northern Minnesota. He developed a strip-census technique in which the area observed for grouse observations was estimated by the average sight distance of flushed birds. The method was referred to in Leopold’s early text, *Game Management* (1933), and is the basis for similar census work today.

Ralph Emerson Yeatter began graduate work under Professor Howard Wight at the University of Michigan. Yeatter studied the introduced Hungarian partridge and ring-necked pheasant.

David M. Gorsuch studied at the University of Arizona under Drs. Charles Vorhies and Walter P. Taylor. Leopold must have known Vorhies and Taylor as they were co-founders of the Arizona Game Protective Association and Leopold had encouraged the formation of Game Protective Associations during his time in the Southwest. Gorsuch studied Gambel’s quail at the Santa Rita Experimental Range.

Herbert Stoddard advised Leopold in selecting these graduate students and also advised during their graduate research projects. By 1924, Stoddard was employed by the U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey (precursor of the Fish & Wildlife Service), studying bobwhite quail in the southeastern United States. His groundbreaking work, *The Bobwhite Quail: its Habits, Preservation and Increase*, was published in 1931.

King mentioned that Stoddard and Leopold visited his grouse research in the field. (He related that the three of them would search themselves for ticks during lunch breaks, each selecting one tick for a “tick race”. Each placed his tick in the center of a circle scratched in the ground. The first tick crawling outside the circle was winner.)

Following graduate work, Errington joined the faculty at Iowa State College in 1932, rising to the rank of full professor in 1948. He became leader of the first Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit when it was established at Iowa State. Errington’s research focused on marsh ecology, particularly relations between mink and muskrats. He contributed greatly to early thinking on density-dependence and compensatory mortality. Many of his more than 200 scholarly papers continue to influence wildlife conservation. Errington was awarded the Wildlife Society’s Aldo Leopold Medal in 1967.

Ralph Terry King joined the faculty of the State University of New York College of Forestry in about 1937. In that year, he was appointed Director of the College’s (Theodore) Roosevelt Wildlife Forest Experiment Station. Beginning in 1921, the Station published some of our earliest wildlife research in the *Roosevelt Wildlife Annals* and the *Roosevelt Wildlife Bulletin*. King was an organizer and first president of The Society of Wildlife Specialists in 1936. This Society became The Wildlife Society in 1937. King was

awarded honorary life membership in The Wildlife Society in 1964. He emphasized teaching during a long career with the College, retiring as Head of the Department of Forest Zoology in 1965.

In 1934, Ralph Emerson Yeatter published *The Hungarian Partridge of the Great Lakes*. He went on to a long research career with the Illinois Natural History Survey, concentrating largely on the study of Greater Prairie-chickens. A principle monograph was his *The Prairie Chicken in Illinois*, published in 1943.

Also in 1934, David Gorsuch published *Life History of the Gambel Quail in Arizona*.

Errington, King, Yeatter and Gorsuch set high standards for future graduate students in wildlife management. Their early works are cited frequently in our first wildlife management textbook: *Game Management* (Leopold, 1933). Likewise, Leopold's leadership in establishing strong academic programs for science-based wildlife management was an important and pioneering move. Hopefully, today's students and wildlife managers will follow adequately in their footsteps.

Further reading: Leopold, A. 1933. *Game Management*. C. Scribners Son's, New York.

Meine, Curt. 1988. *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.

Thanks to Curt Meine for helpful comments and suggestions on an early version of this essay. Jim Bailey, July 2016, Belgrade, Montana