

Durward Allen, 1910–1997: An Appreciation

The George Wright Society lost a true friend recently when Durward L. Allen died of a heart attack on October 17, 1997. As a professor of wildlife ecology at Purdue University, Allen initiated long-term studies of wolves and moose on Isle Royale almost 40 years ago. Even before his Isle Royale work he was an internationally known wildlife scientist. Through his advocacy and example, several generations of wildlife conservationists realized the importance of strong science in decision-making.

Allen was born on October 11, 1910, in Uniondale, Indiana. He graduated from the University of Michigan in 1932 and completed his Ph.D. at Michigan State College (now Michigan State University) in 1937, where his doctoral research focused on the vertebrate fauna of lower Michigan farmland. He established his reputation in wildlife research while with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, studying the ecology of small game animals. Through this work he became convinced of the central importance of habitat integrity in maintaining wildlife populations. His first books were on the fox squirrel and ring-necked pheasant. From Michigan he moved east to join the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, eventually serving as acting director of research. In 1954 he published a landmark book on wildlife conservation, *Our Wildlife Legacy*, a revolutionary critique in which he exposed the futility and wrongheadedness of predator control and stocking to produce game.

Perhaps Allen will be best remembered as the designer and, for 17 years, director of long-term studies of wolves and moose at Isle Royale. Allen began the study in 1958 after leaving federal government service and joining the faculty at Purdue University. He continued the work until his retirement in 1975.

Allen was a prolific author, writing six books (including *Wolves of Minong*) and dozens of articles for general readers, a key audience. Author Frank Graham wrote in *Audubon* magazine that Allen was “gifted with a good ear for the rightness of a sentence.” Allen’s ability to explain the essential characteristics of wildlife communities to the public and professionals alike was summed up by author Hal Borland, “The only writer to equal him in tolerance, knowledge, and sound opinion was Aldo Leopold.

Allen took his societal responsibilities seriously, serving with distinction on many national boards and committees, including the Secretary of the Interior’s Advisory Board on National Parks. He was honored by memberships in the Boone and Crockett Club and the Explorers Club, and received the highest honors bestowed by the Wildlife Society (Leopold Award) and the National Audubon Society (Audubon Medal). Building on his early days as a Boy Scout, Durward often wrote articles on wildlife for *Boys Life*, and he wrote

merit badge books for scouts in mammalogy and wildlife management. As a member of the Cain Committee reviewing the predator control policies of the federal government, he was incensed to learn that, with taxpayers money, poison bait stations were deployed on public lands throughout the West, right up to the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park. The Cain Committee report in 1971 prompted President Nixon to ban the use of poison on public lands. This was a prerequisite for the increase of the wolf in the Rockies and the eventual reestablishment of wolves in Yellowstone.

Throughout his career in wildlife conservation, Durward Allen stressed the importance of all components of ecosystems, including human beings. He wrote, "biological systems—especially, self-perpetuating ecosystems—are the most complex entities we know anything about in the universe. The natural life community is an organism that functions as the sum of its parts. its metabolism is the flow of energy through diverse forms that are held together by their common need and interlocking functions. The community is hedged against extremes and has seemingly endless feedback mechanisms to steer its fluctuations toward a midpoint." Allen regarded the continued expansion of human numbers as a global tragedy that degrades our own lives. He argued that the relationship between any human population and its resource environment can be expressed by the conceptual equation :

$$\frac{\text{Resource} \times \text{Culture}}{\text{Population}} + \text{Living Standard}$$

Few recent analysts have improved on this simple but provocative claim.

Unquestionably, it was Isle Royale that most captured Allen's attention in his later career. Here he found the ideal outdoor laboratory to finally discover the natural role of the wolf in maintaining wildland communities. He wrote, "On this continent and in the world, Isle Royale is an almost unique repository of primitive conditions. Like a priceless antique, it will be even more valuable in times not far ahead... The great carnivore removes the elders, the ailing, the afflicted—and also, no doubt, the foolish and incompetent. For the moose it is a health, welfare, and eugenic program of inscrutable realism. This is the most important of our findings. In it we have the key to why both moose and wolf are what they are, and indeed to the character of wilderness. This system and these dependencies matured through ages beyond our reckoning. The wolf manages his livestock as any husbandman must manage to survive. He is inspector of the herd, liberator of the weak, and guardian of the range." Replete with a top carnivore, Isle Royale set a standard for other national parks to emulate, according to Durward Allen's thinking. His passing leaves the NPS, and scientists like myself with the challenge to maintain his high standards of science, education , and natural resource management.

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