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# Birds a special interest of new acting law dean

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The new acting dean of the I.U. Bloomington School of Law is perhaps better known to the University community as a professor of property law the past quarter century.

But he has, during that same period, developed an equally consuming expertise in such non-legal topics as the population biology of the Dark-eyed Junco, the song of the Rofous-sided Towhee, and the behavior patterns of the Prairie Warbler.

For Val Nolan, Jr., who joined the law faculty in 1949, is a self-taught expert in ornithology and has been a professor of zoology since 1969.

"I am self-taught in the sense I didn't go to classes," Nolan explained, "but I had a lot of help from others."

"I was interested at the bird watcher's level as a child, and after the

war I had made up my mind to take a Ph.D. in biology," he said. Instead, he decided to pursue his interest in law, and he returned to I.U. where he had earlier taken his undergraduate degree with Phi Beta Kappa honors. He received the J.D. degree in 1949 and joined the Bloomington law faculty soon after.

In his spare time Nolan began taking field trips, read books and journals, and developed a correspondence with ornithologists throughout the country.

In 1952, he began a study of the habits of the Prairie Warbler--an undertaking that has only recently been completed and has been submitted for publication in a monograph series by the American Ornithologists Union, of which he is a Fellow.



"There's a constant feeling that because I'm a biologist and a lawyer, there should be some kind of environmental connection. But I'm not interested in joining the two."

"When I was in college, the big question was, 'What are those idiots sitting around splitting atoms for?' And it's very hard for many people now to understand the value of ornithology. But the study of birds is worthwhile for many reasons," he said.

"For one thing, the study of animal behavior has been based heavily on the study of birds. Because of the ease with which they can be observed, because they rely strongly on the same senses that we use, and because of the consistency of some of their behavior patterns, birds were one of the first animal groups whose behavior was systematically studied," he said.

"A very intensive examination of a species of birds may help form the basis for new hypotheses about vertebrates in general--about the different strategies of survival for all vertebrates."

"It's interesting to me that you can take advantage of the fact that an individual male bird maintains a territory and you can then record threads of history from day to day," he said.

Nolan's ornithological studies of the Prairie Warbler began in fields that are now the I.U. golf course. His present study site is located north of the I.U. Cyclotron. Because the warbler is fairly tame and builds its nest low, it has proven a good specimen for daily recordings of behavior.

In 1957 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship that allowed him time to do research in both his vocational areas--one study dealt with Indiana statutes on land transactions and the other a continuation of his warbler studies.

Nolan began the warbler study by observing the nesting habits of the bird, marking and measuring eggs, weighing the young, and following the life cycle of the bird. Laboratory work involved the dissection of hundreds of warblers--killed

in collisions with TV towers and sent to him to investigate the internal make-up of the bird.

The daily rigors of such a project, in time alone, are often great. Equipped with mist nets (for catching birds), measuring tools and charts, Nolan would begin his work before dawn and not cease until after dusk throughout much of the summer season.

"I was lucky in that I lived near the study area," Nolan said. "When the eggs began pipping (a crack in the shell prior to hatching), I could go home and then come back in a couple of hours to weigh the young."

Because of the longevity of his study, Nolan has been able to discover new facts relating to the population dynamics of the species, including data on life spans, emigration, immigration, and the effects of annual weather variations.

"I like dealing with empirical data. It's nice to study something and be able to say to yourself, 'Hey, I'm the only guy who knows that.'"

The "threads of history" of individual animals that Nolan has woven together for studies published in various professional journals about the warbler, the Indigo Bunting, the Dark-eyed Junco, the Towhee and a dozen other species native to southern Indiana, have been an intrinsic part of his life-- but his interest in the law continues.

President Ryan named Nolan in January to serve as interim law dean until a successor is found for Douglass G. Boshkoff. Boshkoff, whose resignation was announced last May, is on leave this semester but will return to Bloomington to teach.

With the added duties of maintaining the law dean's office, Nolan has temporarily relinquished his teaching responsibilities with the department of zoology, but will return when a permanent dean is appointed.

"I love to teach law," he said, "I wouldn't get out of it for any reason."