

LEWIS AUBER
DPhil (Vienna), PhD (Edin)

Lewis Auber, who died on 16 September 1974, was born in Vienna in 1889, both his parents having been teachers of music. After many difficulties he achieved his ambition to study Zoology at the University of Vienna under Professor Marinelli, of whom he often spoke in later life. His DPhil degree was taken at the age of 38. He came to the Department of Zoology at the University of Edinburgh in 1938, at the invitation of Dr Fabius Gross, in order mainly to avoid the consequences of the German occupation in Austria. Even in this country, however, his work was interrupted by a short period of internment, and by having to move away from Edinburgh for a time.

In 1946 he took the post of Senior Scientific Officer at the Wool Industries Research Association at Leeds, where he carried out studies on the histology of wool follicles. His most important paper on this work was published in the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (volume 62, pp191-254) in 1952. On his retirement from Leeds he returned to his beloved Edinburgh and to his work on bird feathers. For this he received grants from Carnegie funds and from the Royal Society of London, and he worked firstly in the Zoology Department of the University and latterly at the Royal Scottish Museum. He was passionately interested in his subject, and wrote some twenty-five papers on many aspects of feather growth. He was fascinated by the problems of colour in feathers, and would co-operate with anyone on this subject, always seeking for advice on the chemical and physical aspects. He spent much time at the microtome and at the microscope, and his papers are full of the most detailed drawings of the structures seen. Every dot of the hundreds of thousands of them was inserted with care. His interest was carried into his whole life, and all who knew him will have heard him discourse at length on his latest studies of the 'cloudy medium' or the 'medullary cells'. Dr Auber's considerable artistic abilities also showed themselves in the production of many 'ordinary' colour pictures of birds. He knew and loved the brilliance and variety of pattern of the tropical birds, but would also delight in a common sparrow, and if you were out walking with him an encounter with the local cat would cause a stoppage of several minutes for a full appreciation of the animal! He had enormous stores of information about any creature from a bacterium to a blue whale, and was always prepared to display them.

Dr Auber was a founder member of the Scottish Skin Biology Club, and a frequent attender at their meetings. He lived most happily with his wife, Clotilde, who survives him. For many years they gave a home to his mother, who was an accomplished pianist, until shortly before her death. The family had a wide circle of friends.

Dr Auber became a Fellow of the Society in 1952. He frequently expressed his appreciation of the help he had received from it and also from the Royal Society of London. His life and career provide an excellent example of an unobtrusive but valuable aspect of the work of our learned Societies during the difficult period of World War II.

The above Obituary Notice, written by Professor C A Beevers, appeared in the 1975 RSE Year Book.