

**Cutler (Betsey) papers**

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**Descriptive Summary****Title:** Cutler (Betsey) papers**Dates:** 1955-2000**Collection Number:** MSS.537**Creator/Collector:** Cutler, Betsey**Extent:** 8 boxes, 3.36 linear ft**Repository:** California Academy of Sciences

San Francisco, California 94118

**Abstract:** This collection contains the research materials of Betsey Cutler, who had a lifelong interest in ornithology and contributed to the studies of avian syrinxes. Betsey Cutler's research focused on using the syrinx as a classification tool to determine the taxonomic affinities of birds at the Order and Family levels. Cutler worked at the California Academy of Sciences in the 1960s, and returned in the 1980s.

The collection contains bird lists, field notes, journals and lab notes, and nearly 1,500 photographic slides. The collection also includes Cutler's 1961 research paper "A Bank Swallow Colony on an Eroded Cliff" and a scrapbook from the 1964 Galapagos International Scientific Project (GISP).

**Language of Material:** English**Access**

Access is unrestricted

**Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], Betsey Cutler papers, MSS-507, Special Collections, California Academy of Sciences Library, San Francisco, CA

**Biography/Administrative History**

Betsey Cutler held a lifelong interest in ornithology. She grew up in Sacramento, California, and spent her summers in Placer County, where she observed local wildlife. Her family supported her interest by fostering a strong connection and understanding of local wildlife. A significant connection was with local expert Waleland

Smith "Lee" Smith, an aviculturist specializing in pheasants, and who advised Cutler on literature and resources on Western birds.

In the 1930s and into the 1940s, Cutler studied arts at Carnegie Technical and earned a BA in drama from Stanford. Cutler studied ornithology on the side. After moving to Marin County, she became acquainted with Bay Area naturalists through her children's outdoor activities. One expert that played a significant role in Cutler's ornithological education was Junea Kelly. Kelly was known for her bird walks and for teaching species and song recognition.

Since the mid to late 1950s, Betsey Cutler had been a member of ornithological and birding clubs—*The Cooper Society*, the American Ornithologist's Union, and *The Wilson Society*. *The Cooper Society*, an American ornithological club founded in California, is headquartered at UC Berkeley. They publish a journal called *The Condor*. Butler has spoken and presented papers at *The Cooper Society*, on topics such as the bank swallows (*Riparia riparia*).

### **Bank Swallows of Lake Merced (1960-1961)**

Cutler also added to existing research on bank swallows, focusing on one colony that makes it to Lake Merced to feed. Unlike the rest of the species, this colony does not nest on the shore of their feeding place. Cutler speculated that the reason for the travel to a feeding site might be because Lake Merced once fed into the Pacific before it was dammed. Furthermore, the bank swallow colony moved along the cliff over the years, establishing new nesting sites where sand is falling. Cutler also observed that the swallows all had a single reaction to birds with black feathers, such as Brewer's Blackbird, which is probably related to something predatory, like a crow.

Betsey Cutler's 1961 research paper "A Bank Swallow Colony on an Eroded Seacliff" highlighted bank swallows' behaviors and how they interacted with the environment. The paper mentions the behaviors of Cedar Waxwings, Northern Rough-winged Swallows (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*), Barn Swallows, Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*)—as they all feed on the lake, have similar styles of feeding, and all get gull feathers to line their nests. Although unpublished, the paper was significant in conservation efforts of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

### **Work at the Academy and Galapagos International Scientific Project (GISP) (1961-1964, 1980s)**

Cutler first started working at the Academy in 1961-1964. Cutler's first job at the Academy was working for Drs. Hamilton and Sauer, feeding their animals. Cutler took care of birds that were in a sick bay, kept the cages clean in the house, in the sound chambers. At times, Cutler was included in some of Dr. Hamilton's experiments, helping with cages and changing the movement recorder in the sound chambers.

Cutler, a Graduate student at the time, was invited to go on the 1964 Galapagos International Scientific Project (GISP) trip organized by Bob Bowman. The trip marked the inauguration of the Charles Darwin Research Station, on the 21st of January 1964. The trip included around 60 and 70 multidisciplinary experts. While there, Cutler collected birds and took syringes out of them and pickled what was left. The specimens collected from the trip would be incorporated into Cutler's master's thesis. Returning from the Galapagos, Cutler stayed on at San Francisco State University and worked for Bob Bowman and his research, as well as taking over his classes and teaching when he was not available.

When her husband John retired, they relocated to the Bay Area. Cutler would return to work at the Academy in the Department of Mammalogy & Ornithology in the 1980s. Cutler worked one day a week providing administrative support, although the job wasn't close to her own interests.

### **PhD & Research goals**

Cutler imagined that she would be doing research and maybe teaching. In an oral interview, Cutler says "I just wanted to find out all I could about whatever I was interested in at the time." Cutler kept and shared her notebooks. After Cutler raised her children, she had to take care of her husband, John. John had a history of illnesses, and finally ended up with cancer at the age of seventy-six. While Betsey Cutler would be described as having a strong and powerful personality, and very organized, she wrote few papers on account of the difficulty focusing and taking care of an ill loved one.

Material, such as the specimens collected by others, from the GISP expedition would be incorporated into Cutler's thesis on Finches. Betsey Cutler's research focused on using the syrinx as a classification tool to determine the taxonomic affinities of birds at the Order and Family levels. Her Master's thesis, completed at San Francisco State University, gained support from Bob Bowman, a **retired** Professor of biology at San Francisco State University and an expert of Galapagos Finches. Cutler's Doctorate was interrupted by prioritizing her spouse's employment and health.

### **Syrinx**

Cutler did not have special instruction in biological drawing, yet was able to develop her techniques for staining and illustration. Cutler drew what she saw through a microscope without any special training in biological illustration. She created detailed drawings by hand, initially putting them into notebooks with notes. It would be a page with a drawing on it, then pages of written notes. Then she would copy the drawing onto something suitable for an illustration page, and it was done by hand, Indian ink and pens. Cutler used Radiograph pens, which she found effective for her drawing.

Cutler has an extensive collection of whole avian syringes that have not been dissected or illustrated. The collection includes *Geospiza* and birds like them, and other songbirds. Cutler has stuck to oscines because they are distinct.

### *Resources Consulted:*

Cutler, Betsey. "Betsey Cutler Interview #1-4: Interview by Adrian Barnett. 23-25 October 2001.

### **Arrangement:**

Materials in this collection were partially organized and required minimal rearrangement. Slides have been rehoused and minimally arranged, respecting the creator's original order. Materials are divided into series and described at the folder level. The collection is divided into 3 series: Series 1: Research materials; Series 2: Published and Personal Papers; Series 3: Photographic Slides

#### **Series 1: Research Materials (1955-1998)**

**Scope and Content:** This series is divided into 5 subseries: Bird list, species accounts, and catalog; Field notes; Journal; Lab Notes; and Hand Reared Bird and Molt Checks.

#### **Subseries 1.1: Bird List, Species Accounts, and Catalog (1955-1998)**

box 1, folder 1: Bird watching list? Specimens? Taxonomic list?

box 1, folder 2: Life list: Birds

box 1, folder 3: Bird List. 1920-1925 Vicinity of Sacramento, CA. 1995

- box 1, folder 4: Catalogue. 1955-1998
- box 1, folder 5: Life list, notes, catalogue. 1957-1965
- box 1, folder 6: Species accounts. Gaviiformes to Caprimulgiformes
- box 1, folder 7: Species accounts. Apodiformes to Passeriformes
- box 1, folder 8: Field notes-Species accounts

**Series 1.2: Field notes (1957-1963)**

- box 2, folder 1 : Field notes. 1957-1959
- box 2, folder 2: Field notes I. Bank Swallows. 12/27/1959-05/25/1960
- box 2, folder 3: Field notes II. Bank Swallows. 05/27/1960-09/10/1960
- box 2, folder 4: Field notes. 07/09/1960-01/01/1962
- box 2, folder 5: Field notes. 02/13/1962-08/26/1962
- box 2, folder 6: Field notes. 09/1962-07/1963  
Notes: Also Fox Sparrow, Bobolink, Insect Cultures, *Steatoda grossa*

**Series 1.3: Journal (1959-2000)**

- box 3, folder 1: Journal. 10/1963-02/29/1964  
Notes: Includes GISP and Geospizinae 06/1963-02/1964
- box 3, folder 2: Journal. 03/1964-1972; to 1981
- box 3, folder 3: Journal. 1959-2000

**Series 1.4: Lab Notes (1964-1965, 1982, 1985-1991)**

**Scope and Contents** These materials were created while Cutler worked at San Francisco State University (1964-1965) and at California Academy of Sciences (1982, 1985-1991)

- box 3, folder 4: Lab notes. 1964-1965
- box 3, folder 5: Lab notes. 1982; 05/13/1985-09/16/1985
- box 4, folder 1: Lab notes. 09/16/1985-01/08/1986
- box 4, folder 2: Lab notes. 01/10/1986-06/23/1986
- box 4, folder 3: Lab notes. 06/25/1986-12/08/1986
- box 4, folder 4: Lab notes. 12/08/1986-05/20/1987
- box 4, folder 5: Lab notes. 05/20/1987-11/27/1987
- box 4, folder 6: Lab notes. 11/27/1987-01/11/1991

**Series 1.5: Hand Reared Birds and Molt Checks (1963-1969, 1971)**

**Scope and Contents:** These research materials are related to Cutler's research work at San Francisco State University, working with Bob Bowman.

box 5, folder 1: Development of hand reared birds. 1963-1966

box 5, folder 2: Development of Hand reared birds. Bill color changes: Geospizinae. 1964-1969

box 5, folder 3: Development of hand reared birds. Preparations: Syrinx. 1965-1968, 1971

box 5, folder 4: Hand reared birds I. Calendar of development. Molts. 1963-1967  
Note: Probably from San Francisco State with Bob Bowman

box 5, folder 5: Hand reared birds II. Calendar of development. Molts. 1966-1969

box 5, folder 6: Hand reared birds III. Molts. 1967-1969

box 5, folder 7: Hand rearing bird, incubation, etc. 1963

Note: Includes correspondence with Franz Sauer of University of Florida, about song development and hand rearing; a copy of "A Proposal for Research: A Study of the variation, development and evolution of behavioral Patterns in Galapagos Finches and Mockingbirds. Principal Investigator Bob Bowman

box 5, folder 8: Geospiza Fortis (Pterylography). 1964

box 5, folder 9: Molts. 1965-1966

box 5, folder 10: Molt Checks. 1966, 1971

box 5, folder 11: Undescribed notes

box 5, folder 12: Undescribed notes

**Series 2: Published and Personal Papers (1961, 1963-1964, 1984)**

box 6, folder 1: Papers for San Francisco State College. 1961

box 6, folder 2: "A Bank Swallow Colony on an Eroded Sea Cliff" 1961

box 6, folder 3: Techniques. 1963

box 6, folder 4: Scrapbook of Newspaper clippings about the Galapagos. 1964

box 6, folder 5: Hiring Letter, California Academy of Sciences. 10/04/1984

**Series 3: Photographic Slides, Photographs, and 16mm Film**

**Subseries 3.1: Birds of India (1957-1958)**

**Scope and Contents**

This subseries contains Betsey Cutler's photographic slides of local birds that were collected while living in India and later used in lectures. Cutler's husband, who was teaching architecture, was based in Howrah, across the river from Calcutta, in a village called Sibpoor. Returning to the United States, the Cutlers toured Europe and the coast of Norway—Betsey Cutler looking for birds

- box 7, folder 1: Birds in India. Birds, nesting holes, tree photos
- box 7, folder 2: Birds in India. "Botanic Garden"  
Note: Birds in India. B. E. College = Bengal Engineering College, Howrah, West Bengal.  
"Botanic Gardens" in Hourah next to B. E. College
- box 7, folder 3: Birds in India. Cranes and Waders
- box 7, folder 4: Birds in India. Vultures, Harriers, Serpent Eagles, Osprey, Accipiter, Eagles
- box 7, folder 5: Birds in India. Kites, Geese, Ducks
- box 7, folder 6: Birds in India. Herons, Storks, Grebes Cormorants
- box 7, folder 7: Birds in India. Kingfishers, White-Collared Kingfisher, Bee-Eaters
- box 7, folder 8: Birds in India. Parakeets, Cuckoos, Hawk-Cuckoo, Owls
- box 7, folder 9: Birds in India. Gulls, Terns, Pigeons, Doves
- box 7, folder 10: Birds in India. Bulbuls, Flycatchers, Babblers, Warblers, Swallows
- box 7, folder 11: Birds in India. Barbet, Woodpeckers, Swallows, Finch-Lark
- box 7, folder 12: Birds in India. Orioles, Roller, Hoopoe, Hornbill
- box 7, folder 13: Birds in India. Mynahs, Pipits, Wagtails
- box 7, folder 14: Birds in India. Turdinae, Tit, Flower Pecker, Sparrow, Shrikes
- box 7, folder 15: Birds in India. Drongo, Corvids, Misc. Natural Objects
- box 7, folder 16: Birds in India. Misc. and unidentified
- box 7, folder 17: Birds of Europe; Norway; Britain

**Subseries 3.2: Bank Swallow Slides, Photographs, and 16mm Film (1960-1961)**

**Scope and Content:** This subseries contains slides documenting research on Bank Swallows of Lake Merced, as well as miscellaneous bird slides.

- box 7, folder 18: Bank Swallows. 02/13/1960-03/09/1960
- box 7, folder 19: Bank Swallows. 03/16/1960-04/04/1960
- box 7, folder 20: Bank Swallows. 04/06/1960-04/18/1960
- box 7, folder 21: Bank Swallows. 04/25/1960-05/01/1960
- box 7, folder 22: Bank Swallows. 05/09/1960
- box 7, folder 23: Bank Swallows. 05/19/1960-06/01/1960
- box 7, folder 24: Bank Swallows. 06/12/1960-06/17/1960
- box 7, folder 25: Bank Swallows. 06/20/1960-07/01/1960
- box 7, folder 26: Bank Swallows. 07/04/1960-07/20/1960

box 7, folder 27: Bank Swallows. 07/24/1960-07/27/1960

box 7, folder 28: Bank Swallows. 02/13/1960-03/27/1961

box 8, folder 1: 16mm Roll. Zool 112 & Biol 199. Cliff Swallows & Bank Swallows. 1961

box 8, folder 2: Bird slides (1 of 3)

box 8, folder 3: Bird slides (2 of 3)

box 8, folder 4: Bird slides (3 of 3)

box 8, folder 5: Misc. Animals and Plants

box 8, folder 6: Photographs. Bank Swallow Study – SF Beach early 1960s

**Subseries 3.3: Academy and Thesis Research (1964-1966, 1970-1971)**

box 8, folder 7: 1964 Galapagos Expedition (1 of 2)

box 8, folder 8: 1964 Galapagos Expedition (2 of 2)

box 8, folder 9: Sonograms. 1965

box 8, folder 10: Photos of dissected syringes, etc. 1966

box 8, folder 11: B. D. Cutler drawings for thesis? San Francisco State University. 1970

box 8, folder 12: Farallon Islands. 1971

box 8, folder 13: Group index cards