

**EDITH RHODA
FORCE
KASSING
1890-1966**



**SCIENTIST
WITH A
GIFT FOR
TEACHING**

Edith Kassing taught science for forty years, while conducting research in ornithology and herpetology. She became nationally recognized for her life-histories on small snakes of the Tulsa area. Her incredible collection was donated to many major American museums.

Edith Rhoda Force was born in October 1890 in Chicago. She started at Knox College (1910), taught in Cook County Schools (1912-18), taught in Beatrice, Nebraska (1918-21), received her bachelor's degree from Chicago's Lewis Institute (1919), and taught at Texas State College for Women (1921-23) in Denton before moving to Oklahoma.

In 1923 Edith came to Oklahoma to teach manual arts at Okmulgee High School but soon her professional interests turned to science. She began studying local birds and reptiles. Her live snake collection was often unpopular with her colleagues. In 1925 she published papers on reptiles and amphibians of Okmulgee County, after her students participated in field trips and specimen collection.

Her scientific research was influenced by ornithologist Margaret Nice, author of the "Birds of Oklahoma", whom she met while taking graduate courses in zoology and botany at the University of Oklahoma in 1925. Dr. Frank Blanchard, a renowned herpetologist at the University of Michigan, became her mentor. She published a paper with him in 1930, while completing her master's degree there in 1931.

Edith moved to Tulsa in 1926 to teach science at Woodrow Wilson Junior High. She immediately initiated studies of Tulsa birds and reptiles. The cabinets in her classroom were soon filled with cages of live snakes and preserved reptiles. She continued there until her retirement in 1956. During 1928-29, she worked on an extensive report of the birds and reptiles of Tulsa County. The original unpublished manuscripts, containing many interesting photographs, disappeared but copies are available at the Tulsa Central Library. She summarized their contents in two papers, the first published lists of birds and reptiles of the Tulsa area.

She led several extracurricular science organizations. She sponsored a Field and Stream club, with students participated in field trips and nature projects. In 1937 she organized the Oklahoma Junior Academy of Science. It would dissolve in 1939 when she spent a year in Liverpool, England on a teacher exchange program. In the 1940s, she taught summer biology courses, where students created science projects.

On April 23, 1935, Edith was one of the founding members of the Tulsa Audubon Society, the oldest bird study organization in Oklahoma. She served as recorder of the Society from 1935 to 1938, recording bird observations. This activity has continued to this day, containing years of bird observation data, a resource unparalleled anywhere in the state. During the summer of 1936, she went to Washington to investigate the records and literature of early naturalists and ornithologists who had worked in Oklahoma. In 1937, she published the results of this investigation in a paper "Bibliography of Oklahoma Ornithology". In 1947-48, Edith sent her large collections of snakes to the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History.

In December 1949, married David Oscar Kassing, a widower she had known from her days in Beatrice, Nebraska. They lived in the Tulsa area until they moved to an Edmond retirement home in 1961. She died there in August 1966 at age 75.

During her lifetime, Kassing was elected a Fellow of the Oklahoma Academy of Science and made an honorary life member of the Tulsa Audubon Society in 1965. She was also inducted in the Oklahoma Educators Hall of Fame. Her life-history studies of various snakes still receive the attention of research herpetologists today. Her openly-outspoken behavior was not well-received by her school colleagues, accounting for why she never advanced to the high school instructor level. Happily, her research activities gave her a feeling of accomplishment that few people enjoy in their work.