

Obituary: Philip Hershkovitz (1909–1997)

On 15 February 1997, Philip Hershkovitz (Fig. 1) died at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago, at the age of 87. Phil was Curator Emeritus of Mammals at the Field Museum of Natural History, where he conducted research on South American primates and other mammals for 50 years. During his lengthy research career, Phil published 159 scientific articles and monographs, and 5 more are in press: of these 164 publications, 53 are primarily or exclusively primatological (Patterson, 1987, 1997; these are

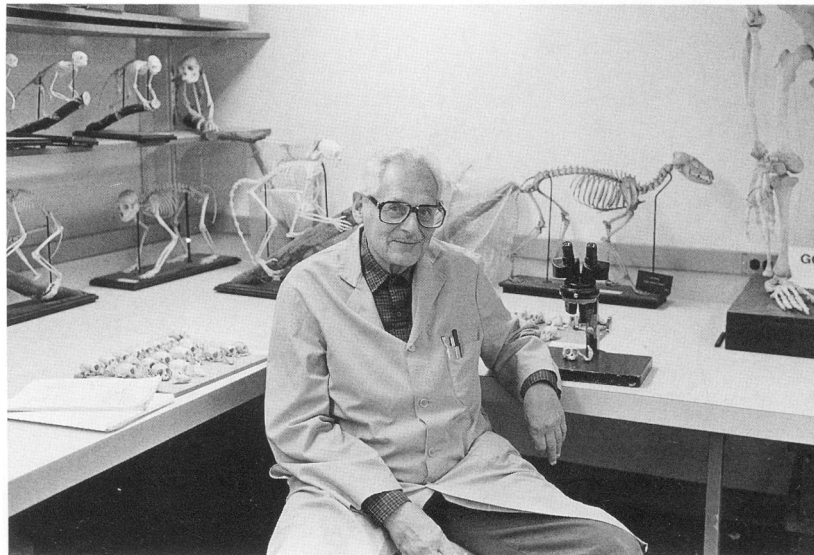


Fig. 1. Philip Hershkovitz, photographed in his laboratory, ca. 1986. (photo credit: The Field Museum, Chicago, IL, Negative No. GN 84917.11).

the source of most of the biographical information cited here). Phil's two most important contributions to primatology probably are his innovative theory of pelage metachromism (1968) and his monumental systematic study of the marmosets, tamarins, and callimicos (1977, xiv + 1117 pp.). The latter work, which is designated as volume one of a proposed multivolume series, includes nearly 400 introductory pages of contextual background concerning various aspects of primates in general and platyrrhines in particular; unfortunately, subsequent volumes in the proposed series were never completed. In recognition of Phil's outstanding research achievements, the IPS named him Honorary President of its XIIth Congress, held in Brasilia in 1988.

Phil was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 12 October 1909. He graduated from high school in 1927, and in 1929 he began his collegiate study of zoology, first at the University of Pittsburgh and subsequently at the University of Michigan. From 1933 to 1937, he interrupted his formal academic training and devoted 4 years to intensive mammalogical fieldwork in Ecuador. After returning to the University of Michigan, he was awarded his bachelor's degree in 1938 and his master's degree in 1940. Subsequently, he began a doctoral program, but in 1941 he again interrupted his formal academic training for fieldwork—this time, to spend 2 productive years in Colombia. In 1943, following the entry of the United States into World War II, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in Europe with the Office of Strategic Services until 1946. In 1947, he joined the staff of the Field Museum and almost immediately returned to Colombia, to continue his mammalogical fieldwork there for 5 more years. Periodic field trips to various South American countries remained an essential component of Phil's research career at the Field Museum for the next 40 years, through 1992, after which failing health forced him to discontinue fieldwork. Although Phil formally retired in 1974, he continued his active program of research on South American mammals until 2 weeks before his death. His last primatological paper was published in 1993.

My association with Phil began in 1958 or 1959, when he agreed to serve as advisor on my Ph.D. dissertation project. He also was an advisor on my subsequent postdoctoral fellowship, and I was privileged to accompany him on a field trip to Surinam in 1961–1962. In the field and at the museum, he was one of the most energetic and productive workers that I have ever encountered; his prodigious research drive was a constant inspiration to everyone around him. He is survived by two sons, a son-in-law, and two grandchildren.

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Jack Fooden
Division of Mammals
Field Museum of Natural History
Roosevelt Road and Lakeshore Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60605