

## THE GEORGE MERCER AWARD FOR 1961



Dr. Norris receiving award from Dr. Eugene Odum, Director of the Institute of Radiation Ecology, U. of Georgia.

The George Mercer Award for 1961 has been presented to Dr. Robert A. Norris, University of Georgia. His paper on "Density, racial composition, sociality, and selective predation in nonbreeding populations of Savannah sparrows" (BIRD BANDING 31(4):173-216) was selected by the Mercer Award Scrutineers as the outstanding paper in the previous two years.

Dr. Norris' early interest in birds was buttressed by Boy Scout work, by sympathetic parents, and by association with others of "naturalistic bent," especially H. L. Stoddard, Sr., M. Hopkins, Jr., D. W. Johnston, and G. A. Dorsey. After a three-year stint in the Hospital Corps of the U. S. Navy, including duty in the Pacific theater, he attended the University of Georgia, where he received a bachelor's degree in zoology in 1948 and, under Dr. E. P. Odum's direction, a master's degree in 1949. The M.S. thesis was based on a two-summer study of distribution and populations of birds in southwestern Georgia. Dr. Odum's ecology courses provided solid, stimulating fare, as did those of Dr. F. A. Pitelka at the University of California, Berkeley, where his graduate studies were continued. A significant facet in his training as a field investigator was participating in a 1950 collecting expedition, sponsored by the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and led by Dr. A. H. Miller, in the Joshua Tree National Monument area of southern California. A doctorate in zoology was received at Berkeley in 1954 and the thesis, written under Dr. Miller's direction and aided by a National Science Foundation fellowship, dealt with comparative biosystematics and life history of two closely related, allopatric species of nuthatch (genus *Sitta*). Since then his peregrinations have involved teaching at Rutgers University, where he profited from association with Dr. M. F. Buell, and at Tulane and Louisiana State Universities. For three years (1955-58) he was a research associate in the University of Georgia Ecological Studies program, headed by Dr. E. P. Odum, in the Savannah River Plant area, near Aiken, South Carolina. Although a rather broad spectrum of AEC-supported studies was, and still is, carried on in this area, a substantial part of his work concerned populations of Savannah sparrows in old fields. During 1961 he worked as a laboratory technologist in the Irwin Memorial Blood Bank of San Francisco, at which time he also did independent research on blood groups in song birds. Ideas have been formulated for interdisciplinary studies in which immunohematology and immunogenetics will be employed in attacking problems in biosystematics and population ecology. At present he is working, in a temporary, research-consultant capacity with Dr. Odum and his associates at the University of Georgia and somewhat later in the year he will be employed as a resident ecologist and ornithologist at Tall Timbers Research Station in northern Florida.