

J.Dewey Soper – Pioneer Award

Joseph Dewey Soper was born 1893 and raised near Rockwood, Ontario. He developed an early interest in natural history and was influenced by the works of Henry David Thoreau and Ernest Thompson Seton. He attended the University of Alberta and studied zoology. In 1920 Soper met Dr. R.M. Anderson and was invited to work as a naturalist on Canada's East Arctic Expedition. He documented the flora and fauna of the eastern Arctic Islands, northern Greenland and areas of Labrador. In 1924 the National Museum of Canada hired Soper to explore and document the flora and fauna of what is today the central North West Territories. Over a two-year period, he travelled over 6400km by dogsled boat and canoe. In 1928, together with Inuit guides, he explored Baffin Island and was the first to successfully locate and document the nesting grounds of the blue phase of the Snow Goose.

In 1934 Soper joined the Canadian Wildlife Service becoming the Federal Chief Migratory Bird Officer for the Prairie Provinces. In 1948 he became the Chief Federal Wildlife Officer for Alberta, NWT and Yukon. By the end of his career Soper had conducted three multi-year Arctic expeditions and published over 130 research papers and articles. His four-year search for and finding the blue phase Snow Goose nesting grounds on Baffin Island (at that point never before documented) was featured in Ripley's Believe It or Not! This discovery earned him the nickname, Blue Goose Soper by his colleagues.

Soper was honoured by having the Dewey Soper Migratory Bird Sanctuary (NWT) named after him. The Alberta Society of Professional Biologists currently awards the J. Dewey Soper Award to outstanding Canadian biologists.

J. Dewey Soper passed away in 1982. His early work to document the flora and fauna of the eastern Arctic Islands and the central Northwest Territories plus his discovery of the nesting grounds of the blue phase of Snow Geese resulted in him being recognized on the Pioneer Wall of Fame.