

## IN MEMORIAM

Bruce William Duncan (1946 – 2006)

*Robert Curry*

ON 11 NOVEMBER 2006 Bruce Duncan died of injuries resulting from an automobile collision the evening before, as he drove home to Paris, Ontario. The Ontario conservation community, the birding community, his myriad friends, and indeed all of nature, lost a great champion and suffered an irreplaceable loss.

Bruce was born on 13 January 1946 in Woking, Surrey, England, to an English mother and a Scottish-born member of the Canadian army medical corps. His family immigrated to Canada, and Bruce grew up mainly in Orillia.

He graduated with a psychology degree from Wilfrid Laurier University (1972). From 1974-1976 he worked at Quetico Provincial Park for the Voyageur Wilderness Program. The experience was life-changing and Bruce returned to the University of Waterloo to study biology. Subsequently Bruce worked for 11 years for the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) as a resource interpreter at Taquanyah Nature Centre west of Cayuga.



It was at this time that Bruce joined the Hamilton Naturalists' Club (HNC). His first submission to the Noteworthy Bird Records was of a Blue-headed Vireo—then, Solitary Vireo—on 4 May 1977 at Taquanyah. He soon immersed himself in the conservation activities of the HNC, as conservation director from 1979 until 1984 and then as its president from 1984 to 1986. In 1986 and 1987 Bruce organized a huge team of volunteers and released four young Bald Eagles at Taquanyah. In 1988, under his direction

and with his full participation, the Hamilton Peregrine Falcon Re-introduction Project successfully reared and released six juvenile Peregrines from the roof of Mohawk College in Hamilton. Subsequently he banded each year the young Peregrines raised by their parents on the roof of the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Hamilton — great publicity for the HNC and the hotel.

Although Bruce was a complete naturalist, his passion and his renowned skill was for diurnal birds of prey. He

was a self-confessed hawk nut. He frequently spoke about hawk migration and hawk identification to naturalists clubs and other groups across southern Ontario and in the United States, some 35 presentations in all. Most often on such occasions he was accompanied by his close friend Barry Cheriére who, as Ontario Birds readers are well aware is a skilled bird photographer, provided his excellent slides of diurnal raptors. They spoke to such organizations and in such places as the Buffalo Ornithological Society (1985), the Michigan Bird Banding Association (Livonia, MI, 1987), Ellicottville, NY, HMANA Conference (1986), Cincinnati, OH and Cape May, NJ. Bruce rarely used notes but instead memorized and rehearsed his talks — a rarity in today's PowerPoint era. Always, he would relate examples using people in his audience so that all were drawn in.

Bruce was an active member and leader in the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). In April 1988 Bruce and Barry were the keynote speakers at the HMANA conference in Cape May, New Jersey. In May 1997 HMANA presented Bruce with the Maurice Broun award for his commitment and outstanding service to further hawk migration and study.

Seeking a more intimate relationship and at the same time a more scientific understanding of birds of prey, Bruce turned to banding. He main-

tained a banding station at Hawk Cliff near Port Stanley for 17 years, banding more than 7000 raptors. This weekend passion took a more scientific turn as Bruce joined the Ontario Bird Banding Association, then served on its board for many years and as president from 1985 to 1988. During this period he edited the OBBA newsletter and journal and authored or co-authored 19 papers on raptor analysis, station reports and book reviews.

Ontario Birds readers also were the beneficiaries of Bruce's identification and writing skills. There, in a series of papers between 1983 and 1990, he wrote papers about the identification and Ontario status of nine species of raptors and vultures.

Bruce was a teacher and a leader. Noting that Hamilton birders lacked focus he instituted the Bird Study Group of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club. From its inaugural meeting on 21 September 1987, until meeting #77 in February 1996, Bruce was the study group leader responsible for the program. His legacy is the dynamic group that exists today and which regularly hosts professional and amateur speakers on all bird topics and with attendance close to 100 on average.

Similarly, Bruce was one of the original small group that gave organizational structure and international status to the Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch at Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) in Grimsby.



The wider birding and naturalists' community, in Ontario and beyond, have all been recipients of his vision and creativity, and are richer for his life and contributions.

Although local and visiting birders had watched hawks migrate up the peninsula since the 1950s, and had established daily coverage beginning in 1977, Bruce, as its first president from 1990 – 1994, and the rest of the executive, formalized reporting and really put Beamer “on the map” of North American hawk migration monitoring sites. He was a director until 2003 and host of the annual Beamer Open House on Good Friday, when he would often bring and release a raptor to the delight and edification of hundreds of the general public.

It was at Hawk Cliff that Bruce and Janet Snaith were married on a sunny Saturday, September the 26th, in 1992.

As Peter Whelan wrote in his *Globe and Mail* column, the bride, groom, minister and guests wore binoculars. Earlier that day Bruce caught and ringed his first ever Peregrine Falcon, remarking to Barry that putting on the band was a special highlight. Barry reminded him that he would be putting a gold band (not aluminum) on a very significant catch, later that afternoon. In the next several years came two children, James and Katie. Subsequently, the joys of family and the demands of work curtailed his involvement in several organizations. It seemed, however, that this was Bruce's role. His vision and energy gave birth to organizations. Then after they were fully functional

and thriving he passed the torch to others and moved on to other projects. As birders and naturalists, Bruce was our man in the formal halls, office and structures of conservation in Ontario. After 11 years with the GRCA he moved to the Hamilton Conservation Authority (HCA) in 1988, first as resource interpreter, then staff ecologist in 1992, and director of watershed planning and engineering in 2002. In January 2004 Bruce was appointed as general manager and chief administrative officer. Most recently he directed and coordinated the gift of 180 acres of land in upper Stoney Creek in east Hamilton from the province of Ontario to the city of Hamilton. This property contained the Eramosa Karst Formation, a complex of sinkholes and caverns identified as an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest. Then he orchestrated a \$1.5 million donation from the Heritage Green Community Trust to the Hamilton Conservation foundation to develop these karst lands as a conservation area. This is a landmark property and will be part of Bruce's legacy.

In recognition of his conservation work Bruce received many honours, including Hamilton's Environmentalist of the Year Award in 1992 and the Canada 125 Award for Environmental Service to the Community.

On a personal note, Bruce was the biggest booster of Birds of Hamilton. He always urged the production com-

mittee and me to aim high and to produce the best book possible. Conversely, I encouraged Bruce to take some time and write about his beloved Taquanyah eagles. This he did in typical eloquent style. His conclusion to that account reveals the essence of Bruce Duncan as a naturalist, conservationist and writer.

*“Bald Eagles remain a potent symbol of North American wildlife and are worth saving and bringing back to their former numbers. This part of Ontario is poorer when it has few Bald Eagles, just as it is poorer when it has few Prothonotary Warblers or few Eastern Bluebirds. When we work together to help, not only does our area become richer in eagles, we do as well — in our deepest essence as part of this natural world.”*

It is a deep privilege to have known Bruce Duncan. Bruce was a gift to the city and people of Hamilton. In addition the wider birding and naturalists' community, in Ontario and beyond, have all been recipients of his vision and creativity, and are richer for his life and contributions.

Our deepest sympathies are extended to Janet, James and Katie, and the rest of Bruce's family.

### Selected Publications\*

- Duncan, B.** 1980. Some unusual hawk behaviour. *Wood Duck* 33: 123.
- Duncan, B.W.** 1983. Identification of accipiters in Ontario. *Ontario Birds* 1: 43 – 49.
- Duncan, B.** 1984. Eskimo Curlew in Hamilton. *Wood Duck* 37: 121.
- Duncan, B.** 1985. Common Loons on land. *Wood Duck* 38: 107.
- Duncan, B.W.** 1986. The occurrence and identification of Swainson's Hawk in Ontario. *Ontario Birds* 4: 43 – 61.
- Duncan, B.** 1987. Peregrine Falcons. *Wood Duck* 40: 7.
- Duncan, B.** 1987. House Finch behavior. *Wood Duck* 41: 59.
- Duncan, B.W.** 1987. Identification of Red-shouldered, Broad-winged, Cooper's and Northern Goshawks in immature plumage. *Ontario Birds* 5: 106 – 111.

- Duncan, B.** 1989. Reintroducing birds of prey. *Wood Duck* 42: 100 – 101.
- Duncan, B.W.** 1990. Identification and status of Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, Turkey Vultures, and Black Vultures in Ontario. *Ontario Birds* 8: 61 – 69.
- Duncan, B.** 1992. Townsend's Solitaires in Ontario. *Wood Duck* 45: 117 – 118.
- Duncan, B.** 1999. Wild Turkeys in the Dundas Valley. *Wood Duck* 52: 187.

\*Not including the 19 papers published in Ontario Bird banding between 1981 and 1992.

### Acknowledgements

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