

KNOW YOUR NEW ENGLAND NATURALISTS: KATHLEEN ANDERSON

by Dr. W. Timothy Anderson

[Editor's note: Some years ago, an ornithologist friend from Wisconsin asked me if I ever visited the bird station near Plymouth. "Kathleen Anderson's outfit - a fine woman, fine scientist" are the words that I remember. Since its founding in 1969, Manomet Bird Observatory has been for many people - essentially - Kathleen Anderson. So that our readers may learn more about that fine woman, the following paragraphs have been written, in response to Bird Observer's request, by her son, Tim.]

Kathleen Shaw Anderson was born in Livingston, Montana, where her father was Supervisor of the Absaroka National Forest (at that time America's largest, forming the northern border of Yellowstone National Park). Her mother is also Montana-born, daughter of pioneer cattle ranchers. This western frontier heritage has remained an influence throughout Kathleen's life. Her early love for the outdoors has remained a constant and abiding one, for she cannot remember a time when she was not either outdoors or wishing that she could be.

Although brought up in Massachusetts (her father's birth-place), frequent visits to her grandparents' ranch, and a wide circle of family and friends in Montana have made the "Big Sky Country" as much her home as New England. Kathleen and her husband Paul lived in Montana for a time after their marriage but returned to Massachusetts and, in 1950, bought Wolf Trap Hill Farm in Middleborough. The old farmhouse (built in 1735) and acres of fields and woodland are well-known to local birders for the variety of raptors centered there - goshawks, Redtails, Redshoulders, Broadwings, most of the owls (including Saw-whet and, on occasion, Long-eared).

Kathleen's interest in the systematic study of birds had an early start. A carefully crayoned copy of Chester Reed's first field guide (with black and white drawings) and a notebook of bird records begun at about age eight are still on her bookshelves. The detail with which she recorded first arrival dates and birdhouse occupants set a pattern of note-taking that has persisted. As her friends know, Betty, as she is called by family and friends, is seldom without her notebook, and the records begun in South Carver now include innumerable notebooks filled with observations from places as distant as James Bay, Peru, Czechoslovakia, and points between.

The first years at Wolf Trap Hill were busy with children, garden, Scouts, and 4-H, and other activities typical of a young mother; but bird study and note-taking never ceased. Family camping trips took the Andersons across much of the United States and into Canada, binoculars and notebook always at hand.

The 1956 outbreak of Eastern Equine Encephalitis in south-

eastern Massachusetts and the recovery of several isolations of virus from mosquitoes collected in the Anderson backyard led to a job as ornithologist at the Taunton Field Station, established in 1957 by the U. S. Public Health Service. Here Kathleen was responsible for capturing, banding, and blood-sampling birds in the Hockomock Swamp and surrounding areas, as well as training each spring a fresh crop of medical students as assistants. This work continued for eleven years, during which time the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) took over the project, and it became the Encephalitis Field Station.

During the fall of 1964, and again in 1965, Kathleen organized a group of volunteers to assist the MDPH in capturing and blood-sampling birds on Duxbury Beach in an effort to determine the possibility that encephalitis virus was being brought into the state by migrants from the north. The nucleus of enthusiastic volunteers assembled at High Pines on Duxbury Beach in 1964 and 1965 led to the establishment, in 1966, of the Manomet Operation Recovery Station on the Roger Ernst estate on the bluff at Manomet, which would become the Manomet Bird Observatory (MBO).

Manomet "OR", under Mrs. Anderson's direction, operated during September and October from 1966 through 1968. During this time Kathleen commuted between the Encephalitis Field Station and Manomet, keeping a sleeping bag at Manomet and somehow managing the household at Wolf Trap Hill as she passed through Middleborough. Fortunately those seven-day weeks and sixteen- and eighteen-hour days lasted only two months each fall.

The sudden death of Emily Goode in December of 1966, Massachusetts Audubon Society's (MAS) beloved natural history teacher in southeastern Massachusetts, brought a desperate plea from the MAS Education Department and a new career as a teacher there that began on less than a week's notice and lasted two years. Somehow, this was sandwiched in with seven months of field work each year at the Encephalitis Field Station and two months each fall as director of Manomet OR.

The establishment of the Manomet Bird Observatory in 1969 and Kathleen's appointment as its first director led to yet another role that absorbed her considerable energies for nearly fifteen years. Under her direction, MBO flourished and is now internationally known for its research and educational programs. In addition, MBO has provided an invaluable opportunity for many volunteers and student interns to participate in all phases of research activities. These young people who have worked and studied with Kathleen Anderson are now spread across the nation and, indeed, throughout the world.

During the busy years at MBO, Mrs. Anderson managed to maintain her broad interests in research and conservation. She served several terms as a Councilor of the Northeastern and

Eastern Bird-Banding associations, as secretary of the Nuttall Ornithological Club and as president of the South Shore Bird Club. Further, she was a founder, trustee, and first president (for eight years) of the Plymouth County Wildlands Trust. She is listed in Who's Who of American Women and was recently elected to membership in The Society of Women Geographers, an affiliate of the Explorer's Club.

The tremendous enthusiasm and drive which characterized all of her work at MBO were not, however, without their cost. Family life, which means so much to Betty (she apparently has cousins in half the fifty states and friends, worldwide), personal research, organic farming, and time for writing too often seemed to come off second-best when priorities were being sorted out. Kathleen left MBO at the end of 1983, believing she had done as much as she could for this first East Coast bird observatory, now firmly established in the forefront of ornithological research. It was time to turn her attention to other projects which had been "on hold" for so many years.

She tells us that the past five months have been some of the happiest and most satisfying she has ever known, busy as ever, but with a bit more time to "sniff the flowers and watch the clouds." Her lifelong concern for the importance of sustainable agriculture in New England has now found an outlet in "hands-on" activities at Wolf Trap Hill; but as she works with the gardens and livestock, notebook and pencil in her pocket, binoculars within reach, ideas for future writing, and plans for the growing farm vie for attention with the scream of a Red-shouldered Hawk over the hill.

A variety of professional commitments still crowds the hours she wants to spend outdoors. She has rotated off the board of the New England Wildflower Society and resigned from the Trails Advisory Committee of the Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources, but continues on the board of the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association in Pennsylvania, and her committee assignments for the American Ornithologists Union and the Wilson Ornithological Society. Most time-consuming, and also most interesting, are her responsibilities as secretary to the U. S. Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation, and as one of the seven-member Non-Game Advisory Committee for the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, where she chairs the Sub-committee on Research and Management Priorities. With the passage of the state's Non-Game Check-off Bill, both opportunities and budget for this program are expanding rapidly. Her carefully recorded observations of birds, plants, turtles, etc., are now being funneled into the state's Natural Heritage Program files as she searches back through years of field notes.

When asked about her plans for the future, Betty told us,

The days aren't long enough. I'm working on one book, with two others in the planning stage. Paul Donahue and I have plans to

lead one or two small private tours each year to some special places in the neotropics. Paul Anderson and I also have some plans, which include a return to Montana, probably next summer. Having time with my family and friends is precious to me, and the latch string's out at Wolf Trap Hill. In the most immediate future I am trying to confirm the breeding of Upland Sandpipers in nearby farmland, and then I'm off to Algonquin Park to participate in the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Project. I really want to hear those wolves howl. And as soon as I am back, Paul and I are going camping with our son and his family."

As if these enthusiasms are not enough, Betty confides that she does a lot of lecturing, she loves to dance a fast polka, and she is teaching her granddaughter to knead bread - "That Sara Elizabeth is really something!" So's her grandmother.



*Kathleen Anderson holds a Northern Parula that shows partial albinism. The bird was banded by Elise Lapham on Block Island in September 1977.*