

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, RUTH

by Paul M. Roberts, Editor

Inasmuch as Ruth Emery has now reached her eightieth birthday, I am sure she will make 110. There is no better way to preserve health and happiness than (through) good birding.

Roger Tory Peterson

There can be few active field birders in Massachusetts who are not familiar with the name Ruth P. Emery. Not only is Ruth statistical editor of the Bird Observer, she is field notes editor of the Massachusetts Audubon Society Newsletter and eastern Massachusetts field notes editor for the Birder's Kit. She also edits the eastern "Voice of Audubon" and is one of the most respected field birders in the state.

Some months ago, staff members of the Bird Observer realized that Ruth would be celebrating her eightieth birthday this past August. Without her knowledge, we decided to celebrate this event in a special way, by dedicating an issue of this magazine to her.

Many of Ruth's friends, including Arthur and Margaret Argue, James Baird, Wallace Bailey, Craig Jackson, Wayne Hanley, Wayne Petersen, Roger Tory Peterson and Henry T. Wiggin, have contributed material for this issue. Many other friends would have, if only they had been privy to our plans. But, alas, even now we have much more material than we can publish. That in itself is quite a tribute to Ruth.

We originally intended to dedicate our previous issue, which came out shortly after her birthday, to Ruth. However, when friends planned a belated birthday party for her in mid-September, we decided to delay this special issue in order that we might gather additional material at that event.

Anyone who has worked with field records understands the significance of Ruth P. Emery's contributions in this field. I vividly recall my first impressions when I began to peruse Records of New England Birds in search of hawk reports. All published field records have certain inherent limitations, but RNEB had so much data, and it was so well-organized. Only when I examined published records for other states did I fully comprehend the magnitude of what Ruth has been doing these past thirty-three years. She has set a standard difficult to emulate. Roger Tory Peterson writes that her summaries, "will be used by researchers for years to come, and when publications on the birds of Massachusetts are updated, they will lean heavily on the data recorded by Ruth Emery and her many correspondents."

The published records, however, do not reflect the many facets of Ruth. Our contributors present an image which may not be evident to those who haven't worked or birded with her. In reading all of the material submitted to Bird Observer, including some not published here, I have been impressed by the recurrence of the same themes in piece after piece. Everyone mentions her adventurous spirit, her amazing vitality.

Referring to Ruth's activities on a birding trip in May of this year, Henry T. Wiggin writes that, "the energy she has boggles the mind!" Her patience and sense of humor impress everyone. Henry recalls the Massachusetts Audubon bus field trips of the 1950's:

There were some good birders on the bus trips in those days, but even then, there were many people who just went along for the ride. Ruth was oh so patient explaining to someone for the seventy-fifth time what a Common Goldeneye looked like. On one trip to Rockport, we were fortunate enough to run into a small alcid flight. Several people on the trip saw a dove-kie for the first time in their life. I saw Ruth laughing shortly thereafter and asked her what was so funny. She replied that she had overheard the bus driver asking a woman what she had just seen. The woman had responded, "It was a small black and white thing that people were calling lifers."

Without exception, the contributors also marvel at Ruth's enthusiasm for listening to their reports of what birds they have seen. Anyone who has called her to report a sighting knows what they mean.

Personally, however, one theme particularly impresses me. In a following article, Wayne Petersen dips back into the 1950's to recall what Ruth meant to him as a beginning birder. He concludes with the wish that her influence will, "continue to hold a special place for yet another generation of wide-eyed, fledgling birders." Shortly after Wayne's manuscript arrived, we received a strikingly similar piece from Craig Jackson, who began birding in 1975. Craig's appreciation of Ruth indicates that her influence on beginning birders is as strong and important today as it was twenty years ago.

The staff of Bird Observer would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this issue, but most of all, we want to thank you, Ruth. Craig expressed sentiments which so many of us share with regard to you:

I hope that Ruth gains satisfaction from helping me to become a better birder, a better bird watcher, and most of all, a person more in touch with the world of nature. For my part, I will always consider it a great privilege to be able to call 472-7848 at almost any time to talk about, and to share our mutual love of, birds.

Ruth, we dedicate this issue to you in celebration of your eightieth! A belated Happy Birthday, and Many Happy Returns!