

## BIRDING WITH RUTH

by Wallace Bailey, Wellfleet

I've been birding with Ruth Emery for more years than I like to remember. Sounds ungallant, doesn't it? Truth is, those well-remembered years have brought a crick to my back, a squint to my eye, and more than a bit of sludge to my overdrive. Those same years have left Ruth unscathed -- as eager and enthusiastic a birding companion as ever. If I had her gumption, I wouldn't hesitate to count the years!

In fact, I do get a lift from Ruth's spirit. It comes from her enthusiasm about my birds. I never knew anyone else so honestly, generously, and unfailingly excited about somebody else's records. It is a rare gift, and it has won a flock of converts to bird study and warmed the hearts of a host of friends.

Indeed, we have shared some exciting birding during the last thirty years: an Ivory Gull on a bus trip in 1946; a European Whimbrel on Monomoy; a Great Gray Owl reputed to be somewhere among the snowbound mini-Himalayas of Gill. I remember that I panted and griped and clutched my two mending broken ribs as I slogged thigh-deep in wet snow. Right beside me slogged Ruth -- with five mending ribs and legs only half as long as mine! The Great Gray was worth the effort, but my cheers were wheezy compared to hers.

We have watched shearwaters with L.G. in a heaving cockleshell off Chatham and alcids from the arctic wastes of Andrews Point. We have tallied the specialties from Newburyport's Ross' Gull to Texas' Black-capped Vireo. Given Ruth's knowledge and long experience, it is easy to have enthusiasm for the likes of these.

But what about all those ho-hum days afield? The century run that bombed at eighty; the Christmas Census in the rain; the hours and miles lost to the vagrant that vanished? Those are the days we see Ruth's zest for living challenged and proved and her professionalism rated A+.

How many times in these thirty-plus years have I called Ruth (don't ask, she can probably look in the records and tell you!) to report today's list, propose tomorrow's trip, or ask the low-down on what's around. The voice on the 'phone is unfailingly cheerful, knowing, ready to share. Hey, Ruth -- how about the Cape tomorrow . . . ?