

INTRODUCTION

Marion Schiefer, Co-Editor

This issue of *The Mississippi Kite* is dedicated to articles written in memory of Judy Toups, who passed away on 27 February 2007. Judy was one of the best known birders in Mississippi during her lifetime. According to her son, Jay Toups, she started birdwatching in 1972. She took up painting earlier in that year, he says, and “many of her paintings featured birds.” Soon “she obtained a field guide and binoculars and began learning to identify each bird” (Toups 2007). JoRee Pease and Tish Machado both also mention in their articles written for this issue that Judy’s interest in birds began in the early 1970’s when her parents gave her a bird feeder.

Judy started birdwatching in her backyard in Gulfport, Mississippi, but she quickly expanded her range and knowledge to include all of Mississippi’s coastal counties. Before long she was recognized as an expert on Mississippi birds. She wrote a column about birdwatching for many years for the Gulfport-Biloxi newspaper, the *Sun Herald*, and taught a series of bird identification classes. She led her students and others interested in learning from her on field trips—a group that came to be known as the “Bushwhackers.”

Judy helped to found a local chapter of the Audubon Society named the Mississippi Coast Audubon Society, an organization that has played an important role in the

conservation of habitats for birds and other wildlife along the coast. She also became active in the Mississippi Ornithological Society (MOS) and served the organization as Secretary from 1977-1980, as Editor of the MOS Newsletter from 1981-1986, and as President from 1986-1988. She contributed many articles to *The Mississippi Kite* from 1976 through 1990 (see list in last article in this issue). Just looking at the titles of those articles indicates how much Judy contributed to Mississippi bird records. She also published articles in national birding magazines such as *Birder's World* and *Bird Watcher's Digest* and co-authored two books on birding on the Mississippi coast--*Birds and Birding on the Mississippi Coast* with Jerry Jackson as co-author in 1987 and *Guide to Birding Coastal Mississippi and Adjacent Counties* in 2004 with co-authors Jerry Bird and Stacy Peterson.

After Hurricane Katrina devastated coastal Mississippi in August, 2005, Judy led the efforts to help birds and other wildlife recover, an effort that came to be called "Operation Backyard Recovery." She also led in efforts to help birders who lost all or part of their homes to Katrina. But the after effects of Katrina ultimately forced Judy to move away from the coast she loved so much. According to her son, Jay, when his sister Christine lost her job about nine months after the storm because of economic slowdown in the coastal counties, she and their mother decided to relocate to Decatur, Alabama. By that time Judy's health was beginning to fail and by the beginning of February, 2007, her "health had declined noticeably." By February 27 she was gone (Toups 2007). As Dena and Don McKee said in a post to the Missbird listserv shortly after they heard of her death on that day, "All nature has lost a very dear friend" (McKee 2007).

This is just a brief summary of some of the many contributions Judy Toups made in encouraging and strengthening birding in Mississippi. As you continue to read the pages that follow, you will get a good idea of what her life meant to many of her friends and colleagues.

Literature Cited

McKee, Don and Dena. 27 Feb. 2007. Post to Missbird listserv, missbird@listserv.olemiss.edu. Hosted by the University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi.

Toups, Jay. 2007. Life and Times of Judith Toups, 1930-2007. The Judy Toups Trail.
<http://judithtoups.blogspot.com/2007/03/life-and-times-of-judith-toups.html>.