

IN MEMORIAM: OUR PAL, BUDDY HOPKINS

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and

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Anyone who had the distinct privilege of knowing Milton (Buddy) Hopkins for 60 years or more now revels in the memories of countless exchanges and communications with our beloved long-time friend, who passed away on 5 March 2007. His infectious grin, wholesome demeanor, and genuine warmth could always be read in his steady eyes, along with the humor which was never very far away.

Buddy could be a practical joker, but only rarely. Once he related the story of how he and a friend dug under a stump and found a live bobcat. It was caught, put it into an old suitcase, and left beside a lonely country road. As they backed off to watch, a car came along and a hand drew the suitcase into the car. As the car started to go, it suddenly swerved off into a pine thicket, all 4 doors flung open, and bodies (and bobcat) flew into the woods.

In addition to his highly readable and well-received books, we believe his own words in correspondence to Robert Norris (RAN) revealed something of the spirit and essence of this grand southern gentleman. What follows are excerpts from that correspondence:

[Sympathetic; 1 August 2004] “I liked Tom Earl Ireland very much (brother-in-law of RAN) and hated to hear of his passing. This Alzheimer’s disease is of the devil. Please give Nell Marie my best regards.”

[Modernization; 9 August 2001] “I can say with confidence and finality that I’ll never own a computer. I once read that Jimmy Carter said anyone could write a book if one just owned a word-processor, so I went out and bought one. I slowly pecked out 2 long pages, hit a wrong key and obliterated all. I think I gave the processor away.”

[Empathetic; 16 June 2001] “Bubba, Bonnie, and I have just quit killing rattlesnakes several years back. They are getting scarcer every year. Do you remember when you offered Jimmy Johnston 50 cents not to kill one?”

[Good-natured; 9 March 1997] In concluding a long letter, he wrote "More later but I've had a sip of bourbon and must still address this envelope quoting a chap named Keillor -- be well, do good work, and keep in touch."

[Naturalist; 9 March 1997] "I too don't run into much curiosity about the natural world. The Eurasian Collared-Doves often feed on the banks of Fitzgerald parking lots but only one person has asked me about them. You can bet that they (local folk) are up on the latest TV, flicks, politics, etc."

[Concern; 7 January 1997] While visiting Sapelo Island to participate in a bird count he wrote, "I called Herman Cooledge. He was using a walker and could hardly move along. He's now 80-81 and recently suffered a stroke. Sights of an old friend in his shape tear my heartstrings, for it hasn't been 8-9 years since he and I put in 8-10 mile walks on Sapelo Island."

[Life; 8 December 1996] "I don't care to be around the next fifty years. Fact is, I'd rather have lived my span in John James Audubon's time. Even so, we had the good fortune to live in some pretty interesting times, especially in the 1930s-1940s when things moved slower and there was still a lot of unsettled countryside."

Buddy's adventuresome spirit was legendary:

- Leading naturalists through chest-deep, snake-infested waters of a smelly herony;
- Walking while carrying on spirited conversations along miles and miles of Georgia beaches;
- Keeping watch for any vagrant waterfowl on nearby farm ponds;
- Floating Georgia's rivers in search of rare birds, snakes, and turtles;
- Doing loop-de-loops with his airplane;
- Riding rail cars;
- Removing screw-worms from a huge bull's penis;
- Toting a 200-lb sack of guano.

His mantra: "No task is too difficult to overcome if one sets his mind to it."

He was fortunate to know and be influenced by renowned naturalists and ecologists such as Francis Harper, Eugene Odum, and Herbert Stoddard. Buddy's countless field companions over the years, including William Dopson, John Crenshaw, Frankie Snow, and Bob Humphrey, enjoyed his adventures and gracious hospitality, and were witness to his mania for collecting. Buddy's collecting hobby began at an early age when he gathered miniature reproductions of birds by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. These began his long-time interest in identifying birds. Then came collecting practically anything in sight -- postcards, stamps, books, coins, Civil War memorabilia, Indian artifacts, ancient farm machinery, native plants for cultivation, and so on. When our

mail arrived, we could immediately recognize Buddy's envelopes, which were always plastered with old mint U.S. stamps from his collection.

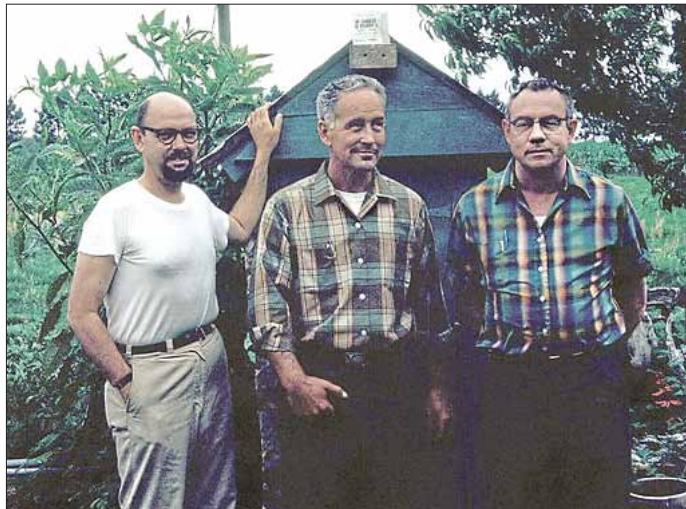
His recent (2001) book, *In One Place: The Natural History of a Georgia Farmer* (St. Simons Island [GA]: Saltmarsh Press), embodies the best of his farm life, along with his unfailing generosity and hospitality. All were welcome guests and comrades, single visitors, couples, and small groups, as well as large crowds of GOS members.

So often we both wish we could relive some of the field experiences we had with our loyal friend, Buddy Hopkins. We shall always treasure the memories of him as we knew him, and we'll buttress, amplify, and extend these memories whenever we reread his remarkably well-written book. In life, we, like so many others, felt enduring love for Buddy. With his passing, this love is stilled. We salute him.

Writing a fit epitaph in his own words, Buddy said: "God, what a revelation and classroom this life has been for a farm boy." (*In One Place: The Natural History of a Georgia Farmer*, p. 265.)

Editor's note: see also John Swiderski's memorial article about Buddy in the June 2007 GOShawk, the GOS newsletter:

www.gos.org/newsletters/200706-GOShawkJun07.pdf



From left to right: David Johnston, Milton (Buddy) Hopkins, and Robert Norris at Hopkins' farm in Fitzgerald, Georgia, circa 1950s.