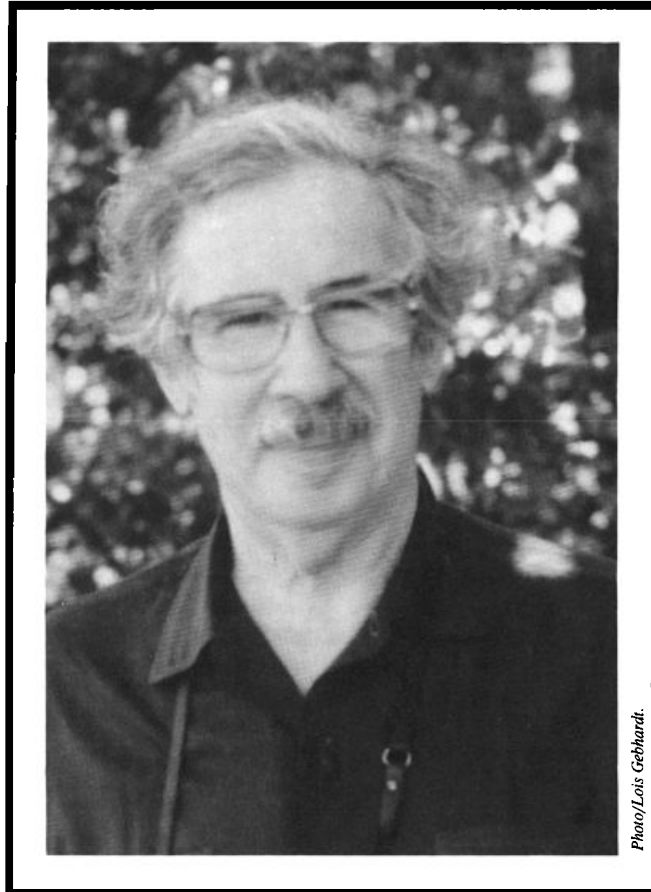


# In Memoriam

## Robert S. Arbib, Jr.



Photo/Lois Gebhardt

### *Susan Roney Drennan*

**R**OBERT ARBIB AND I WERE FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES in the development of *AMERICAN BIRDS* for more than a decade. He was so closely tied to its evolution and achievements, for so many years, that the man and *AMERICAN BIRDS* appeared to me as almost synonymous. Throughout his too-short life he maintained a deep interest in birds and, to a lesser degree, mammals. He was, as all our readers know, primarily interested in field studies of distribution, migration, and abundance.

This was a man of keen intelligence and great enthusiasms. His passion for birds, the environment, travel, art, wine, women, and song are legion. Throughout his life, he was a rich man indeed, because he was able, almost exclusively, to pursue his two great loves, birds and words. He pursued them with distinction.

Robert was born March 17, 1915, in Gloversville, New York, and raised in Woodmere on Long Island. Even as a young child, he was filled with the wonders of the natural world around him.

As a young man, he commuted from Long Island to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City to attend the meetings of the prestigious Linnaean



Bob Arbib birding with Southern Pacific Coast Regional Editor, Guy McCaskie, in 1973. Photo/Hugh E. Kingery.

Society of New York—this the oldest natural history society in America. Before becoming its president, Robert started the *Linnaean News-letter*, of which he was editor for eleven years. It is noteworthy that this year marks the fortieth anniversary of that publication.

By 1947, Arbib had become a founding member of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs. He was elected president of that organization in 1964. Up until his death, he was chairman of the Federation's research and publications committee. Nineteen forty-seven also saw Arbib become a member of the American Ornithologists' Union, the Cooper Ornithological Society, and the Wilson Ornithological Society. Later he was a founding member and secretary of the Hawk Migration Association of North America.

Robert Arbib attended Yale University and graduated as a biology major, a fitting foundation for his life's interest in ornithology. He served five years in the United States Army with the 36th Engineers Regiment before entering World War II. He was stationed mostly in France and England. During those years he wrote articles for the *London Daily Express*. After the war, Arbib further honed his writing skills as a copywriter for the Grey, Kenyon and Eckhardt, and D'Arcy advertising agencies. He retired from advertising in 1968.

In 1970, Robert Arbib became the editor of AMERICAN BIRDS, which, at that time, was called AUDUBON FIELD NOTES. This began a period in his life during which he made what many think of as his most significant impact on ornithology. He edited the magazine from November 1970 through February 1984. Under his editorship the magazine flourished. Its scope expanded, and his accomplishments were formally recognized in October 1985 when he was named co-recipient of the distinguished Arthur A. Allen Award from the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University.

As Les Line, editor of AUDUBON magazine has said, "Arbib was a genuinely talented writer for a popular audience." His first book, *Here We Are Together*, was pub-

lished nearly forty-five years ago in London. In 1965, he co-authored *The Hungry Bird Book* with a British colleague, Tony Sopher. In 1966, he co-authored *Enjoying Birds Around New York City* with Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. and Sally Hoyt Spofford. His biographical book about his birdwatching adventures as a youth, *The Lord's Woods*, written in 1971, won the coveted John Burroughs Medal. Robert's deep concern for the loss of our wild areas is evident throughout the book. *The Lord's Woods* stands as a fight against developers and exploiters of our natural heritage—a battle fought not with the sword but with the pen. It is a moving appeal, and if this book were Arbib's single lasting memorial, it would be quite enough.

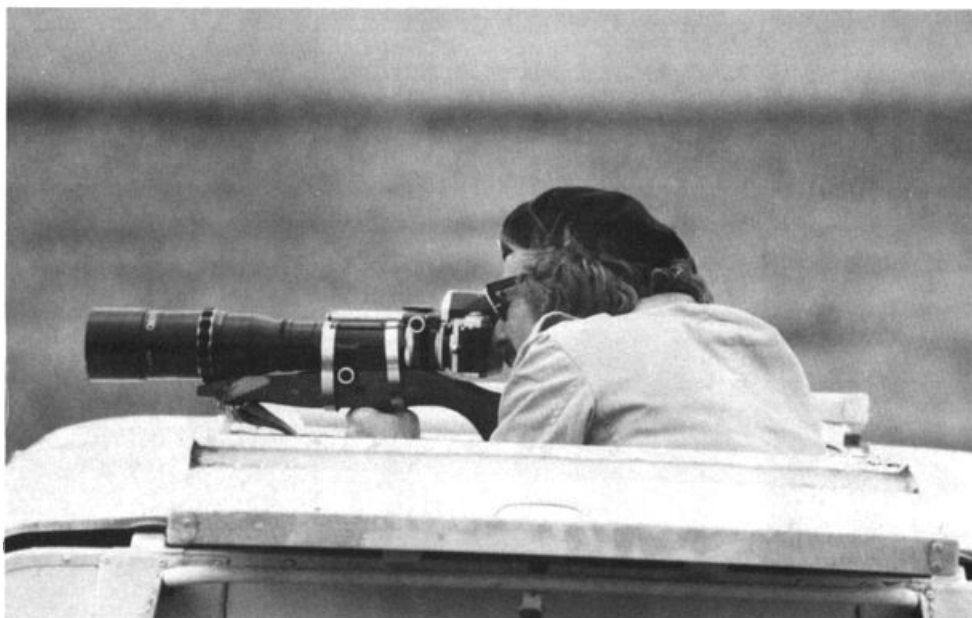
Roger Tory Peterson has written about Arbib:

Although Bob Arbib and I had known each other since we were young men and talked about birds a lot, we seldom joined each other on field trips except at ornithological meetings. In our youth the 5 or 6 years difference in our ages meant a lot. To a 20-year old, a 14-year old was just a kid.

I (an outsider) was allowed to join the tight little gang of bird-chasing teenagers in the Bronx ruled by Joe Hickey, and so exclusive were we that the next wave of youngsters, among them John Bull, formed their own club which they called the "Sialis Bird Club." Then we began hearing about still another competitive group of young birders who lived around Woodmere on suburban Long Island. This little club produced some of the sharpest field men of the future, including Bob Arbib, later to nourish AMERICAN BIRDS and bring to it his editorial skill and integrity.

Bob was a very gifted writer (he wrote speeches for Eisenhower and Stevenson) and, had he devoted more of his time to nature writing *per se*, he might have eclipsed even such classic favorites as Ed Teale and John Burroughs. In fact his book, *The Lord's Woods*, which won the Burroughs Award, is the most perceptive piece of writing about the evolution of a young birdwatcher from neophyte to hardcore expert that I have ever read. His writing has a sensual quality usually lacking in the literary attempts of most other writers about bird-watching or birding who give us plenty of facts but little feeling.

*Bob takes aim during a birding expedition to the Ngorongoro Crater, Africa, July 1973. Photo/W. Bousman.*



On his retirement, Bob, like several other editors I have known, intended to write more expansively. A book on owls had priority; no one would have written it better. This brings to mind a comment by my friend, the late James Fisher: "My only fear of dying before my time is that there are several books that only I could write that would not get written." Bob Arbib should have had another 20 years—at least 2 or 3 more books that only he could have written.

As Richard A. Sloss, a childhood friend, has commented, "I believe Bob's most precious gift was his ability to express himself lucidly, powerfully, and with beauty. He leaves a message in the pages of *The Lords Woods* which should not be forgotten."

When the news went out that Arbib had passed away on July 20, 1987, many of his friends wrote to *AMERICAN BIRDS*, almost all emphasizing his accomplishments with the magazine and his outstanding characteristics as a man. Frances C. James, Professor of Biology at Florida State University, wrote the following:

I was very sorry to learn that Bob Arbib passed away. He was a good friend. I enjoyed seeing him at meetings. We always discussed the unique role of *AMERICAN BIRDS* as a bridge between amateur and professional ornithology. . . . He enjoyed his role as editor and was properly proud of the product. His service to the National Audubon Society as editor of *AMERICAN BIRDS* was magnified many times by the knowledge and encouragement it brought to naturalists all over North America.

John P. Hubbard, Assistant Chief for Endangered Species for the State of New Mexico, wrote:

I am sorry to hear of the passing of Robert Arbib. Bob was both a friend and a practitioner of ornithology, and his 13-plus years of editorship of *AMERICAN BIRDS* will stand as a fitting monument to his contributions. In addition to keeping the magazine in the forefront of field (= interesting) ornithology, Bob also used his editorship to reinforce the role of the non-professional in contributing to the data base on North American birds. Bob did this in part by helping to expand the magazine to accommo-

date the increase of records. Frankly, if *AMERICAN BIRDS* had not served ornithology in this manner, I believe we would have a poor record indeed of the changing status of birds on this continent.

The sentiment expressed by Mary H. Clench, President of the Wilson Ornithological Society, was shared by many:

It's sad, indeed, to think that Bob is gone. He was a very special person in many ways. . . . I don't think that I've ever known any editor who was so passionate (in a quietly harried sort of way) about his journal. Bob did a superb job of *AB*—its growth during his editorship is his finest memorial.

One of Arbib's outstanding attributes was his willingness to try new ideas. Robert L. Norton, editor for the West Indies Regional Report, described that willingness:

My first contact with Bob was after returning from an extended visit to the Virgin Islands to feel out the prospects of a West Indies Regional Report. I hadn't gotten very far into justifying why I thought it might be of interest to readers of *AMERICAN BIRDS*, when Bob asked when he could expect to get the first insertion. Our last two meetings were at A.O.U. conferences in Chicago and New York where Bob, my wife, and I spent hours just swapping stories about travelling, birding, and his plans to lead various tours around the globe. Since the spring of 1979, Bob's interest and support of the "newest region," a "geographic outlyer" as we called it, was unfaltering. His knowledge of West Indian bird life and of people working in the Caribbean made my work easier and my career all the more rewarding. His impact was gentle, yet resounding.

A familiar sight on Christmas Bird Counts and big days was Arbib's car, with its conspicuous license plates spelling out the word *STRIX*. Hugh Kingery, Regional Editor for the Mountain West Region, provided this insight into Arbib's birding pleasures:

We had a regional editors "meeting" in Arizona in 1973 that Guy McCaskie, Fran Williams, and I attended, and we saw a lot of new birds. I particularly remember finding a Flammulated Owl calling, halfway up Mt. Lemmon,



*Pictured (left to right): Charles Wolcott, Executive Director of the Laboratory of Ornithology, Susan R. Drennan and Bob Arbib, co-recipients of the Arthur A. Allen Award, and Roger Tory Peterson at the award ceremonies in October 1985. Photo/C. Hadley Smith.*

near Tucson. Seeing that little owl in the beam of his flashlight gave Bob a particular thrill.

While working for the National Audubon Society, Arbib often led bird tours for the Society. William G. Bousman wrote this account of meeting Robert:

My wife and I went to East Africa in 1973 on an Audubon trip where we met Bob. After that we only kept up with Christmas cards and, of course, through AMERICAN BIRDS. On that field trip we always liked to think that he joined us Californians at dinner because of his love of wine and stimulating conversation. In fact, as a man of considerable charm and curiosity, he responded to anyone who was interesting and interested.

Jerry Jackson, editor in the Central Southern Region, summed up his impressions of Arbib this way:

I knew Bob primarily as a fellow editor. We had no long term association, just a regular interchange of ideas and ruminations about editorial matters. These took place at professional meetings two or three times a year and occasionally by an exchange of correspondence. I learned a great deal from him. Innovative, offbeat, an inquisitive student, a patient teacher, a righteous conservationist—that was Bob. We'll all miss the idiosyncratic editor!

As Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. said, "Bob Arbib's loss will be very deeply felt by us all."

For more than twenty years, he and his wife, Renee Johnson Arbib, lived in Mamaroneck, New York, where Arbib was a very active conservationist, as a director of Friends of the Marshlands, Inc., in neighboring Rye, New York, and as the first representative of the Jay Coalition, whose goal was the protection and preservation of the Jay

property, also in Rye. In September 1985, he was appointed to the Coastal Zone Management Commission for Mamaroneck.

Many in Mamaroneck will remember Robert as the man who brought cherry trees to that village. On January 30, 1968, when Arbib was the chairman of the Parks Commission, he put forward the idea of a cherry tree walk along the west basin of Harbor Island Park. He hoped that in time, it would be as lovely as the tidal basin in Washington, D.C. His proposal was that residents donate \$25 per tree in honor of or in memory of an individual or an organization. The idea met with immediate approval by the villagers; the day that this idea was announced in the local newspapers, the first check was delivered to the village manager. People rallied around the idea, so much so that hundreds of checks followed. Within two months, there were 353 trees subscribed. Most of these were planted around the basin, as he wished, and others were planted in nearby parks. Now, every May, those trees bloom and are savored by all who see them. Each was a gift with a special meaning to its particular donor, but together these trees make a living memorial to Mamaroneck from Robert Arbib, and a testimonial to the man himself.

Because Robert Arbib was sometimes a shy person, few people realized what a truly fun person he was. He had a lively sense of humor, and over the years, while we worked together, one of my biggest joys was making him laugh; in fact, sometimes causing him to forget all about his editorial dignity and to laugh until tears rolled down his cheeks. The memories of those occasions are my strongest of the man, and those are the ones that will stay with me as long as I live.