

In Memoriam

Frederic R. Scott, III

March 1, 1928–April 25, 2001

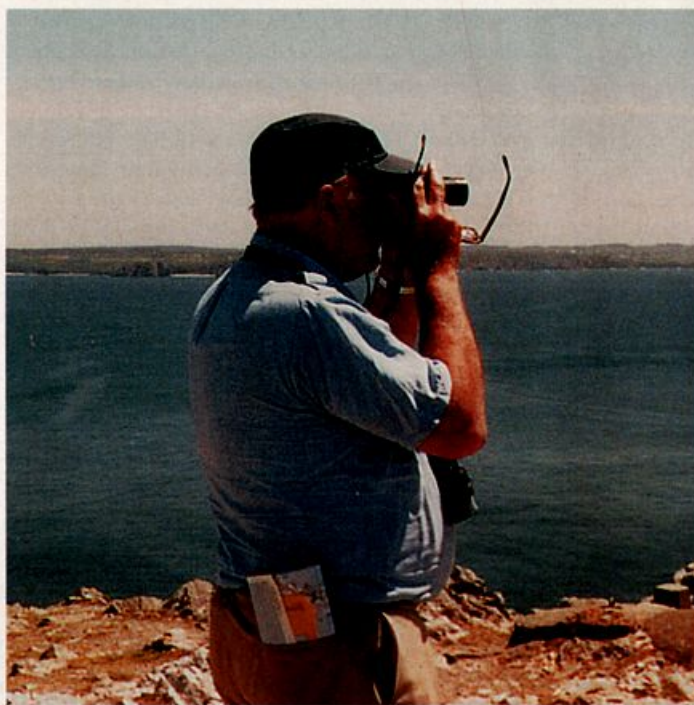
When Rich Stallcup's photograph of the male Cape May Warbler near Bolinas, California, arrived, the mind's eye turned instantly to that singular image of a male Cape May Warbler in a Flowering Dogwood that blazed forth from the cover of American Birds in September 1978. Birding was smaller then, perhaps more intimate or more naïve, and so many who received that issue in the mail were undone by it. It captured the spirit of spring, that elusive aesthetic language that draws so many birders back into the field with an almost feverish intensity. I recall Fred Scott, then Regional Editor for the Middle Atlantic, praising that sublime photograph, in words characteristically well-chosen.

As this issue goes to press in the first week of May, the dogwoods are in bloom, and warblers of many sorts forage among them, but a lion, one of our own, has passed away. Frederic R. Scott, "Fred" to everyone who knew him, served as Audubon Field Notes' Editor for the Middle Atlantic Coast region with Julian K. Potter from the first issue of Volume 12 (fall 1957) to the first issue of Volume 14. From winter 1959–1960 to spring 1975, David A. Cutler wrote the regional report with Fred, who was responsible for most of the Virginia material. With the redefinition in 1975 of the reporting regions (Delaware became part of the Hudson-Delaware region), Scott became sole editor of the Middle Atlantic region for American Birds, a region that includes the Piedmont and Coastal Plain of Maryland and Virginia, as well as the District of Columbia. He served in this capacity through the fall of 1979, his successor being Henry T. Armistead of Philadelphia, who remembers him here.

— Ed.

Fred Scott was one of my most important birding mentors. When after 23 years he stepped down as Middle Atlantic Coast Editor of *American Birds*, I was flabbergasted when he and Chan Robbins recommended me as his successor. But I swallowed hard, and tried harder, and this was probably the best thing to happen to me in my "career" as an amateur ornithologist. I lasted 14 years, and after 265,000 or so words, I thought the column was overdue for some new blood. Another mentor and friend, David A. Cutler, who shared the column with Fred for years, once said to me: "Fred Scott. There is a professional editor."

Fred had a lifelong interest in Virginia's avifauna and in particular the birds of Virginia's Eastern Shore. In his earliest years of birding in the 1940s, Fred would bicycle for a very full day from the West End of Richmond to the Curles Neck farming communities, a distance of some



40 miles round-trip; he kept records of every bird he saw then. After taking his B. S. in biology from Hampden-Sydney College in 1950, he earned his M.A. from the University of Michigan in 1952. That year, he started the Chincoteague Christmas Bird Count centered on that refuge back even before there was a bridge linking it to Assateague Island (and before there was a bridge to the Eastern Shore of Virginia). He compiled that count, in two years with help from Claudia Wilds, until 1990. He had founded the Hopewell, Virginia C.B.C. in 1944 at age 26 and was its compiler for 40 years. He also did early C.B.C.s in such places as remote Cobb Island, the Chesapeake Bay mouth (by the old ferry system), and Cape Charles.

Sitting in the dining room of the Tour-Inns Motor Lodge at Kiptopeke one early fall day, Fred and friends observed through the

motel windows a flood of flickers, warblers, and other migrants passing north along the bluff. This moment—the first inkling of the enormity of the autumn bird passage at this site (and of “reverse migration” here)—was the inspiration for the start of the Kiptopeke landbird banding station that Fred, Walter P. Smith, Mike and Dorothy Mitchell, Charles W. Hacker, John H. Grey, Paul W. Sykes, and others began in September 1963 in cooperation with the national program *Operation Recovery*. Fred was the station’s Director until Walter Smith took over in 1985. Kiptopeke has been in continuous operation since 1963, with well over 260,000 birds of over 180 species banded. There is now a major raptor banding station and a raptor census station as well. Without Fred’s foresight, energies, and pioneering interest, these operations might not have flourished as they have for the past nearly four decades.

Fred was a big man, tall, with an impressive bearing, a ruddy, bald head but always with a twinkle in his eye and a gift for playful, sardonic humor and good will. I remember watching his large hands deftly and gently handle delicate kinglets at the banding station, just as deftly as he would later pop nuts into his mouth at Happy Hour in Walter Smith’s room at the Edgewood Motel on fall afternoons after a day’s banding.

One time, when I was servicing mist nets at Kiptopeke, I saw in the distance what looked like an enormous flicker lying in the trammels. A closer inspection revealed a rubber chicken waiting for its band. I was not surprised when I learned how it got there. A *bon vivant*, Fred once took me in his Boston Whaler to Tangier Island in the central Chesapeake Bay. At noon, after we had surveyed various small islands and tumps, some with small tern colonies, he observed the call for whiskey and a cigar under a blazing July sun while I favored pepperoni, salami, and other salty, fat-filled

foods. He appreciated my jest that Tangier should do an Environmental Impact Statement in the aftermath of our repast. Once at dinner at Paul’s Restaurant in Cheriton I remember listening to Fred hold forth on all the different kinds of German and other sausages he had savored on a recent European trip; he went on for 10 minutes or more. (He and fellow Kiptopeke banders were responsible for making the Crab Imperial the birder’s meal of choice at Paul’s for decades.) Fred loved classical music, though not a musician, he was member of the Musicians’ Club, of the original Chamber Music Society, and of the Richmond Chamber Players. He helped find a home for Richmond’s only classical music station at Union Theological Seminary’s former building. He was an urbane man without airs from a sophisticated city.

Fred’s contributions to the ornithology of the mid-Atlantic, beyond his 41 regional reports in *Audubon Field Notes* and *American Birds*, were many, leading the list over 80 scholarly contributions published in the Virginia Society of Ornithology’s journal *The Raven*, his earliest being an essay on the 1953 spring migration in Virginia. He wrote on Bachman’s Warbler in Virginia, on nesting Red Crossbills on Shenandoah Mountain and the great crossbill invasion of 1963–1964, on summering Golden-winged Warbler and Black-capped Chickadee, as well as on vagrants he found, such as a Western Grebe on the York River in 1963. His subjects ranged from Appalachia and the Shenandoah Valley to the barrier islands of the Eastern Shore, still very remote territory in mid-century. After 15 years as Associate Editor under J. J. Murray (1955–1969), Fred assumed the Editorship of *The Raven* for issues from September 1969 until 1988, and he served as Editor Emeritus throughout the 1990s. He worked for the V.S.O. in countless other capacities, leader of field trips, organizer and

compiler of bird counts and forays, and editor of Christmas Bird Count data, in which he was succeeded by Teta Kain, also his successor as *Raven* editor and compiler of the Chincoteague C.B.C. He was instrumental in helping to get Virginia’s breeding bird atlas off the ground and himself conducted many breeding bird surveys. Fred, along with Jackson Abbott and others, carefully documented the decline of Bald Eagles in Virginia through censuses in the 1960s and 1970s. He served on the Governor’s Task Force for Caledon State Park, a crucial site for the protection of eagles. His efforts on their behalf were recognized with an award from the National Audubon Society in 1983.

But his productivity in the literature on birds and in bird conservation hardly defined Fred for his friends. It was his gentlemanly demeanor, his gregariousness, his powerful laugh and discerning sense of humor that won over three generations of Atlantic birders and ornithologists. With Dr Mitchell A. Byrd, Fred surely shares the accolade dean of Virginia ornithology. He was in the finest sense a professional amateur ornithologist. He is and will be missed.

Rest in peace, Fred.

—Henry T. Armistead

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