

In Memoriam

Robert L. Sutton

July 9, 1943—July 22, 2002

On 22 July 2002, birder, environmentalist, and friend Robert L. Sutton of Manchester Parish, Jamaica, was killed by stabbing during a robbery of his home, Marshall's Pen—a place intimately known to thousands of birders and ornithologists across the planet. His wife, Ann Haynes Sutton, likewise a prominent ornithologist and conservationist, was also stabbed, robbed, and abducted but survived the attack.

We do not often read or write of events such as this in *North American Birds*, and it saddens us deeply to include them here. Robert Sutton was not only synonymous with Jamaican ornithology to so many: he was universally known as a kind and gentle man, a marvelous host, and a patient counselor and listener. His knowledge of Caribbean birdlife was shared generously with countless people—students, researchers, development specialists, photographers, journalists, and government officials. He volunteered regularly to teach the art and skill of birding to local people and to take members of the Natural History Society of Jamaica and the Gosse Bird Club into the field. And he was the local guide for virtually every organized birding tour or group that visited the island. His patience and wit were apparent to all who spent time with him.

To so many of us who spent time at Marshall's Pen, Robert Sutton seemed a man of a gentler era. His roots on Jamaica extended back to 1655, and he was a direct descendant of Richard James, the first baby born in Jamaica under English rule. His father, who passed away in 1998 at the age of 97, often gave tours of the family estate and the history of the family, which includes the Robert Sutton who founded the London Stock Exchange.

Robert was born on July 9, 1943 in Mandeville, where he was schooled and eventually attended DeCarteret College, but he also learned much about cattle ranching at an early age, on the family property in Manchester. He managed cattle herds on properties in the parishes of St. Elizabeth and Westmoreland until 1979, when he took over his father's business. His accomplishments as a cattle breeder were substantial (particularly with Jamaican Redpolls), with some of his stock taking prizes. Robert was rooted to the land and the local people. His family donated land for the nearby Mike Town Community Centre and the Mike Town Missionary Church, and he was a regular at Community Council meetings. He was sponsor of the Mike Town Basic School, a past president of the Manchester Horticultural Society, and treasurer of the Jamaica Junior Naturalists.

A self-taught naturalist, Robert was a tireless promoter of the wild beauty of his native island. He counseled many hundreds of visiting naturalists and researchers throughout his adult life. In 1997, he was a consultant to the BBC Natural History Film Unit on David Attenborough's *Life of Birds*, as well as for the 1995 production *Spirits of the Jaguar*. Environmental impact statements were another strong suit, from the JAVAMEX Project for CIDA in 1977, to the Royal Palm Reserve Project for the Petroleum Corporation of Jamaica in 1987, to the problem of bird strikes, for the Airports Authority of Jamaica a decade ago. Through all of this, Ann was a constant advisor, companion, and partner, who assisted Robert with his projects while spearheading many of her

own conservation initiatives and maintaining Marshall's Pen as a refuge for both birds and birders. At the time of his death, Robert was helping Ann in studying birds of the Portland Bight Protected Area and trying to identify ways to promote conservation in the area through sustainable eco-tourism. A master bander through the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Robert and Ann banded thousands of birds on Jamaica over three decades, and Robert gathered data on weather as well, faithfully forwarding his findings to the Jamaican Meteorological Service.

Birders will long know the name Robert Sutton through his publications. Together with his cousin, Audrey Downer, Robert published *Birds of Jamaica: a Photographic Field Guide* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); with Georges Reynard, he published *Bird Songs in Jamaica* (Cornell University Press, 2000). Most sadly, Robert's ideas for an exhaustive monograph on the island's avifauna were not carried out before he was taken from us. As his obituary from the *Gleaner* in Jamaica read: "He was just beginning to set down for the rest of us the wealth of knowledge he had gained over his lifetime and was planning a new book and a new series of sound recordings. His untimely death is a great loss to the environmental community, and to the environment itself. In his own quiet (and unsung) way, this Jamaican man has made a serious and lasting contribution to our understanding of Jamaica's natural history."

Robert, you are missed beyond measure.

—Edward S. Brinkley

—Richard C. Hoyer

The Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds, with the assistance of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, has established a Memorial Fund to honor Robert Sutton's life and work. The funds will support an aspect of Jamaican bird conservation especially important to Robert (a project to be announced in the Society's journal *El Pitirre*). To contribute to the fund, please send a check made out to National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (and with "Robert Sutton Memorial Fund" in the check's memo space, *very important*) to:

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Suite 900
1120 Connecticut Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will then send a thank-you letter with a tax-deductible donation credit.