

In Memory of Harry

If you knew Harry Spencer, you knew he was the very heart and soul of Black River Audubon Society. Board member, treasurer, president, bluebird monitor, Wingtips editor, field trip regular, Harry did it all. He did everything with a quiet grace that welcomed everyone to the joys of birding. We were all made richer by his presence in our lives.

When Harry Spencer retired and joined Black River Audubon Society he did so with much enthusiasm. As president and Wingtips editor he brought BRAS into the age of technology. He spent a great deal of time and energy improving the organization to make it what it is today. He did much to encourage and guide others with his quiet, friendly works. He will truly be missed. (Carol Leininger)



Harry tending his bluebird trail.

It has been very rewarding to know Harry. When I started working on the Black River Audubon website, I knew little about birds; he taught me a lot. He was my go-to person for bird identification. We began posting to the website with the February 2008 issue. Since then all are on the website. The back issues are a tribute to him. (Arlene Lengyel)

I first met Harry in 1985 when he retired from Eastman Kodak and came to teach in the Oberlin College chemistry department for a number of years. At the time neither of us was birding, so it was a pleasant surprise to find we shared a common interest when I returned to birding in 2005.

We immediately began birding together and did so often, mostly at one of the Carlisle Reservation trails, which Harry knew intimately. He knew where you were likely to find elusive birds such as a yellow-breasted chat or a cerulean warbler or when the bobolinks would return. Harry birded for the pleasure of the experience, not for generating a life list. He appreciated any bird he saw. But he did keep a daily list for posting on eBird. As a scientist, he knew the value of collecting good data. When possible Harry took along his Cairn terrier, Star. He attached her leash to his waist so his hands were free for his binoculars and camera. Sometimes when I walked Carlisle alone, a dog walker would enquire about Harry if they had not seen him for a while.

Harry had a strong commitment to BRAS and was constantly looking for ways to get others involved, and I soon was one of his converts. Harry always saw what was possible and brought out the best in others with his gentle manner, good humor, insight, and patience.

Since we both lived in Oberlin, Harry and I carpoled to most activities. On birding outings Harry required that he be home by noon. His wife, Peg, was unable to go on regular field trips but every day they took a lunch and drove to a spot where they could eat and observe birds. Wellington Upground Reservoir and the Lake Erie shore in Vermilion were two of their favorite spots.

Harry touched every aspect of my experience with birding. I am thankful for the friendship we shared and will miss him greatly. (Marty Ackermann)

Harry was one of the first people I met when I joined Black River Audubon four years ago. He always enjoyed discussing the Navy where we both served. The thing about Harry that I will always remember is how much he was committed to advancing the goals of Black River Audubon. And on a personal note, Harry was very helpful in trying to allow me to hear birdcalls, even though my old hearing aids didn't pick up the high frequencies. Harry was really delighted when I got new ones that would allow me to hear birds I had never heard before. He will be missed by all who knew him. (Larry Wilson)

Harry always had positive words to say to me. He always looked for ways he could help grow membership. He is now with his precious Peg looking for those ivory-billed woodpeckers. May he rest in peace. I will miss you Harry. (Betsy Miles)

When I first met Harry, I had volunteered to write articles for our publication Wingtips. He was so happy that I agreed to help, his smile was from ear to ear. I don't know whether he knew if I could write or not, he was just glad that someone offered to help. After I submitted my first article, Harry emailed me back hoping that I would become a regular contributor and now I am an editor. I spoke with Harry at our February 2017 program and he told me he always looked forward to reading my articles for Wingtips because he appreciated that I wrote my own personal experiences with the bird and it made my stories more enjoyable. It was my last conversation with Harry and I will always remember his kind words. Harry was often soft-spoken but always honest and direct when necessary. I will miss him dearly. You earned your "wings" Harry. (Cathy Priebe)



Harry on a field trip, July 2016

Like our founder, Jack Smith, Harry was a great advocate for educating and involving our young people in environmental education and conservation. He encouraged and supported me as education chairperson in getting Audubon Adventures into classrooms and providing scholarships to educators to the Hog Island environmental education camp.

Harry initiated the idea of members adopting a trail and regularly monitoring it with eBird with the goal of establishing a Lorain County birding trail using data to let visitors know where to go to find different species.

Harry always had the BRAS mission in mind when discussing issues and was able to cut to the core of the discussion and suggest a solution that met our mission.

Above all, I will remember Harry for his compassion for people and his extraordinary kindness. (Dick Lee)

I am happy that the last time I saw him was at a Black River Audubon meeting when he was happy, spunky, and responsive to our speaker. Godspeed, Harry. You will be missed. (Tammy Martin)

During his long and valuable association with Black River Audubon, Harry Spencer provided key leadership and effectively supported Jack Smith's wish for the continuation of Jack's vision for the organization.

As President he revised the By-Laws providing for clearer guidelines and more active participation by Board chairs, adding the establishment of co-chairs where indicated. As a Board member, he served in several capacities, most recently as Treasurer, as he continued to be involved with growth and management.

He developed the web site and participated in its operation as it improved, expanded its reach, and became the current attractive and comprehensive picture of Black River Audubon available to members, prospective members and other interested viewers. He was an advocate and a perceptive critic, both valuable assets for any organization. And he was an avid birder, one of the most faithful of members in participating in field activities regardless of weather.

My initial reaction that I shared with some of you: Harry is one of those people who will live forever in the memory of the many who knew him and appreciated his uniqueness. (Harriet Alger)

My friendship with Harry was short, barely a handful of years but his influence in my life was impossible to measure. His knowledge of birds, identification by sight and call, was something I can only aspire to and his patience and enthusiasm in pointing out species new to me during bluebird trail walks was motivating. Harry had a child-like curiosity, a quick intelligence, a quiet but wry sense of humor. I always felt his support for the bluebird program we recently started coordinating for Black River Audubon and his approval of its growth. The last time I saw Harry he asked me to "wow" his daughter with the numbers of fledglings from that program and the sparkle in his eyes during my answer told all of us that he took much personal satisfaction from imagining the hundreds and hundreds of fledgling native birds listed. It is because of great men like Harry that our children and grandchildren will have a richer and more beautiful world to explore and enjoy. We feel the loss of his presence but know that this world is a better place because of his walk among us. (Penny Brandau)

I nearly missed my last, and best, visit with Harry. We were co-editors of Wingtips and I needed to visit him at his house to correct a problem I was having with the April edition. He suggested that I join him for dinner that evening. I was rather busy at the time and considered declining. Something told me, though, that I could always make time for Harry and I accepted. I am certainly glad I did; it gave me another chance to take part in the wonderful conversations that we always had together. We had a great time talking in his beautiful home, appropriately surrounded by trees on the edge of Oberlin. I also met, once more, his faithful dog Star who came to greet me and see me off.

Harry certainly was the most cordial person I ever met; yet one who in his devotion to Black River Audubon Society let his opinions be known without causing animosity. A very rare gift, indeed. Perhaps my best memory was the pleasure he took in his last meeting when the teenaged speaker related his Hog Island experiences. To see the future of birding assured gave Harry such pleasure despite the obvious effects of his last illness. Harry was a role model for all of us. (Jim Jablonski)



Happy Birding, Harry!

The first time I spent with Harry was on the Wellington Christmas Bird Count hiking Charlemont on a cold, dreary day. Harry brightened the day with his Day-Glo orange cap and his sharp wit. He gently informed us it was hunting season and we should have something bright on too. Harry had a way of giving helpful hints with a twinkle in his eye. Over the last few years I have been trying to take pictures of birds and submitted some to Wingtips. I sent Harry a picture I thought was worthy of publication, but when it didn't make the cut I asked why. Harry said it was because he couldn't see the eye of the bird and that is what gave it spark. Harry had that spark in his eye. I am grateful to have known Harry. He will be missed. (Sally Fox)



Harry, front and center at Eagle Point Nature Preserve, doing what he loved most with (l-r) Nina Love, Marty Ackermann, Paul Sherwood and Barb Knapp.

Harry was always a fun loving guy who would get excited by the sounds and sights he heard and saw while birding. Once on the Christmas bird count we saw about thirty horned larks. Although it was snowing and windy we stopped to count and listen to them call to each other. Harry became excited just watching, listening and counting them. Another time we were at Sandy Ridge Reservation when it had been raining a lot. When it finally stopped I began to take off my rain gear and two sandhill cranes that happened to be nearby became startled and started to make a lot of noise. They kept it up for about fifteen minutes. Larry Wilson, Arlene Ryan, Marty Ackermann and Harry just laughed and laughed. Harry loved to laugh and we all loved to laugh with him. Even as I relive the event tears stream down my face. Harry was loved by us all; I wish I had hugged him a few times.

Hopefully everyone who reads this gets to know the other members of this group. We love to laugh together and Harry was our influence; he was so much fun to be around. I will miss him so much. (Doug Cary)

Dear Harry:

We never had a chance to say goodbye—so quickly you soared to the heavens! I am convinced Providence had a purpose for this abrupt departure. Perhaps it was the call to share in another realm your kindness, teaching and great appreciation of nature and beauty. Down here on earth we hold to your exceptional goodness and wisdom as sacred living memories and thank God that we had the privilege to know you.

We sense your frequent presence at the dinner table where we had profoundly inspiring discussions, all the while you were smiling and your blues eyes were twinkling with warmth and enthusiasm; and Star was at your side.

In bird walks your instructions—on communicating the location of birds and photographing them by focusing on their eyes—remain with me. You taught me about writing for Wingtips. How sweet the success of pleasing you!

Your wisest advice was that we should live each day to its fullest with the utmost gratitude for being alive. You inspired us to follow your example!

Our last bird walk with you was on Hale Road looking particularly for trumpeter swans. Never saw them, but something else drew my camera's attention, perhaps an omen of your impending departure on wings toward some marvelous destiny.

Thank you Harry! We miss you very much! (Barbara Baudot)



Harry and Star, both departing, 2017

Harry Spencer
1927-2017



If you read the personal memorials to Harry Spencer, it should not come as a surprise that he was a native of *Friendship*, New York. His cordial, happy and gentle nature filled him with a love of life that drew others to him. His love of nature and especially birds were legendary in our area and inspired others to the same activities.

Harry's final years, as all of ours, brought heartache as he lost his beloved wife, Peg, and was preparing to move from his lovely home just prior to his death. Still, he was always among friends, attending Black River Audubon Society meetings and birding during poor winter weather up to the very end. His term on the Society's board was ending but he made every meeting until the last one, just days after his passing.

Even as this is written, I find myself thinking that I must hurry to get the pages of this issue to him for proofreading before I remember. Still, I hope he likes it.

Above photo by Barbara Baudot