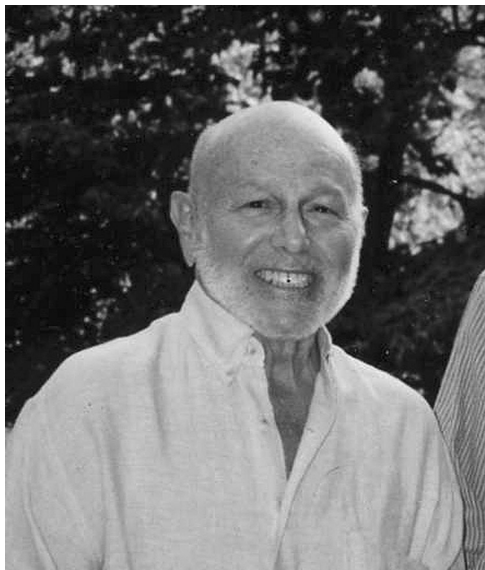


Obituaries

David A. Cutler 1925-2004



It is with heavy heart that we record the passing of Dave Cutler. Dave was one of the towering figures of DVOC: a member for 60 years, Fellow and Life Member, twice elected to Council, and Honorary Member. He succeeded his brother Herb as the Club's Field Trip Chairman in 1952, and he also served on the Club's Nominating Committee with George Reynard. He was influential in the initial studies of shorebirds in Delaware Bay, and was a charter member of the Delmarva Ornithological Society (DOS). He succeeded the legendary Julian Potter as Mid-Atlantic Regional Editor for *Bird Lore* and its successor, *North American Birds*, starting in the early 1960's. Compiling region-wide records is a yeoman's task, but Dave did this for more than 40 years. His renown was such that he was written up by *Time* magazine in the 1960's, at a time when birding had not penetrated the popular culture to the extent that it has today. But most importantly, Dave was a friend and mentor to all; an ace birder to the end; and one who saw birding as, first and foremost, people and fun.

Dave started birding early. He grew up in West Philadelphia, the son of a long-time Philadelphia police detective, and was birding by the age of 12. He was encouraged by his older brother Herb, the Boy Scouts, and the Comstock Society, but it was seeing a male Hooded Warbler at an outlet pipe at Centennial Lake in Fairmount Park as a youngster that struck the spark. For Dave, as for so many birders, it was one bird - one sighting - that made all the difference.

While he was still a teenager, World War II intruded. On Pearl Harbor Day, when he was 16, he lied about his age and joined the Navy. He thought that the December 1941 Bombay Hook Christmas Bird Count might be the last one he'd ever participate in. Fortunately, he enjoyed 58 more counts, 53 as compiler.

But Dave didn't let the war prevent him from birding. While on duty with the Navy Air Corps in Rhode Island he birded with the legendary Ludlow Griscom. On one such occasion, Griscom looked at a Great Black-backed Gull and said, presciently: "Some day there'll be Lesser Black-backed Gulls here too." For a time he was stationed in Alameda, California. To make the best of his stay, he attended meetings of the Cooper Ornithological Society and birded with shorebird expert Eunice Kelly and museum curator Robert Storer. Dave's best find during that stint was California's first (Nelson's) Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

By profession Dave was an engineer. He graduated from the University of Denver with a degree in engineering, after only three years. He told his sister that he needed to get out and make money. He came back to Philadelphia to work as Walter Annenberg's right-hand man, and set up newspaper plants all over the country. His expertise was in color printing. He set up the color printing process for the *Miami Herald* at a time when it was unprecedented to have color pictures in newspapers. He eventually set up his own company for recycling paper, in Wyncote, PA.

Dave joined DVOC in 1944 at the age of 19. DVOC was very exclusive in those days, and the club kept him waiting for 5 years before finally admitting him. Can you imagine a 14-year-old asking the vaunted DVOC of that era to admit him as a member? He related that one requirement for admission was being able to recite the Latin names of 100 birds. Even though Dave had proven his birding prowess and made some rare finds, it took a push from Julian Potter, DVOC's leading light, before the club would admit someone so young.

Dave's adventures in birding have included some unusual experiences. For instance, he hitchhiked from Philadelphia to Mexico to be part of the first Christmas Bird Count ever conducted in that country, in San Luis Potosi, where he found Mexicans using slingshots to kill birds for food. On another early trip to Mexico, an eight-week collecting expedition organized by Louisiana State University, he learned how to shoot and skin birds. To bird Mexico before 1952, he and his brother Herb had to create their own field guide, making drawings from records of Griscom's previous collecting expeditions. No field guide existed. Before they left for Mexico, the legendary James ("Jim") Bond gave the Cutler brothers guidance from the Mexican birds in the Academy's skin collection.

Dave made a number of rare and extralimital finds. One great find, in the 1960's, was an immature Long-tailed Jaeger - in Lincoln, Nebraska, of all places. Dave saw it sitting on an island while he was swimming at a local lake with his family. It was a first state record. Cassinia records a number of the early finds made by Dave in the Delaware Valley. These include nesting Great Blue Herons at Centennial Lake in Fairmount Park in 1944, an Audubon's Shearwater off Asbury Park, NJ on July 29, 1951, and the second North American record of Pink-footed Goose on November 1, 1953 at Bombay Hook. Another major find was the second Delaware record of Brewer's Blackbird.

Dave never seemed to forget a bird. A couple of years ago, when one of us (A.E.) told Dave excitedly about a Yellow Rail found in April at Bombay Hook, his comment was "oh yeah, we had them there with Buckalew back in 1938." That was over 60 years earlier, when he was only 13! When Martin Selzer and Bert Filemyr found a Northern Lapwing on the 2000 Bombay Hook Christmas Bird Count, Dave

commented that it was in the exact same spot as the one found by Johnny Miller in 1952. It was impossible to get "one up" on him. He was always excited about your finds, while quietly telling you about his own.

Despite all his other birding accomplishments, Dave is perhaps most renowned for organizing and running his famous Delaware "May Runs," which later served as a model for the World Series of Birding. He did this every year for fifty-five years. The Cutler brothers began doing these Big Days back in 1948, starting sometimes in Pennsylvania but normally spending most of the day in Delaware. The core regulars were Harry Armistead, Carl Perry, Howard Brokaw, and Dave Cutler. But it was the policy of this group to add an outside guest, or monitor, on many of the runs. Previous participants include such illustrious birding names as Pete Dunne, Will Russell of Wings, Kenn Kaufman, Ted Parker, Jeff Gordon, Arnold Small of California, Bob Pyle, Johnny Miller, Davis Finch of Wings, Joe Cadbury, John Janowski, Herb and Betty Cutler (originators), Dick Miller, Charlie Wonderly, Bob Sehl, Alan Brady, Jim Merritt, and many other DVOCers, including ourselves. Dave said that the participants were as interesting as the birds, and the laughs were many. The Cutler team still holds the Delaware state single-day record of 201 species (205 prior to the ABA's current rules). It never lost its competitive edge: in 2003, the Cutler-Perry team had 193 species, Andy Ednie's team 191, Mary Gustafson's 191, and Jim Lenhard's had 189.

Along the way on the runs, there were a few shockers. Like the year when the first bird identified – at 12:10 AM – was a staked-out Cerulean Warbler! It was on nest, and its extended tail was seen in the beam of a flashlight that had been mounted on a telescope taped to a tree the previous evening. Time Magazine ran a story about the famous Cutler team in its June 2, 1967 issue. It had this to say: "In Delaware, Dave Cutler, who can identify more than 200 birds by song alone, led his five-man team over 500 miles of wind-swept back roads. Armed with a supply of cherry bombs (to startle sleeping birds into song) and a portable tape player programmed with 42 different calls, the team identified 187 species."

Looking back on a lifetime of adventures with birds and birders, there is little doubt what attracted Dave the most: the people and the laughs. Dave's greatest accomplishments were the encouragement of

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youth birding; creating a spirit of cooperation among birders; and always acting as a gentleman. He will be sorely missed by the birding community. His life will be remembered equally for his contributions to ornithology as a science, and to birding as enjoyment. Dave leaves behind his two sons and a daughter, three brothers and a sister, and his good friend Kieren.

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Helen C. McWilliams **1923-2005**

Helen McWilliams passed away peacefully at her Swarthmore home on Aug. 30, 2005. An avid birder, naturalist, competitive gardener and flower arranger, she was one of the first women to join DVOG in 1983.

In Delaware County, Helen mentored birders young and old, organizing local field trips and always including new birders. She shared the traditional hot spots and her special birding places. Surprisingly, few birders can remember where they met Helen, and each one feels they always knew her and birded with her. She encountered many of her fellow-birders at Tyler Arboretum, Lima, PA, now part of the Upper Ridley/Crum Important Bird Area (IBA), where she and her late husband Jack played a major role in its support. Helen taught nature education courses at Tyler and at local grade schools. She led bird walks

and gave bird programs for a variety of organizations. In 1973 she discovered a Red-breasted Nuthatch nest in Swarthmore for a first Delaware County breeding record. Helen participated in the Glenolden Christmas Bird Count for decades. Her home was the lunch stop for the Swarthmore team and even when she was no longer able to bird, the Swarthmore team always joined her for lunch. She also “block-busted” in Wayne Co. for the 1st Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas.

Helen is survived by her daughter Mimi (Mary Margaret) of Swarthmore and sons John and Will and their families.

Doris McGovern
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