

Bucks County Birder Profile

Ron French

Article by Chuck Crunkleton

Born - Kensington section, Philadelphia, Pa.

Age - 70

Resides - Chalfont, Pa.

Life List - 2448

North America Life List - 699 (I think it's more, but he's holding out for a good one for 700!)

Property List - 195

Favorite Field Guide - The original "Peterson's Field Guide"

Favorite Book About Birds - "Last of the Curlews" by Fred Bodsworth

Best Birding Location You've

Visited - Turkey

What Has Birding Taught You - How fragile life is in general

Which Historical Figure Would

You Like To Have Birded With - Theodore Roosevelt

Person Who Most Influenced Your Passion For Birds - Fred Mears
Favorite Bird - "They're all my favorites"

Ron French is a respected and admired member of the local birding community around PeaceValley and eastern Pennsylvania. Almost everyone seems to know him and care deeply about him. But what has brought Ron to this lofty plateau? Ron was raised by his grandparents in the city, and had little exposure to nature. But his grandmom liked to show him the local House Sparrows and European Starlings and get him to watch their habits.



Photo by Ray Hendrick



Long Tailed Duck pencil drawing by Ken Kitson

Occasionally, he would spend weekends with his cousin in Croyden (the other end of the world) and he had the chance to go exploring the woods and fields. All this sparked his interest in nature and birds.

As a teen, Ron enjoyed acting on stage. This led to various roles in amateur theater which lasted into his forties. He performed at Town & Country Players and the Jenkintown Music Theater, among others, and starred in such plays as "Night Must Fall", "Kiss Me Kate" and "Man of La Mancha". He was president of Town & Country Players in 1969.

He entered the army at the age of 20, and was stationed in Panama. Luckily, he didn't have to serve in the infantry. He was probably the only one there who looked at the local birds, even if he could only identify the Black Vultures.

In 1958, during a cocktail party after a play, he noticed people kidding a man about bird-watching. Interested, Ron talked with him, and a lifelong friendship began with Fred Mears. He was invited to go the next day to Brigantine with Fred, Charlie Price and Johnny Miller, all of whom would become big names in birding. Ron was in good company and his passion for birds grew quickly.

During the 60's, Fred received a bird banding license at Island Beach State Park in New Jersey, and Ron would help every chance he got. To be able to hold a bird in the hand, weigh it, measure it, and enjoy its' beauty gave him a great education. Ron

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developed a slide show program using the pictures they took and went around to local schools and taught young children about birds. Ron eventually went on to hold the title of 1st Vice-President of the Eastern Bird Banding Association.

He moved to a house on Creek Road in Chalfont 1961, and watched the progression of the nearby meadow into Lake Galena. In 1975, Peace Valley Nature Center was born. In the 60's and 70's, Ron and Fred and friends would bird every chance they got, locally and nationally. Fred eventually got a job as Naturalist at Peace Valley and instituted the Saturday morning bird walks, which he led until 1989. Ron took over the reins at that time and spent the next 13 years building up the program with local field trips.

Ron moved back to Philadelphia in 1984 to the Chestnut Hill section near the Wissahickon Creek and became an active member of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, "DVOC".

He also began to travel on field trips out of the country, first going to Costa Rica with DVOC, and also using Field Guides, a bird tour group. Ecuador, Venezuela, Brazil, Iceland, Sweden, Hungary, Spain, Belize and Australia are only some of the places he has visited.

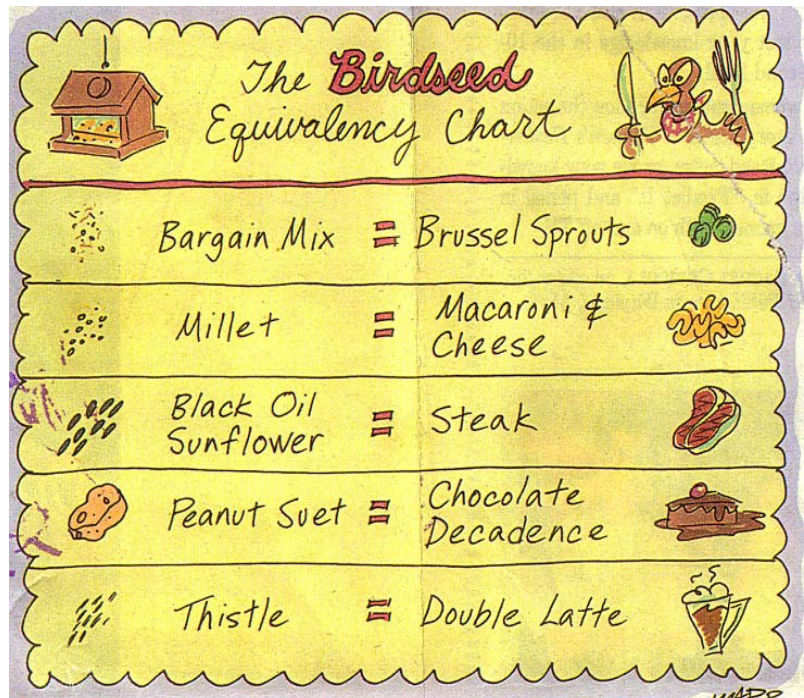
He returned to Bucks Co. in 1987, buying a house in Chalfont. The property abuts a nearby quarry, where he has received permission to walk and enjoy the hobby of birding, and which has enabled him to build quite a yard list.

His job career has varied, working at places from the Drexel Institute of Technology to managing a cheese shop in New Hope. He has run a company called E.Q., Inc., which sells medical devices for physical therapy, since 1986.

Ron is a member and contributor to many birding organizations such as Heritage Conservancy, Bucks Co. Audubon, ABA, Nature Conservancy and Hawk Mt. Sanctuary. His association with DVOC culminated in his holding all the elected offices in the organization and becoming President during 2000-2001.

He currently serves on the Hike and Bike Trail Committee for Warrington Township, and is the first President of Bucks County Birders.

Throughout the years, Ron has enjoyed learning and especially teaching about birds. His gentle attitude and concern for nature to beginning birders has left a wonderful lasting impression on many. I include myself in this category, and am delighted to have Ron to thank for my own passion in birds.



This Guide to Bird Nutrition Provided by Alan Brady

