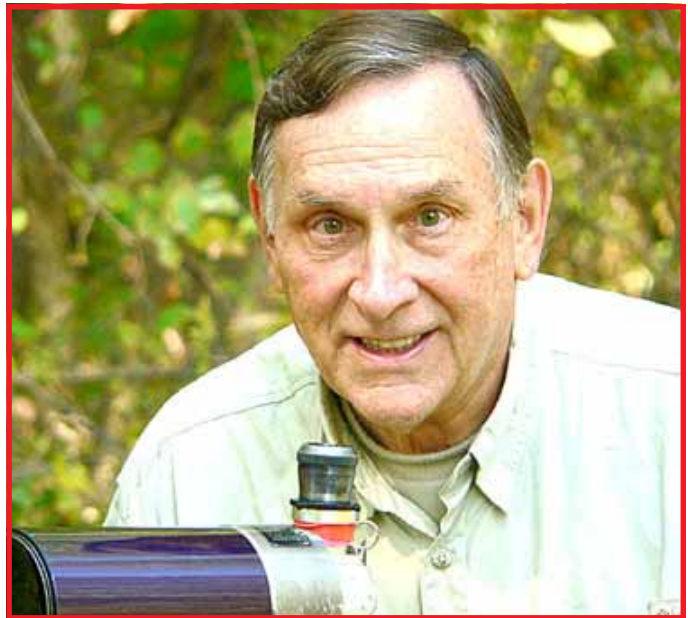


Bucks County Birder Profile: Hart Rufe



By Bob Rufe (his brother)

Place of birth: Sellersville, PA

Age: 74 on September 6, 2006

Residence: A 54-acre farm in East Rockhill Township, Bucks County

Life list: My North American life list (the only list I keep) stands at 756. I added three this year: the Yellow Grosbeak in Albuquerque, NM; the Western Reef-Heron in Newcastle, NH; and one in my armchair at home, when the Blue Grouse was split into the Sooty (Glacier Bay, AK, and Olympic Peninsula, WA) and Dusky (Deseret Ranch, UT). However, I lost one when the Delaware Bird Records Committee finally decided this year that the 1989 Bombay Hook "Greater Golden-Plover" was an even more unlikely Pacific Golden-Plover. I saw the Pacific Golden-Plover in Alaska in 1988.

Property list: I've never kept a property list.

Favorite field guide: When I first started birding, the original Peterson Guide with its many black and white line drawings was the only book available. Then the Golden Guide came out and supplanted Peterson. Later the National Geographic Guide blew away all of the earlier guides. Now Sibley is the "bible" and I have metamorphosed right along with each of the new guides as it came along.

Favorite book about birds: I particularly enjoyed *John James Audubon: The Making of an American* by Richard Rhodes. I enjoy almost anything by Pete Dunne; i.e., *The Feather Quest*, *Tales of a Low Rent Birder*, etc.

Favorite bird: This is almost impossible to answer, and can only be considered in context. For instance, we have a pair of Carolina Wrens that nest under the eaves of our front porch in a hanging basket that we have put up for them; in Florida there is a pair of Sandhill Cranes that is almost tame and is constantly near our patio as our next-door neighbor hand-feeds them; every summer a gorgeous pair of Eastern Towhees spends the summer under our bird feeders where we get to watch them bring their young and we see the fledglings grow and change plumage. I think the most beautiful bird I've ever seen is the adult male Flame-colored Tanager at the Mile-Hi Ranch in Ramsey Canyon, AZ, where the entire bird is the bright flame color of the Blackburnian's throat. Or the Great Horned Owl that responds to my hooting in the fall; majestic Bald Eagles soaring overhead; Swallow-tailed Kites hunting just over the trees; no, I can't name just one favorite.

Magazines I read regularly: *Birding*, *Birder's World*, *Bird Watcher's Digest*, *Outdoor Photographer*, *Smart Computing*, *Newsweek*, and *New Yorker*.

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Best birding location you have visited: Again it is almost impossible to pick just one favorite location. We love our winter birding in Florida at Merritt Island, the Everglades, and several other local spots we visit regularly; and certainly the Rio Grande Valley in Texas is an area we like to visit as often as possible; and how can one ignore Alaska with all the great birding locations there; but if forced to pick one and only one location, it would probably be Southeast Arizona around Sierra Vista, Patagonia, Madera Canyon, and the Tucson area. In the worldwide category, the favorite would be Ecuador, clearly.



Hart Rufe, leaning against post and Jewel Rufe kneeling, fifth from left in 1989 Bucks County Audubon field trip to Portal, Arizona. Photo by Bob Rufe.

Do you recognize yourself or friends in the photo?

What has birding taught you? Mainly patience. We have often waited many hours for a rare bird to show up, and sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't.

Which historical figure would you have liked to bird with? After reading John James Audubon's biography I believe it would be tremendously exciting to have traveled with him.

Person who most influenced your passion for birds: In 1944, when I first joined the Boy Scouts, my Scoutmaster was a man named Ralph Waite. He was a birder and the only birder that either he or I ever knew in those days. That's before there was a Bucks County Audubon or any bird club anywhere nearby. In the spring we would go birding around Sellersville, anywhere that we could walk to. We would meet around 5:30 or 6:00 a.m. and bird until about 8:00 when he would continue on to work and I would go to school. It was not uncommon then to see 18-20 species of warblers in those couple of hours, and

on Saturdays we would devote the whole morning to birding. Two or three times a year, we would experience "warbler waves," when literally thousands of warblers would pass by while we stood at one location and just tried to see and identify as many of them as we could. Unfortunately, I have never experienced anything like that again as an adult. Later, after completing school and returning to Sellersville, Joe Pearson helped me renew my interest in birds, along with Augie and Judy Mirabella and

George Franchois, and, much as I hate to admit it, Rick Mellon, in his youthful single days, introduced me to long-distance birding, first to New England and then to Manitoba/Churchill. Those trips got me hooked on traveling for birds.

Additional information: When we birded in Sellersville, our favorite locations were Lenape Park before there were any ball fields or development of any kind, Cathill before there were any houses up there, and the Holiday House area, where there were a lot of open fields abutting a stand of high trees. Of course, the area is all changed now. I'll never forget seeing my first Tufted Titmouse, and Ralph made me figure it out myself from the early Peterson. That, of course, was before anybody had bird feeders or there were places like Green Lane or Nockamixon or Peace Valley where you could go and get all kinds of help. When I went for my review for the birdwatching merit badge, it was clear from the start that I knew infinitely more about birds than my reviewer did. That was at Camp Ockanickon, and the reviewer had me lead the review process for the two other

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scouts there for the same birdwatching merit badge.

The Explorer Scout trip to Algonquin Park in Canada probably did more to rekindle my interest in birds after being away at school for eight years. I remember seeing Gray Jays and not knowing what they were, and coming home to look them up. Shortly after that we saw a program advertised by Lehigh Valley Audubon featuring Heinz Meng on the propagation and reintroduction of Peregrine Falcons. It was at that program that I met Joe Pearson. He told me then about the new Bucks County Audubon chapter just getting started. From there I gradually got back into birding in a big way.

Living person you would most like to join for dinner and conversation: Jewel and I have had the great pleasure several times to have dinner with our good friends, Bob and Peg Ridgely, and Frank Gill and Sally Conyne.

Comments from the author:

The date was April 21, 1973. The place was Brigantine. "And these are all Semi-palmated Sandpipers, except the one with a ring around his neck, and he's a Semi-palmated Plover? So what does "semi-palmated" mean?" The conversation went something like that on my first day of "birding" ever – the term wasn't even invented yet! My first bird of the day was a Mockingbird – I probably thought I knew what a Mockingbird was, but I had never "seen" one. Such was the beginning of my avocation as a birder. My leader, instructor, mentor? As for so many Bucks County birdwatchers over the last 30+ years, it was my big brother, Hart Rufe!

Many of you know Hart personally, and you can find his autobiographical birding snapshot on the DVOC website, so my challenge and delight is to share some of the birding stories and insights you may not have heard elsewhere. Here are some of the characteristics which make for a great birder, a big brother to look up to, and an all around good

guy. But just a few, to maintain some sense of humility!

Let's see – first there's Hart's dedication.

How about having participated in every Upper Bucks County CBC except the very first one in 1968 when he didn't even know it was occurring? Oops – correction! He missed the one in 1994 for a birding trip to Antarctica, although he did the compilation anyway. Hart assisted Joe Pearson, the official compiler for most of the 1970s, but did not become the official compiler until 1982. He compiled the UBC CBC every

year since then until he turned it over to Bill Etter in 2005.

I participated on many of these counts and particularly enjoyed the recaps in the early evening either at his house or sometimes at CBC reporting parties. "What was your best bird?" Hart has always had an affection for owling, and shares this detailed reflection. "In 1970 and again in '71, the Upper Bucks CBC had the highest count of Long-eared Owls in the entire United States (17), all found in the Kellers Church pines behind the church, which was part of the then new Nockamixon State Park. The following year, the park allowed hunting in that area, and we found dead owls and shotgun shells on the ground. To my knowledge, there have never been owls found in that area since then. Our high count of Screech Owls was 1976, when several teams, including ours, went owling from midnight 'til dawn and then again from dark until quite late in the evening. Only Kirk and Lois Moulton have done some of that in recent years, with great results."

Particularly memorable was the recap in which was detailed the inspection of the Barn Owl roost site at Penrose Hallowell's Bedminster-area farm. The only way to confirm the bird was to climb the silo ladder to spot it or flush it so another team member would spot it. It seems "flush" was the appropriate operative term as Hart's approach up the ladder caused the startled owl to



Bob and Hart at in Algonquin, Canada, 1961



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whitewash my brother just as it lifted off its perch! Whatever it takes – that’s dedication!

Then there is his teaching. Hart led, co-led or “participated” (he’s always leading) in all of the early long-distance Bucks County Audubon trips, culminating in the two-week trek to Attu in 1992. He subsequently turned the reins over to Margie Rutbell and Gerry Dewaghe for these excursions. While the elements of bird identification, habitat, taxonomy, and conservation are central to the educational richness of these birding trips, there is so much more that has been gleaned by participants in these long trips, as well as the day trips and weekend outings. His teaching is by example and outreach rather than by instruction, by humor and involvement; and by sheer enthusiasm, which spreads charismatically. Sometimes, teaching may even involve a little sarcasm to engender a personal touch to the lesson – don’t be offended, just return it! He now spends the winter in Florida, where he leads trips for the St. Lucie Audubon Society; same teaching skills, more humor, less sarcasm.

Our history: As you might imagine, I share some history with my older brother – Hart did break my arm as a five- or six-year old trying to get me to “fly!” In his own profile for this biographical sketch, Hart mentions renewing his enthusiasm for birding during an Explorer Scout excursion to Algonquin Park – I participated on that trip in 1961, but I don’t remember any birding – the birdwatching must have been an escape, a release from the stresses brought by all of those teenage participants. Where were the binoculars? Birding has been a constant stress reliever, with the possible exception of missing a “chase bird.”

We both love local history, and most of the Rufe ancestral branches trace to immigrants’ arrivals in the early eighteenth century, settling in Revere, Bridgeton, Sellersville, and Perkasio. Hart and I were roommates during a three-week birding extravaganza in 1988, staying at memorable establishments such as the King Eider on St. Paul in the Pribiloff Islands. He then snored; I then drank; we both slept well! (The adventure was the subject of the Bucks County Birders program on June 27, 2006.) At the Puffin Hotel in Anchorage, Hart made one of his regular, albeit infrequent, calls home to check in with family in Sellersville, and was updated with the history-making news that “Guess what? Perkasio just burned down!” I recall that was June 26, 1988, just a

week before the Fourth of July holiday. On the return trip to Alaska four years later for birding “Attu in ’92,” the history of World War II surrounded Hart, Jewel, and me on the island that in May of 1943 witnessed the only battle of the war fought on U.S. soil.

Hart’s humor: The only element that prevented mutiny on long-distance birding trips! Hart is well-known for “read between the lines” itineraries, which might include phrases such as “... meals may not be at regularly scheduled intervals” or “... some owling” or “... limited rest stops.” I only recall a few of the one-liners and some of the occasions, and “you had to be there,” but suffice to say that, since not a single misdemeanor nor felony occurred on any of these trips, there was a LOT of humor at work! Does anyone recall “Eye shine” (sneakers in Guadalupe Canyon); “Let’s go shopping.” (Nome, AK); “I wanna go home.” (late night on some washboard road in AZ); “Just five more minutes...” (every stop, every day) and on every trip, a “Theresa Award” or two? Often as not, the fun was poked at Hart.

Hart’s idiosyncrasies: It is the duty of the baby brother, if not merely the consequence of birth order, to accept the praise and criticism of the older sibling, whether deserved or not (see Hart’s comments on the Golden-Plover, and the DBRC posting at DOSBirds.org). Birding involves decision making, and who better to learn from than one whose career has been acclaimed for his good judgment. While careful study and thoughtful pronouncement of a bird’s identity is the usual result of this careful process of deliberation, Hart’s seniority and influence on my own early birding ID caused me in later years to reexamine some of those checkmarks I had tallied while using the “Did you see it well enough that I can count it?” method! The detailed accounting of additional idiosyncrasies will fill the next book. And, Your Honor, it is now my opportunity to plead “Not guilty” to slamming the door that chased the Altamira Oriole in Bentsen State Park in April 1986! Not that anyone would remember.

One of my own birding idiosyncrasies or “quirks” is to pick up the latest field guide as soon as it is published – and my favorite all-around guide is the “National Geo.” One of my best uses of these field guides, and one you might consider adopting for your own use, is to give away, whenever possible, my “used copy” to a youth birder who might not consider purchasing a field guide a high priority on his or her own. Great idea! Having said that – there is one field guide I will not give away. It is the one that is inscribed, “To Bob, May you never again have to ask, ‘What bird was that?’ Hart. 12/25/73.”