

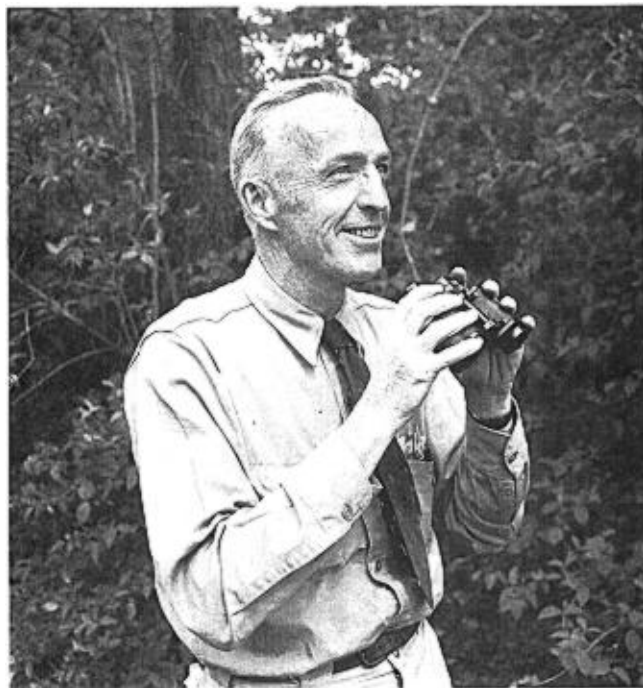


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IN MEMORIAM: JOSEPH J. HICKEY, 1907-1993

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JOSEPH J. HICKEY, 1907-1993

(Photograph taken in 1964)

Joe Hickey was a New York City birdwatcher, born 16 April 1907, who rose to join the elite of American ornithology and conservation. After a boy scout leader got him interested in birds, teenage Joe became a star member of the Bronx County Bird Club, an overachieving group of young birdwatching turks that included his lifelong friends Roger Tory Peterson and Allan Cruickshank. Joe did not initially pursue a career in ornithology. Instead, he earned his B.S. degree in History from New York University in 1930 and then took jobs as track coach at NYU (Joe was a champion miler

as a student) and as a businessman at Consolidated Edison.

During the Depression, Joe continued his avocational interest in birds and joined the Linnean Society, which held meetings at the American Museum of Natural History. There he met Ernst Mayr, who encouraged Joe to become more scientific in his pursuit of birds. Following Mayr's advice, Joe returned to night school at NYU and resumed his undergraduate studies, this time in Biology. In 1941 Joe met Aldo Leopold at a cocktail party and eagerly accepted an invitation to move to the Midwest and pur-

sue an M.S. degree with Leopold at the University of Wisconsin.

Noting there was no American equivalent to the British book, *The Art of Bird Watching* by E. M. Nicholson, Joe began work on his classic *A Guide to Bird Watching* during his honeymoon. His new bride, Margaret Brooks, had a birding background and encouraged him to complete the book, which he submitted as his Master's thesis in 1943. It was published immediately by Oxford University Press and is still in print. Joe was on a roll.

A Guggenheim Fellowship helped Joe to pursue his Ph.D. at the University of Michigan under the supervision of Josselyn Van Tyne. His thesis project took advantage of a virtually unexploited gold mine of bird-banding data accumulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Joe analyzed these data using the then-new technique of life-table analysis. His dissertation, *Survival Studies of Banded Birds*, was published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1952 and reprinted in 1972.

In 1947, Aldo Leopold invited Joe to return to the University of Wisconsin to become the second professor in Leopold's thriving Department of Wildlife Management. But, Aldo Leopold died unexpectedly just a few months later, and new Assistant Professor Hickey was abruptly appointed to head the department in 1948. One of his first major accomplishments was organizing the effort to publish posthumously Leopold's nearly completed masterpiece, *A Sand County Almanac*, which appeared a year later in 1949. Joe remained at the University of Wisconsin throughout his career, retiring (or being fired because of his age, as Joe saw it) in 1976.

While at the University of Wisconsin, Joe became an acclaimed teacher, researcher and conservationist. He loved students and classroom instruction, and he was an outstanding mentor. Tape-recorded sounds of birds greeted students in his wildlife ecology class, and his lectures were charming. Enrollment in his courses grew impressively during the 1960s and 1970s as students became increasingly involved in environmentalism. Among his many honors, the one that Joe cherished most was the University's most prestigious teaching award, given to him at the end of his teaching career in 1976.

Joe's career as a researcher will be remembered primarily for his contributions to unraveling the connection between declines in bird populations and chlorinated hydrocarbon pes-

ticides, such as DDT. Joe loved Peregrine Falcons, and in 1941 he assembled an atlas of all the known eyries east of the Rocky Mountains. It proved to be a pivotal project. In 1964, as Peregrine Falcon populations were crashing throughout much of their cosmopolitan range, Joe arranged a resurvey of the nesting sites he had documented earlier. Not a single occupied eyrie could be located. Shocked by this result, in 1965 Joe organized and hosted an international meeting on the status of the Peregrine Falcon.

Joe's research during the 1960s was dominated by studies of effects of pesticides on wildlife. As a result, Joe was thrust somewhat reluctantly into the limelight of the 1960s environmental movement. His research on ecological effects of DDT played a major role in its eventual ban, first in Wisconsin and later in the United States. However, he paid a price for being an outspoken critic of popular agricultural chemicals. As a professor in the country's largest college of agriculture, Joe was severely censured by spiteful college administrators. The environmental community, however, showered Joe with recognition for his contributions. He received dozens of prestigious awards, including the Aldo Leopold Medal from The Wildlife Society, the Arthur A. Allen Medal from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, the Distinguished Service Medal from National Audubon Society, the Eisenmann Medal from the Linnean Society, and the Elliott Coues Award from the AOU.

Joe was also an active conservationist outside the academic arena. He was one of the founders and the first Secretary of The Nature Conservancy. He served on boards of directors for dozens of conservation organizations, most of which gave him awards for his contributions. He also had a passion for editing, and he served as editor of the *Journal of Wildlife Management*, *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New York*, *Proceedings of the 13th International Ornithological Congress*, and the proceedings of his Peregrine meeting (*Peregrine Falcon Populations: Their Biology and Decline*). A perfectionist when it came to editing, Joe agonized over every error that escaped his careful attention.

Joe joined the AOU in 1936, became an Elective Member in 1940, Council Member in 1945, Fellow in 1954, and President in 1972. He was a regular attendee of ornithological meetings in the United States and around the world. To

those who were close observers of Joe's behavior at paper sessions, he possessed an amazing ability to appear to sleep through a presentation but ask the most insightful questions immediately after the audience's applause woke him.

Joe was widowed soon after his retirement. He remarried, to Lola Gordon, and together they travelled extensively, usually with birding on the agenda. He remained active in conservation organizations well into his retirement, and he continued to attend ornithological events.

Joe was a warm friend and colleague to many ornithologists and conservationists who will

miss his distinctive Bronx accent, which he never lost during 52 years in the Midwest. His intellectual legacy lives on in the thousands of students who were inspired by Joe's courses and benefitted from his fatherly advice. Peregrine Falcons and other birds of prey have recovered during the postpesticide era that he helped bring about, and millions of acres of critical bird habitats have been protected by the conservation organizations to which he was so devoted. Joe, indeed, led a full and rewarding life until he died on 31 August 1993.