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## In Memoriam: Douglas A. James, 1925-2018

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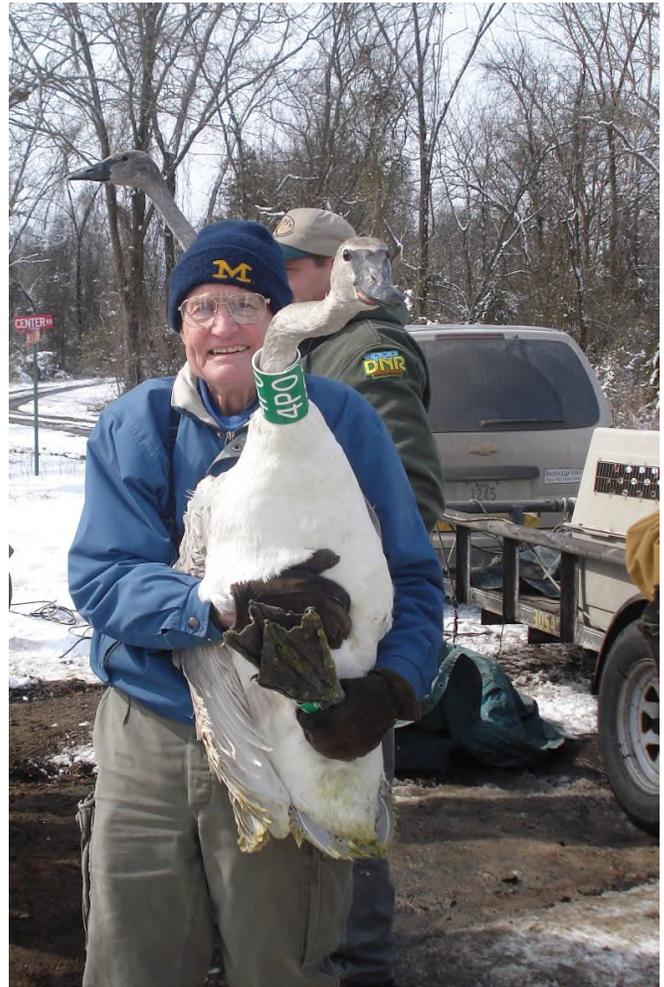
## In Memoriam: Douglas A. James, 1925-2018

On December 17, 2018, Arkansas lost a giant in ornithology and conservation. Douglas A. James, a faculty member at the University of Arkansas (Fayetteville) from 1953 to 2016, was the authority on the birds of Arkansas and was one of the state's leading conservationists in the second half of the last century. Widely considered as "The Bird Man of Arkansas", he co-authored *Arkansas Birds: Their Distribution and Abundance* (University of Arkansas Press) with Joseph C. Neal in 1986. He arranged the first meeting of what would become the Ozark Society, which was responsible for saving the Buffalo River from damming. Starting with studies of scrubland birds in northwestern Arkansas, Doug expanded to studying scrubland birds in Africa, Nepal, and Belize as one of the few people to have received three Fulbright Scholar awards. He also spent spring of 1995 as a Visiting Scholar at Cambridge University in England.

Douglas Arthur James was born on 25 July 1925 in Detroit, Michigan, to Arthur Collins James and Sigrid Elizabeth Hovey. He began his career in ornithology by drawing and coloring bird pictures in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Later in elementary school, his teacher asked him to lead class field trips and continued to do so in junior high. He attended the University of Michigan, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in 1946 and a Master of Science degree in 1947. He then went to the University of Illinois to study under the famous avian physiologist and ecologist, S. C. Kendeigh, where he completed a doctoral degree in 1957 on the ecology of roosting blackbirds.

In 1953, he was offered a position as the first ornithologist at the University of Arkansas. Prior to that, ornithology was first taught at the University by William Baerg, a professor in the Department of Entomology. Doug last taught ornithology in the spring of 2015, meaning that the course was taught for nearly 90 years by just two professors. His ornithology course was known for decades for its annual South Texas field trip in the spring. Doug was the first faculty member in his department to receive the special appointment University Professor of Biological Sciences in 2004. When he retired in 2016, he had been at the University of Arkansas for 64 years.

In his decades-long illustrious career, Doug published over a hundred scientific papers and received 77 research grants (totaling over \$1.5 million) from local and national agencies. He cherished the opportunity to attend ornithological meetings and gave over 300 presentations of which 70 were invited. He



Douglas A. James at Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge with trumpeter swan, February 2010. Photo by Sue Pekel.

mentored more than 80 graduate students, including 30 doctoral students. Notable subjects of his international studies included the endangered Great Hornbill in India, Jabiru in Belize, Pallas's Fishing Eagle in Mongolia, Musk Deer in Nepal, Scrubland bird communities in India, and avifauna of Malaysian rubber plantations. More locally, he authored several papers on the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker in Arkansas. He played a significant role in the development of the field of multivariate statistics to describe bird habitats. A historical plaque on the university campus notes the accomplishments in statistical ecology of James' lab and students.

Doug received several life-time achievement awards, including the W. Frank Blair Eminent Naturalist Award (2006) from the Southwestern Association of Naturalists, which recognizes excellence in a lifetime of

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commitment to outstanding study or conservation of the flora or fauna of the southwestern United States, Mexico, and Central America, and William and Nancy Klamm Service Award (2014) from the Wilson Ornithological Society (WOS), which honors the history of service and dedication to the society. Altogether, he received 14 awards for his excellence in teaching and research from various entities including an international teaching award. In 2002, he received the prestigious Charles and Nadine Baum Teaching Award, the highest teaching award given by the University of Arkansas. Doug served as President of the WOS (1977-79); and was elected Fellow to the American Association for Advancement of Science (1968) and American Ornithologists' Union (AOU; 1988). As President of WOS, he pushed for encouraging amateur involvement in ornithology.

Doug James was the quintessential versatile naturalist, almost equally adept with reptiles and mammals, as he was with birds. His non-avian publications covered the gamut from box turtles and bats, to salamanders and small mammals. With a clever mixture of field and lab investigations, his sharp and interdisciplinary mind enabled him address questions not answered by any one discipline. He was as comfortable with the binoculars as he was with museum skins and specimens, a quality that is becoming increasingly rare among academics. Using these attributes, he determined, for example, that Great Hornbills do not use mud to seal nest cavities (Wilson J. Ornithology, 2007). Among his notable Arkansas projects were the successful translocation of wild turkeys to northwest Arkansas; discerning perplexing chickadee specimens using skeletal measurements; identifying Colibri hummingbirds using indirect measurements from photographs; and interpreting the cargos of birds blown into Arkansas by hurricanes (J. Ark. Acad. Sci. 1983-2010).

Doug was a great and inspiring teacher. He trained his graduate students first by an excellent regimen of his own courses. His courses were strongly supported by intensive 4-hour lab sessions, in which he hammered the importance of accuracy and attention for detail while dealing with complex data. His superior grasp of statistics and ability to incorporate statistical methods into data actually collected by students was invaluable. His courses were also heavily field-oriented, and this excellent combination of lab and field exposure shaped many a biologist's career, as is evident from the enormous success of his former students. He hated jargon and obfuscation in scientific writing and demanded simplicity and clarity. He imposed tough but

fair standards in his classes, and decried the rise of grade inflation, often telling his classes that he finished his B.S. degree with a 2.9 G.P.A., yet led the graduation march for topping his class.

In 1955, Doug and his then wife Frances James spear-headed the formation of the Arkansas Audubon Society, a vibrant organization that continues today. In 1972, Doug helped form the Arkansas Audubon Society Trust (AAST) with the intention of funding avian research and conservation projects within Arkansas. The AAST has continued to grow and its endowment is approaching \$200,000 as it nears its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022. Due to his vision, hundreds of graduate and undergraduate students have been funded by the Trust. One AAST award was named the Douglas James Award, given annually to a project involving birds. Doug was the first Curator of bird records for the Arkansas Audubon Society. He helped with writing the bylaws of the society, organized the first fall meeting, became the first newsletter editor, and initiated several of the annual awards bestowed by the society. While he was curator, he helped accumulated over 30,000 bird records for Arkansas, which became the foundation for his Arkansas Birds book. He used a punch card system that foresaw the coming of computers. All those cards have now been digitized and are available on line.

During his career, Doug filled nearly 150 field notebooks based on his research and travels: 106 from North America (mostly Arkansas), 24 from Central and South America, 8 from Asia, 7 from Africa, and 4 from Europe. He always told his students "if you didn't write it down, it didn't happen." Doug remained active in publishing till the end, although some of his long-term studies (like plant succession and bird communities in the forests of northern Michigan, spanning several decades) unfortunately remain unpublished. His last paper appeared the year he died. It documented changes in small mammal abundances in Lake Fayetteville over 32 years, the data having been collected as part of his Mammalogy class field trips from 1983 (J. Arkansas Acad. Sci. 72).

Doug loved to tell stories of his rich life-experiences. Notable among the anecdotes he shared was one of being bitten by a skunk that later tested positive for rabies; walking into a Michigan gas station with a live freshly caught rattlesnake at hand ("it emptied the place in a hurry"); and chasing away and being chased by elephants and bison while running in India. One of his college classmates was Nobel Laureate James Watson of DNA-structure fame. When Watson visited Fayetteville in May 2005, Doug joked to a packed audience: "We both aspired to be ornithologists.

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I made it. He didn't." Once while setting off on a hike through an Indian rainforest searching for hornbill nest sites, he applied leech repellent to one of his feet. When asked why he left the other unsprayed, he quipped "That's my control!" He loved gags. He wore a hog hat to drive long-winded speakers off the stage at the AOU meeting he hosted in Fayetteville. His frequent and much sought-after talks on his global studies were colorful, literally and figuratively. He proudly wore a traditional attire of the country he was speaking about, like a Nepali hat or an Indonesian batik. After a short stint in India, he walked into his classroom wearing a garland he was given by an Indian family. Students rarely fell asleep in his classes!

Doug was an avid runner most of life, having run 10 marathons. He was indefatigable in the field, often challenging his much younger graduate students to keep up with him. After a long day of field work, he often ran to refresh and rejuvenate. His immense knowledge of natural history of the localities, his ability to design field projects tailor-made to local situations, and his stamina and endurance in the field made him an invaluable mentor. Doug lived a simple life and shunned luxuries. His intellectual curiosity was insatiable, and he waxed eloquent on all matters. His interests were eclectic, and included history, ballet, opera, and art galleries. He loved all kinds of dancing.

Apart from his own contributions to natural history, Doug James's ultimate legacy will be the generations of competent field biologists and teachers his mentorship spawned. The first three former students who were recognized as Distinguished Alums of the department were Doug's graduate students. He is survived by his wife of over 30 years, Elizabeth Adam, three daughters from his first marriage with Frances James, two grandchildren, Travis and Sydney Olson, and one great granddaughter, Linnea Olson. Two of his daughters, Helen and Avis, followed their parents' footsteps to fruitful careers in biology. The third, Sigrid, a lawyer, is a bird artist who helped illustrate his bird book.

At the 103<sup>rd</sup> Arkansas Academy of Science annual meeting on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2019, Doug James was posthumously named as the First Honorary Fellow of the Arkansas Academy of Science. Doug bequeathed much of his life-time earnings to the University of Arkansas to establish a future Douglas A. James Endowed Chair in Ornithology.

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The following song was sung during the memorial celebration of Doug James' life on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2019:

ODE TO DOUG JAMES

*Still On the Hill*

By Kelly & Donna Mulhollan

*He's gone to a place, just past the rainbow  
He's gone to a place, where the birding's always good  
Where birds of all feathers, fly on forever  
And back here on earth, we'll always remember*

*He's gone to a place, where he won't need no raincoat  
No hat and no jacket, no long underwear  
No spotting scope or tripod, no glasses or field guide  
No duct tape or insecticide  
He won't need those things up there*

*That cold December morning, when the birds were all  
counted  
An event that he founded, so many years ago  
And little did we know, that eve he had departed  
With wings of his own, Doug James had flown*