



## **Elaina Marie Tuttle, 1963–2016**

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IN MEMORIAM

## Elaina Marie Tuttle, 1963–2016

Rusty Gonser<sup>1\*</sup> and Ellen Ketterson<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Biology, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana, USA

<sup>2</sup> Department of Biology, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA

\* Corresponding author: [rusty.gonser@indstate.edu](mailto:rusty.gonser@indstate.edu)

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Elaina Marie Tuttle—ornithologist, behavioral geneticist, educator, colleague, wife, and mother—died on June 15, 2016, of complications from metastatic breast cancer. Elaina was best known for her scientific contributions derived from 28 years of studying White-throated Sparrows in nature at Cranberry Lake Biological Station (CLBS) in the Adirondack Mountains of New York. As a professor in the Department of Biology at Indiana State University (ISU), she excelled as a scientist, mentor, and teacher. Elaina was integral to the founding of ISU's Center for Genomic Advocacy, which established a graduate program in genomic advocacy and genetic counseling, and just before her passing she was appointed associate dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies. At ISU, Elaina received the Theodore Dreiser Award for Research and Creativity, along with numerous teaching accolades, and was one of the youngest faculty members to be awarded the university's President's Medal. Over the course of her career, Elaina mentored hundreds of undergraduate field and lab assistants, several graduate students, and four postdoctoral fellows. She also served as an associate editor of *The Auk* from 2010 until her death and became an Elective Member of the AOU in 2016.

Born on November 9, 1963, Elaina grew up in Nashua, New Hampshire, and West Springfield, Massachusetts. While a student at West Springfield High School, Elaina could be found crawling through the local ponds in search of tadpoles, which reflected an intellectual curiosity about nature that never waned. Her association with CLBS began when she was an undergraduate field assistant for Doug Fraser—the start of her lifelong fascination with the White-throated Sparrow, which gave rise to the station's longest-running research program.

Elaina's early studies focused on sexual selection and reproductive trade-offs, which she pursued as a graduate student at the State University of New York at Albany, where she studied with Thomas Caraco (doctoral advisor), Ken Able, Jerram Brown, and Jim Gilliam. After developing her molecular genetics skills in the labs of Chip



**Elaina Marie Tuttle.** Photo credit: ISU Photography Services

Aquadro and David Westneat, Elaina met and married the love of her life, Rusty Gonser.

Elaina began a postdoctoral fellowship at the Center for the Integrative Study of Animal Behavior at Indiana University, where she worked in the laboratory of Ellen Ketterson. During this work, she traveled to England to visit with Tim Birkhead to discuss sperm competition in birds. This interest led to a postdoctoral fellowship with Stephen Pruett-Jones at the University of Chicago, which led, in turn, to springs and summers studying fairy wrens in Australia. Elaina's adeptness in collecting sperm from free-living birds earned her the nickname "The Sperminator," and her "hands-on" research provided excellent fodder for speaking engagements, where she would tell her audience that "the testes size of a male fairy wren is analogous to a 200-pound male having 40-pound testicles."

Elaina's first faculty position was at St. Mary's College of Maryland, where she was a popular teacher and mentored teams of 10 to 12 undergraduate researchers studying her

sparrows at CLBS. She ignited her students' passion for science and was a role model for finding a balance between work and family life. Elaina was living proof that it's possible to fall over backwards, get stuck in a bog, and be rescued by your students, who then rose to the occasion by helping her by foot, boat, and ambulance to reach a safe place to give birth to her son, Caleb. For Elaina, summers spent at the biological station with Rusty, Caleb, and their dog Zeke, along with their ever-expanding family of

students, created a rich tradition of shared memories, laughter, and scientific achievements. Elaina was known for wearing military-style coats and Doc Martens boots, and for listening to the songs of The Clash and Bruce Springsteen—which Caleb played on the piano—and, of course, the song of the White-throated Sparrow, *Poor Sam Peabody Peabody Peabody*.

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Memorials Editor: Ted Anderson, ted020@centurytel.net