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IN MEMORIAM

Emil K. Urban, 1934–2014

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Emil Urban and *The Birds of Africa* will always be synonymous. Stretching over 40 years, with a publication span of more than 20 years, this project represents his life's great work and his enduring ornithological legacy. However long, difficult, and complicated, this was a project he believed just had to get done. He was the only lead author–editor involved in all 7 of the original volumes. And it was he who, through diligence, patience, communication, and keen mediation skills, kept the project together, held collaborators on target, negotiated through a succession of publishers, and saw each volume to its publication deadline. I wonder how many such complex serial collaborations actually reach their intended endpoint. Emil made sure this one did. The project was the inspiration of Leslie Brown, who involved Emil in 1964. In 1978, they invited as third author Ken Newman, who was replaced by Hilary Fry in 1980. Stuart Keith joined the team the same year, after Brown's death. Until the final of the original volumes was published in 2004, Emil led the team to fulfill Brown's and his dream, as they churned through the mass of previously scattered information to produce the definitive comprehensive treatment of the avifauna of Africa. Including the 2013 volume on Africa's islands done by others, these 8 volumes stand as the standard work on Africa's birds. They were recently reissued by Christopher Helm/Bloomsbury.

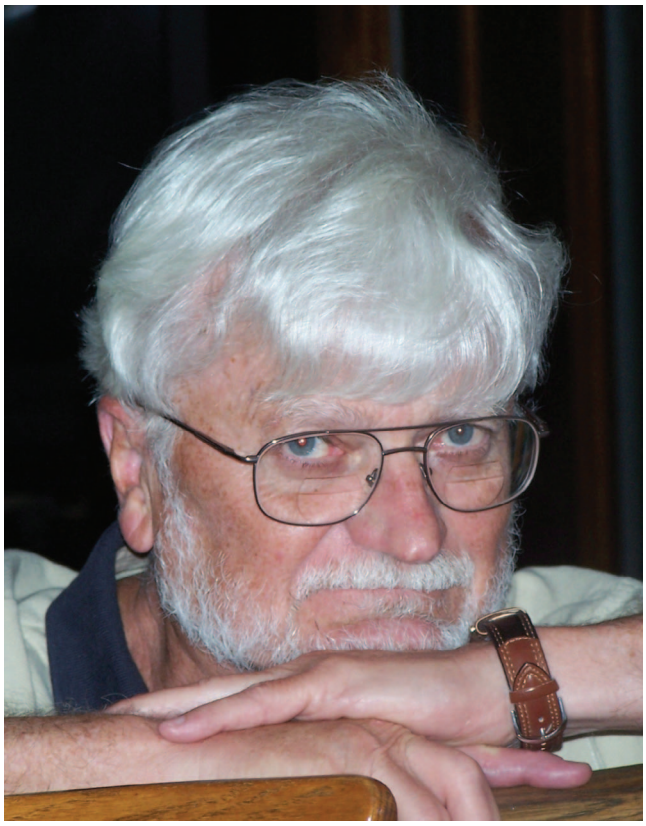
Emil Urban became, by choice and circumstance, a scholar of Africa—both its birds and its culture—and spent the first segment of his career, 1964–1975, at Haile Selassie I University (now Addis Ababa University) in Ethiopia, as a professor, as department chair, and as a field ornithologist. Born on May 27, 1934, he grew up in Milwaukee and Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, and discovered birds when a biology teacher insisted on an early-morning field trip, during which they happened to encounter an impressive warbler migration. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1956 and headed for the University of Kansas for his master's degree, where he was mentored by Bud Tordoff and Richard Johnson in a faunistic study of the birds of Coahuila, Mexico. Back at the University of Wisconsin, he first became enamored by bird migration under the influence of Franz Sauer, who was a visiting professor at the time. In the summer of 1960, they set up camp at Boxer Bay, St. Lawrence Island, to study Pacific Golden Plover migration orientation, which ended up requiring a 23-hour walk-out when their supplies failed to arrive. Emil thrived on difficult fieldwork, a trait that would prove quite helpful in Africa. After Sauer left Wisconsin, Emil obtained his Ph.D. on lizard locomotion, under John Neese. He and Lois Lee, who also enjoyed the challenges of being in the field, were married in 1963. He received his doctorate in 1964. Their daughter, Kristine, was born in 1966. By then, the family was in Ethiopia.

Raising a family in Addis Ababa in the 1960s and 1970s was certainly a challenge. Addis Abada was a diverse and complicated city to live in, and the countryside was even more so. Yet Emil was always ready to head to the field to see new things. From Kristine's first field trip at about 8 months of age, the family's field studies and explorations, often with visiting ornithologists and birders in tow, continued for nearly a decade. Field ornithology in Ethiopia was both difficult and rewarding. Difficult, because as an official "guest" of the country one was not in control of anything. Rewarding, because it offered exposure to the diverse landscape, avifauna, and cultures of the country. Adventure, deeply felt learning experiences, and close bonds among those sharing such experiences would have been reward enough. But the goal of these treks was the birds.

Emil focused his field studies mostly on biology and behavior of waterbirds, including pelicans, cormorants, ibis, ducks, and cranes, which resulted in many of his more than 80 professional papers. Simultaneously, his interest in African birds in general served as the foundation for *The Birds of Africa*. Along the way, filling in a blank space on the map, he and Brown compiled the *Checklist of the Birds of Ethiopia* in 1971. The same year, he spent an academic sabbatical year in residence at the University of Miami, as a guest of Oscar T. (Bud) Owre, which is where I first met Emil while we toiled in parallel, preparing papers on ibises and other waterbirds. He then returned to Ethiopia, to his professorship and research. The sabbatical sojourn

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brought to the fore the Urbans' parental concerns for their daughter's lack of exposure to an America she but slightly knew and did not feel part of. The coup of September 12, 1974, which overthrew the emperor, destabilized society and caused termination of support by the United States. As the functionality of the university deteriorated and field sites became inaccessible, and given their desire to provide their daughter options in choosing her own future, it became clear that it was time to go home. The family left quietly but sadly in January 1975—only months, as it turned out, prior to the university being totally shut down by the new government, which sent the students to the countryside to proselytize for its revolutionary cause.

In 1976, Emil began the second leg of his career, as chair and professor of biology at Augusta College (later Augusta State University) in Georgia. It was a good match; he chaired the department for an academically astounding 29 years. Never one to seek recognition for himself, nonetheless his successes as a professor, administrator, and author were such that in 1997 he was named to a Fuller E. Callaway Chair, the most prestigious faculty post in the Georgia university system, retaining this honor until his retirement. During his tenure, he served on numerous university and system-wide committees and on review panels for other biology departments. He was an advocate for faculty and student scholarship at all levels of the university system. It was from Augusta that he shepherded the Africa book project, his office and home piled with reference material, Lois serving as indexer and voluntary proof editor. His scholarly work became, in time, one of the best private collections of ornithological Africana. The period 1982–2004 saw the publication of 7 volumes of *The Birds of Africa*. Appreciation for his work grew. He was active in and honored by Pan-African Ornithological Congresses. For the XI Congress, he was asked to write the conference overview. For his body of work on African birds, he was elected a Fellow of the AOU in 1990.

In his adopted Georgia, Emil explored new field sites and settled on St. Catherines Island, which soon became a favorite place. The landscape matrix of marshes, beach, and woods underpinned by its deep local history made this island special to him. He organized the St. Catherines Island Christmas Count and was the leader of the count each year from 1987 to 2013, finishing the last compilation from his hospital bed. He chaired the St. Catherines Island Research Advisory Committee, reveling in working with diverse scholars. With Lois and others, he published the bird checklist for the island. For his ornithological work in Georgia, he received the Earl R. Green Memorial Award of the Georgia Ornithological Society in 1997.

From his time at the high lakes of Ethiopia, Emil's interest in the behavior, functional morphology, distribution, and conservation of waterbirds never lapsed. In recognition of his engagement, he was elected a council member of the Waterbird Society for an unprecedented 2 terms a decade apart, 1997–1999 and 2006–2009. His work on Crowned Cranes led to his service on the Board of Advisors for the International Crane Foundation and invited participation in international crane biology conferences.

Emil retired from Augusta State University as Callaway Emeritus Professor on January 1, 2007, but his engagement with scholarship continued. His knowledge and experience were sought by a second and third generation of African ornithologists, including compilers of many of the new guides to various parts of the continent, which have made its birdlife accessible. He pursued his broader interests in history, politics, bird records, and St. Catherines, much of which he was called upon to share in lectures. With a full schedule of such engagements on the calendar, he passed away on January 24, 2014, in Augusta, Georgia.

Emil was indeed both a gentleman and a scholar. He always appeared to be calm and deliberate. He was thoughtful and people-oriented. It was his way to bring people together, make them comfortable; yet he expected honesty, openness, and high-quality work. His engagement made everyone more productive. It also was his way to mediate divergent personalities for the greater good (a skill in somewhat limited supply). He never was anything but encouraging to students and collaborators, and one soon

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became the other, as was my experience. The ornithologists, birders, professors, and students who passed through Addis and Augusta during his times in both places were beneficiaries of his human-focused approach to scholarship, academics, and teaching. The undergraduate student research award in biology at Augusta State University, named for him, is testament to his continuing influence. His ashes, scattered on St. Catherines, have been returned to one of the landscapes he loved most, another being Ethiopia.

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