



## **Martin Keli McNicholl, 1946–2017**

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IN MEMORIAM

## Martin Keli McNicholl, 1946–2017

Spencer G. Sealy

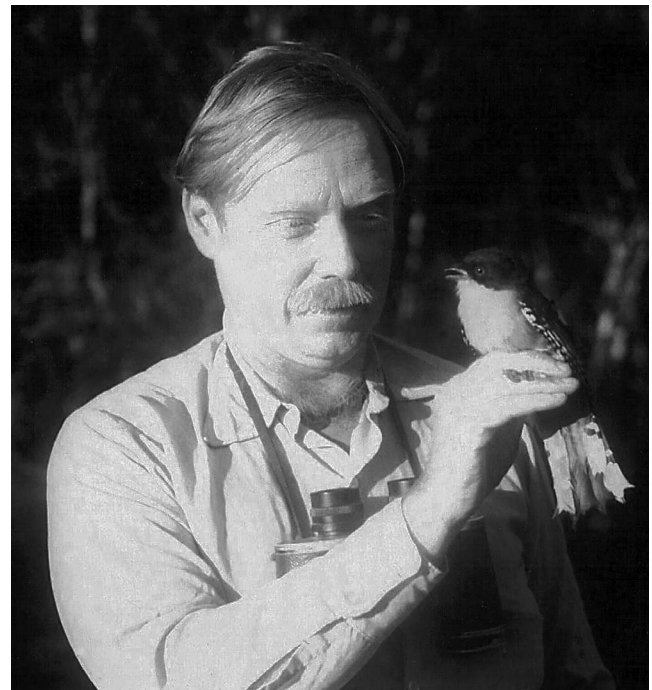
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Martin K. McNicholl, Elective Member of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU; now American Ornithological Society) since 1986, died on December 15, 2017, at the age of 71, in Burnaby, British Columbia. Martin was born on April 16, 1946, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where as a young boy he began a lifelong interest in nature, particularly birds, an interest that was nurtured by family and friends. With his first "Peterson" and binoculars in hand, Martin's early years were spent observing birds in a forested cemetery in Winnipeg and at family cottages on Lake Winnipeg and in the Lake Country of southwestern Ontario. Nest cards and field notes from those early activities became the basis for many articles published in local natural history journals. Martin graduated with a B.Sc. (Hons.) in zoology from the University of Manitoba in 1968. While an undergraduate, he was employed for a summer by one of his professors, Roger M. Evans, to conduct surveys of waterbirds and Sharp-tailed Grouse.

My first contact with Martin was through requests for reprints of articles when he was a master's student at the University of Manitoba, working under the guidance of Dr. Evans. In the summer of 1972, Evans and I toured the university's field station at Delta Marsh, where I noticed a huge thesis shelved with others focused on various aspects of marsh ecology. It was Martin's master's thesis on the breeding biology of Forster's Tern, which was completed in 1971. I commented on its length, and Evans, who seemed not at all surprised by my curiosity, explained that Martin wanted to bring together everything that was known at the time about gulls and terns, which he did in 323 pages of appendices, on top of 329 pages of text! I had been introduced to Martin McNicholl, the bibliophile.

For his Ph.D., Martin moved to the University of Alberta to study the behavioral ecology of a population of Blue Grouse (now Sooty Grouse) over four summers on the Comox Burn on Vancouver Island, under the supervision of Fred C. Zwickel. Before completing his dissertation in 1978, Martin was employed by two



Martin Keli McNicholl. Photo credit: Kevin Young

environmental consulting firms, Peregrine Research and Documentation and the Lombard North Group. After a postdoctoral year of teaching at Brock University in Ontario, he returned to Alberta and again was employed by consulting firms, in particular Beak Consultants in Calgary.

In the ensuing years, Martin willingly shared his encyclopedic knowledge of the literature of natural history and ornithology, and many of us benefited from his knowledgeable reviews of manuscripts, critiques of ideas, and references to the literature on the many subjects he had at his fingertips. Beginning in the late 1970s, he served on about 30 boards and committees with Edmonton Naturalists, Edmonton Bird Club, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, and Provincial Museum of Alberta (now Royal

Alberta Museum), and later with the Canadian Wildlife Service and Ontario Field Ornithologists, as well as the North American Loon Fund and the Colonial Waterbird Society (now Waterbird Society). From 1984 to 1987, he was general manager and executive director of the Long Point Bird Observatory, now an important part of Bird Studies Canada. In the early 1990s, he moved to British Columbia and worked at the Vancouver International Airport, first for LGL Environmental Research Associates, then with Airport Wildlife Management International, focusing on reducing bird hazards to aircraft.

In addition to publishing dozens of papers and notes in scientific and natural history journals, preparing and editing reports, and contributing book chapters and papers to symposium volumes, Martin also published numerous popular articles. In addition to papers focused on the biology of Forster's Tern and song variation and discrimination in Sooty Grouse, which resulted from work conducted during his graduate research, he published on many other subjects: hatching and egg teeth in birds, weather-related mortality, interspecific interactions, inappropriate cowbird hosts, range extensions and vagrancy, a seminal paper on larid site tenacity, and an overlooked paper in which he distinguished between usage of the terms "cannibalism" and "scavenging" in the ecological literature.

Martin brought his considerable organizational and editorial skills to bear in the establishment of the *Alberta Naturalist*, of which he was an early editor, and later in *Ornithology in Ontario* (1994), a 400-page historical review of ornithology and ornithologists coauthored with John L. Cranmer-Byng, to which he also contributed overviews of the history of ornithology and bird banding in Ontario. These interests continued, and he edited and contributed multiple chapters to two special volumes of the *Alberta Naturalist*: one focused on the history of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists and its Corporate Member Clubs (1981); the other on the history of bird banding and banders in Alberta, published to commemorate the AOU meeting held in Edmonton in 1981. In the early 1990s, he joined the board of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists (BCFO) and soon assumed editorial duties of the society's journal, *British Columbia Birds*, first as book review editor and then as editor-in-chief, a position he held from 1994 to 2002. In addition to contributing regularly to the BCFO newsletter *BC Birding*, he served for many years on the Birding Committee of Nature Vancouver and as the program chair of the Langley Field Naturalists. Concurrent with these activities, and for more than 30 years, from 1980 to 2014, Martin was in charge of the "Recent Literature" section of *North American Bird Bander*. Book reviews also appeared in the *Canadian Field-Naturalist*, *The Auk*, and local

journals of ornithology and natural history such as *Alberta Field Naturalist*, *Blue Jay*, *Edmonton Naturalist*, and *Ontario Birds*.

Martin compiled several bibliographies, including two on Manitoba ornithology. *Manitoba Bird Studies* was prepared in conjunction with the meeting of the AOU held in Winnipeg in 1975, and an expanded version, *Manitoba Bird Studies 1744–1983*, was published in 1985. Sandwiched between these volumes was *A Bibliography of Alberta Ornithology* (1981), of which he was senior editor; a second and expanded edition of this bibliography, coedited with David E. Ealey, was published in 1991. He also authored 45 entries in the *Canadian Encyclopedia* (1985), most dealing with birds and natural history. In addition to preparing the account of Forster's Tern for *The Birds of North America* (2001), he coauthored featured species accounts of Common Nighthawk (2006) and Forster's Tern (2008) in British Columbia for *Wildlife Afield*, and contributed species accounts for *The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Ontario* (1987), *The Birds of Manitoba* (2003), and *The Birds of Saskatchewan* (forthcoming). Martin's field notes, many reports, extensive correspondence, and other papers are archived at the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies in Victoria ([www.wildlifebc.org](http://www.wildlifebc.org)).

Martin's many accomplishments and his generosity of time were recognized through several awards, including the Loran L. Goulden Memorial Award for outstanding contributions to natural history in Alberta (1983); the Ernest Thompson Seton medal for contributions to Manitoba's natural history (1995); Honorary Life Member of both the Langley Field Naturalists (2001) and BCFO (2002); and the Steve Cannings Award from the BCFO (2014) for contributions to ornithology and bird study in British Columbia.

In 2001, Martin almost lost his life when he was stricken with meningitis and pneumonia. After spending four weeks in hospital, two of them in a coma, he recovered and continued his work and volunteer activities for several more years. For the last two or three years before his death, however, Martin was confined to a wheelchair, as nerve damage due to the meningitis severely restricted his mobility and made it difficult for him to continue doing what he loved most. One of Martin's last outings was a trip arranged for him to travel by wheelchair van to attend the 2014 annual conference of the BCFO held in Pemberton. As the longtime chair of the awards committee, Martin was prepared to announce that year's recipient of the Steve Cannings Award, only to be pleasantly surprised to learn that it was he who would receive the award!

Martin will be remembered by his colleagues and friends as a true gentleman who was generous with his time and willing to share his vast knowledge on natural history and

ornithology. Martin is survived by his sister Sigrid Zueff, brother-in-law Don Zueff, nephews Stephan and Eric, niece Heather, aunt Jean Dempster, and partner of 28 years Kevin Young.

I gratefully acknowledge information provided by David M. Ealey, Jocelyn Hudon, and D. V. (Chip)

Weseloh and thank Kevin Young for supplying the photograph.

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