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Source: *The Auk*, 127(3) : 712-713

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2010.127.3.712>

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*The Auk* 127(3):712–713, 2010  
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## IN MEMORIAM: RICHARD GEORGE BOLNEY BROWN, 1935–2010

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Richard (Dick) G. B. Brown, Elective Member (1978) and long-time supporter of the AOU, died on 26 March 2010 in Kings Regional Rehabilitation Centre, Waterville, Nova Scotia, at the age of 74, following a lengthy battle with dementia. Dick was best known for his pioneering study of the pelagic ecology of seabirds in the Northwest Atlantic, which included the first computerization of seabird at-sea data to analyze species' distributions over a large marine geographic area. He was a towering figure in marine ornithology worldwide for establishing the relationship between distributions of birds at sea through the annual cycle with the oceanographic characteristics of their marine habitat. Dick is also remembered as a well-read, witty, and entertaining raconteur, at his best in informal social gatherings discussing topics from his beloved seabirds to the Greek classics, always enhanced by a glass of spirits or wine in hand. He was one of the warmest, friendliest, and most interesting seabird investigators of his era, always willing to give of his time and knowledge to fellow workers and students.

Dick was born in Wolverhampton, the West Midlands, England, on 15 September 1935, the son of George and Nora (*nee* Taylor) Brown. After secondary schooling at the Benedictine Downside School, he went to New College, University of Oxford, and graduated in Zoology (1957). Dick remained at Oxford as a graduate student of Niko Tinbergen and completed his D. Phil. (Ph.D.) researches (1962) on the comparative reproductive behavior of fruit flies (*Drosophila obscura* group). He then switched from entomology to ornithology, his primary interest, a transition made easy by an offer from Tinbergen to undertake postdoctoral studies (1962–1965) on species' isolation mechanisms among the large gulls (*Larus* spp.) on Walney Island, Lancashire, England, and later to go to Alaska to produce ethograms of Sabine's Gull. This resulted in an outpouring of publications, largely on social factors that influence breeding behavior in fruit flies and colonially-breeding seabirds, and also on migration in insects and the behavior of Western Sandpipers and Willow Warblers in continuous daylight. The Oxford environment and interactions with outstanding doctoral and postdoctoral students in both David Lack's and Niko Tinbergen's laboratories formed the foundation for his life's work on marine birds.

In 1965, Dick moved to Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, as a research associate to teach animal behavior in the Department of Psychology. Although this experiment to bring ethology and psychology closer together failed to flourish, Dick exploited the presence of pigeons on campus and examined social interference in courtship and seed selection. He also established working relationships with oceanographers at both Dalhousie University and the nearby Bedford Institute of Oceanography (BIO), connections that permitted him to participate on joint oceanographic cruises in government research vessels and develop

connections that would serve him well in the future. Dick thought that his stay in Canada would only be for a couple of years as a psychology lecturer, but as he stated later: "The country grabbed me, and before I knew it I was an oceanographer counting birds at sea and also discovered the Atlantic Ocean in all its moods, and I liked it very much indeed."

Dick joined the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) in 1967, first in Aurora, Ontario, to study crop damage to cherry and grape orchards by American Robins, and later at BIO where he remained until his retirement in 1994. Although officially hired to study the bird-damage problem in the Niagara Peninsula, Hugh Boyd, the newly appointed CWS chief of migratory birds, recognized Dick's keen interest in marine birds and encouraged him to continue his cruises on BIO ships as a secondary activity with the aim of ultimately initiating a long-term study of the pelagic ecology of Canadian Atlantic seabirds. Dick did this with gusto and was soon publishing papers on seabirds and developing the use of computers to examine distributions of birds at sea in collaboration with Université de Moncton scientists Paul Germain, Eric Tull, and Tim Davis. The at-sea program entitled PIROP (Programme Intégré de Recherches sur les Oiseaux Pélagiques) was initiated in 1969 by Dick and Paul Germain. By 1972, the program was operated completely by the CWS.

In early 1971, approval for the establishment of Canada's first formal CWS seabird program was secured by Hugh Boyd, and Dick relocated quickly from Aurora to BIO, Dartmouth, early that summer. In addition to completing the write-up and publication of his robin work (*Bird Damage to Fruit Crops in the Niagara Peninsula*, 1974), Dick pushed full-throttle to take advantage of the relatively large BIO oceanographic fleet with its many cruises throughout the northwest Atlantic. Once at BIO, he spent a great deal of time at sea, training and directing a small group of observers to systematically collect quantitative data to chart the distribution of seabirds at sea. From 1971 to 1973, Dick also supervised the fine-tuning of the CWS-PIROP program for computerized seabird atlases utilizing the BIO computer center and the programming talents of Eric Tull.

Dick's early training in animal behavior served him well. He was exceptionally well organized, a meticulous record-keeper with an innate sense of completeness. In addition to data on species, numbers, and position of birds at sea, he began to integrate bird distribution data with oceanographic characteristics of the waters where the birds were found in an effort to answer not only the question of where the birds occur but also of why they are there. The use of oceanographic research vessels that simultaneously collected physical, chemical, and biological data where the birds were being recorded made for unique opportunities to better understand the patterns of seabird distribution and abundance.

Data were collected from Canadian oceanographic ships all the way from Baffin Bay south to Cape Horn and beyond, wherever cruise plans dictated. Dick thrived in this work, and his effort, creativity, and transformation into an oceanographer bore fruit in his many scientific publications on birds in a marine environment, including the *Atlas of Eastern Canadian Seabirds* (1975), the first summary analysis of the at-sea data, which was followed by an updated pelagic-distribution supplement, *Revised Atlas of Eastern Canadian Seabirds, I. Shipboard Surveys* (1986), and the *Gazetteer of Marine Birds in Atlantic Canada: An Atlas of Seabird Vulnerability to Oil Pollution* (1994). Within the world of oceanography, his special interest was perhaps in physical processes and chemical cycles that influenced primary and secondary productivity—for example, upwellings and converging currents that concentrate seabird prey and physical features such as sea-ice that can both enhance and limit seabird foraging. Much of what he learned was summarized in two review chapters in the *The Atlantic Alcidae* (1985). Dick also, to use his words, “preached the seabird gospel” to all takers with the focus on seabirds as marine animals, an effort to educate both the lay public and professional oceanographers who often overlooked seabirds as an integral part of marine ecosystems. He ultimately succeeded in getting the oceanographic fraternity to acknowledge that indeed “the sea has wings”!

Dick had talents beyond marine ornithology and oceanography. He was a gifted writer, editor, and translator. He served on the editorial boards of the *Canadian Journal of Zoology* and *Ontario Bird Banding*, and for many years he wrote a bimonthly column on natural history for the popular magazine *Nature Canada*. He also served the ornithological world well by translating many Danish and Norwegian scientific papers, monographs, and books on birds into English. Dick’s great love of literature and maritime history resulted in his own book *Voyage of the Iceberg: The Story of the Iceberg that Sank the Titanic* (1983), a unique fictional overview of the tragedy that blended shipbuilding, natural history, and oceanography. It brought him the 1983 Outdoor Writing Award (Books) of the Canadian Sportsmen’s Shows–Outdoor Writers of

Canada, and the 1984 Science Journalism Award of the Canadian Science Writers’ Association, as well as great acclaim from reviewers worldwide. Dick also contributed to the local birdwatcher and naturalist scene in Nova Scotia, especially the Nova Scotia Bird Society, and derived considerable pleasure from mentoring colleagues, students, and serious amateurs on seabird topics and oceanography. In 2000, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Pacific Seabird Group, which recognized his outstanding contributions to marine ornithology.

Dick’s lifelong passion for the study of birds is perhaps best exemplified by comments he made about his first publication (1955) as a second-year undergraduate on the migration of the Eurasian Coot in Britain in relation to what followed on marine birds: “SEABIRDS? They’re a long way from the Res,” a reservoir near Brewood, where Dick spent his youth, “where I did my first bit of scientific research on coots, but the research is much the same. The trick is to wonder WHY the coots in Staffordshire, and the shearwaters and phalaropes out at sea, are where they are.” His was an inquisitive mind, always asking questions, a quest for knowledge that continued throughout his working life. His study of pelagic seabird distributions and the roles that seabirds play in pelagic ecosystems will continue indefinitely both inside and outside Canadian waters, with results far exceeding the initial 1967 objective of using at-sea data to predict the hazards of oil spills and other marine pollutants.

Dick is survived by his brother, Fr. Sandy Brown of Staffordshire, England, and many close friends that considered him family. Dick will be missed by everyone who was fortunate enough to have known him as a research scientist with the CWS Seabird Research Unit at BIO. His enthusiasm for life and his researches on seabirds, coupled with a most diverse knowledge of both the natural sciences and the humanities, made him special. Dick represented science at its best as an intelligent and original thinker who never stopped giving to the CWS and ornithology communities. His death is a tragic loss to all of us, as was his 15-year illness, which took him from us prematurely.