



## IN MEMORIAM: JANET KEAR, 1933–2004

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Source: The Auk, 122(4) : 1293-1294

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038\(2005\)122\[1293:IMJK\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038(2005)122[1293:IMJK]2.0.CO;2)

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## In Memoriam



*The Auk* 122(4):1293–1294, 2005  
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Printed in USA.

### IN MEMORIAM: JANET KEAR, 1933–2004

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The eminent British ornithologist Janet Kear died, after a short illness, on 24 November 2004 at the age of 71. An Honorary Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU), she was remarkable for her pioneering studies of wildfowl, her contributions to waterbird conservation, and for inspiring a generation of researchers and aviculturalists. Many of today's leading ornithologists and conservationists attribute their choice of career, or its subsequent development, to fruitful discussions at Janet's dinner table.

Born in London, Janet spent some years at Caspar Junior College in Wyoming, but returned to Britain to complete her education. After her first degree at King's College, London, she studied the feeding behavior of finches under R. A. Hinde at Cambridge University and gained her Ph.D. in 1959. Shortly afterwards, she became Research Scientist at the Wildfowl Trust (now the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust [WWT]), the organization founded by Peter Scott, where her first husband, Geoffrey Matthews, was Director of Research and Conservation. Janet was initially involved in the project to protect the endangered Hawaiian Goose (the Nene), which included a captive breeding program to reintroduce the birds to the wild. During the 1960s and early 1970s, she published on subjects as diverse as behavior, cognition, and the regulation of avian breeding cycles. Perhaps her most important studies were those on the potential conflict between goose grazing and agriculture at a time when the birds were first moving onto arable land. She also developed a keen interest in assessing the health of captive waterbird populations, with a view to improving husbandry techniques.

In 1977, Janet was appointed Curator of the

WWT Centre at Martin Mere in Lancashire, and she was Director responsible for all WWT Centres from 1991 until her retirement in 1993. These two roles added substantially to her administrative workload, yet she managed to retain her research interests and to be actively involved in ornithological work outside her base at WWT. She was a major force in the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU), as a member of council from 1980 to 1994 and as President from 1990 to 1994. From 1980 to 1988, she was Editor of *The Ibis*. From 1989 to 2001, she edited *Wildfowl*, the WWT's journal. Generous with her time, Janet served as council member for the Study of Animal Behaviour, the Avicultural Society, the British Trust for Ornithology, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust, and English Nature. Her substantial international reputation included chairing the Endangered Waterfowl Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature from 1976 to 1987. She was on the committee of the International Ornithological Congress from 1982 to 1998, and was vice-president at its 1998 meeting in Durban.

Under Janet's leadership, Martin Mere, one of the United Kingdom's leading wetland reserves and a major visitor attraction, fully achieved the aim of bringing birds and people together. There she met her second husband, John Turner, himself a keen ornithologist, and their legendary hospitality was received by people from all walks of life. Her sharp intellect made it difficult for her to suffer fools gladly, but people were quickly won to her warmth and generosity. She was particularly aware of the importance of encouraging the next generation, and was tireless in helping those aspiring to careers in animal husbandry, research, and conservation.



JANET KEAR, 1933–2004  
(Photograph by Tim Jones.)

Janet received many accolades during her life. She became an Honorary Fellow of the AOU in 1998. She was Honorary Fellow of Manchester Metropolitan University, Honorary Doctorate (with title Professor) of Liverpool John Moores University, and Fellow of Liverpool University. She was also awarded the BOU medal and the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to conservation. In addition to more than 90 published papers, she wrote *The Mute Swan* (1989), *Man and Wildfowl* (1990), and *Ducks of the World* (1991). She co-edited the proceedings of the first international Flamingo symposium, entitled *Flamingos* (1975), co-authored *The Hawaiian Goose: An Experiment in Conservation* (1980), and

*Wildfowl* (1985), and wrote a major part of *The Swans* (1972).

The diagnosis of a brain tumor in September 2004 was a serious blow to her many friends and admirers. Up to that time, she was in regular communication with ornithologists across the globe, and she had just completed her seminal work *Ducks, Geese, and Swans*, which was being printed at the time of her death. This substantial work, published by Oxford University Press in 2005, is a lasting memorial to a lifetime devoted to the study and conservation of wildfowl. Her legacy to wildlife conservation and animal welfare lives on in those she inspired who continue working in these fields.