

2005 Goodhue-Elkins Award Recipient

As presented at the New Hampshire Audubon Annual Meeting, June 4, 2005

The Goodhue-Elkins Award is given annually by New Hampshire Audubon (NHA) to recognize an individual who has made outstanding contributions to the study of New Hampshire birds. This award is named for Charles Goodhue, one of New Hampshire's first great birders, and Kimball Elkins, still the model of critical observation and insightful record keeping.

Dick Hughes, a retired computer engineer, has spent much of his spare time tracking, watching, and monitoring birds and wildlife in the Great Bay region and beyond for many years. Fortunately for NHA, he retired early and devoted much of his time to keeping track of birds around the seacoast.

When former NHA staff member Diane Evans first met Dick Hughes, she recalls that he was somewhat of an "Accidental Volunteer." It was back in the early days of wintering Bald Eagle monitoring at Great Bay, and she had gathered a few folks to count eagles and try to catch sight of them as they flew to a night roost. As she was giving assignments, she saw a man at the fringe that she didn't recognize. Not wanting to be rude or exclusive, she teamed him up, after he gave an agreeable shrug and said, "Sure, I'll help."

Since that fateful day more than 20 years ago, Dick has been monitoring winter eagles in the Great Bay area from Thanksgiving to early April. Once a week, like clockwork, he spends a frigid evening on the windy side of Great Bay watching Wilcox Point to document how many birds are coming in to roost. In a recent segment of the television program *New Hampshire Wildlife Journal*, he describes watching eagles in winter as "an awe inspiring sight." It takes a special person to brave the biting winter temperatures of Great Bay to witness this sight and to accumulate the data that would later lead to the site's eventual protection as a winter eagle roost. Eagles led to Peregrine Falcons, terns, and Ospreys.

Dick has been documenting Ospreys in the Great Bay area from the mid-1980s, before they were even confirmed nesting in 1989, until today, when he still visits six or seven nest sites on his own. It is Dick's careful observations of coastal Ospreys that have allowed us to follow and manage this population. Without fail, he documents his time, observations, and details each year, also creating a summary of the season, unasked for, which he sends in with all his data sheets. He has been a mentor to other Osprey nest watchers, answering questions and providing guidance for the Great Bay Osprey Stewards, coordinated by New Hampshire Fish & Game Department. Other volunteers that he has mentored as Osprey stewards have gone on to make valuable contributions to conservation efforts in a variety of arenas. Dick has gone on to further Osprey awareness and education by single-handedly creating an Osprey Web site, initially for Great Bay, that has the history of every nest site, dates of incubation, nest visits, and all kinds of interesting information on the bird. The site has been growing every year and now includes statewide information. And of course Dick has been a regular participant in Osprey Weekend.

Before the Ospreys, there were terns to monitor. For more than a decade, Dick followed the nesting terns that persisted in the Hampton salt marsh, on small islands along the Piscataqua River, and in Great Bay. He spent many hours canoeing through narrow tidal channels with

strong tidal currents, across open bay waters, and searching through the salt marsh grass to monitor the status of nesting terns. Dick's contributions to the documentation of New Hampshire's tern breeding status through the 1990s helped to focus efforts towards tern restoration at the Isles of Shoals.

Dick has also contributed to the Peregrine Falcon Watch and Northern Harrier surveys during the mid to late 1990s, and Common Nighthawk surveys from an earlier time. He has participated in NHA wetland surveys of properties in Great Bay that were later to become protected. All this time in the field has helped Dick accumulate a wealth of sightings and he has made significant contributions to *New Hampshire Bird Records*. When the call came in about a possible Piping Plover nest in 1997, Dick was on the beach within an hour to determine that it was, indeed, a Piping Plover. The data gathered on seacoast bird monitoring projects have, in no small way, been due to Dick's efforts.

Despite various medical obstacles over the years, he has continued his work with his characteristic sense of humor. He kept Diane Evans laughing and sane on many a freezing afternoon of winter eagle watching and, according to Chris Martin, "It's always a pleasure to be out with him."

Dick Hughes's careful observations and record keeping as well as his tremendous enthusiasm and willingness to recruit and train dozens of volunteers exemplify the qualifications of a Goodhue-Elkins Award recipient. Because of those efforts he has made an outstanding and lasting contribution to birds in New Hampshire. Although he has described his passion as "a selfish interest," we have all benefited from his work, most especially the birds, which inspire his commitment. New Hampshire Audubon is honored to present him with the 2005 Goodhue-Elkins Award.

(reprinted from *New Hampshire Bird Records*, Vol. 24 #1, Spring 2005. www.nhbirdrecords.org)