

2012 Goodhue-Elkins Award

As presented by Jay Barry at the New Hampshire Audubon Annual Meeting, September 29, 2012.

The Goodhue-Elkins Award is given annually by New Hampshire Audubon 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 the state's first great birders, and Kimball Elkins, who remains the model for critical observation and insightful record keeping.

This year's recipient of the Goodhue-Elkins Award is Roger Lawrence. I think Kimball would be very happy that his old friend is receiving this award.

At the age of fifteen Roger earned his scout merit badge in bird watching. Seventy-seven years later Roger is still lifting his binoculars to the sky as often as he can.

Roger was a professor of biology at St. Anselms College in Manchester for many years. Although most of his courses revolved around general biology, his great passion was, and still is, birding. Roger devoted his time and effort to NH Audubon for many years, primarily from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s. He was a director on the New Hampshire Audubon Board from 1963-1969. He was an observer on the Walpole Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) route from 1966 (the first year that BBS routes were initiated in New Hampshire) to 1973. Roger was an active reporter of bird sightings to New Hampshire Audubon and contributed data to the *New Hampshire Audubon Quarterly* from the 1960s to the 1980s. He led many field trips for New Hampshire Audubon in the 1960s and 1970s. Roger was among a core group of field trip leaders before the era of chapters began that included Kimball Elkins, Tudor Richards, Art Borrer, Dennis Abbot, Davis Finch, Betty and Leon Phinney and Bob Rathbone. He established the Nashua-Hollis Christmas Bird Count (CBC) and was a regular on the Seacoast CBC for many years.

In addition to this, Roger also took time for scientific pursuits. For many years during the 1960s through the 1980s he kept detailed, meticulous records on first arrival dates for spring migrants. This may represent the first "phenology" study in New Hampshire. In 1966 Roger obtained a bird banding permit from the US Fish & Wildlife Service and banded migrants in the spring and fall at his farm in Merrimack. There was an occasional trip to the wastewater treatment plant to band shorebirds. In winter his traps would be filled with Evening Grosbeaks, at a time when they were still a regular visitor to southern New Hampshire.

His contributions to New Hampshire Audubon and his personal research activities are only part of Roger's story. His real influence was in the many hundreds of students, young and old, that he brought into the birding and natural history community. He has unbridled enthusiasm, passion, and joy when



Roger Lawrence with the Goodhue-Elkins Award. Photo by Jay Barry.

sharing his knowledge and bringing the world of birding to others. As a teacher, you just don't get much better.

It was a warm, sunny day in late April 1960 when an eleven year old boy who had always been interested in Natural History decided to go on a "birding" field trip to Greeley Park in Nashua. The first thing that happened was that a man, among the twenty or so people that gathered for the trip came over with a big smile and said "welcome to the group." That was the first time I met Roger Lawrence. He made sure to stick close by me for the rest of the day, pointing out identification cues for all the species we saw and heard (The Rufous -sided Towhee sounds like "Drink Your Tea"). I was introduced to the importance of keeping a field notebook and keeping accurate data. From that point on, I attended many New Hampshire Audubon field trips and CBCs with Roger. I well remember being at the end of Great Boars Head at **6:00 am** in sub-zero wind chills looking for sea ducks. As time went on I graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a degree in zoology under Art Borrer and then began a career teaching middle school science in Bedford for twenty-eight years. After a suggestion from Roger, we established a hawk watch for 18 years from 1973-1990.

Little did I know that a lifetime passion would begin that sunny April morning over fifty years ago when a total stranger reached out his hand and said "welcome to the group." I am sure there are many others out there with stories similar to mine. Roger was always encouraging young people and his students at St. Anselm College to go birding and study ornithology.

After retirement from St. Anselm, Roger, not content to sit at home, brought his passion for birding to younger students. He has been conducting a hawk watch for the past twenty-five years with elementary students at the Reeds Ferry School in Merrimack. Cindy Janiak, a fourth grade teacher at the school had this to say about Roger:

"He's introduced an entire generation to bird watching. He loves the kids. He's very engaging. He teaches them to be patient and observe things."

The students, as they scanned the skies for kettles of Broad-winged Hawks, said they enjoyed being out in nature and learning from Professor Lawrence, as they call him. When a student asked him why he enjoys birding so much his reply was "You never know what's coming next." Asked if he would be back again next year Roger replied "If I feel up to it, I'll be here."

Roger lights up the world wherever he goes. At the end of the day when we look back it is the lives of others that we have influenced that is really important. There are so many lives he has influenced, and so many that are grateful that he was their mentor, their teacher, their friend. So it is an honor and great pleasure for New Hampshire Audubon to award Roger Lawrence with the 2012 Goodhue-Elkins Award.