

2006 Goodhue-Elkins Award

As presented at the New Hampshire Audubon Annual Meeting, June 3, 2006

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 New Hampshire's first great birders, and Kimball Elkins, who remains the model for critical observation and insightful record keeping.

Ralph Andrews, the recipient of this year's award, has devoted an entire lifetime to the study of birds and their conservation. He is one of those fortunate individuals who has managed to do this through his professional career and, just as seriously, through his private interests and endeavors.

Ralph was born and raised in Ithaca, New York. As a Boy Scout he developed a youthful interest in nature, particularly bird watching. He created his first bird list when he was eleven years old. Much of this early bird watching was done in Sapsucker Woods, which is now the site of Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology. As a young scout, Ralph was awarded the annual Louis Agassiz Fuertes award for "Best Nature Student". Living in Ithaca afforded Ralph the opportunity to become acquainted with some of Cornell's esteemed ornithologists including Arthur Allen, George Sutton, and Paul Kellogg. Ralph's first public appearance was on Dr. Kellogg's bird-related radio broadcast where the young Ralph was asked to describe his recent sighting of a Northern Mockingbird, then an unusual bird for New York state. Initially discouraged by some of the graduate students at Cornell who impressed upon Ralph that you couldn't make a living actually doing ornithology, he began his undergraduate career at Cornell in biochemistry. But, according to Ralph, after a few physics and calculus classes, he kept the "bio" and dropped the "chemistry". Influenced by the work of Aldo Leopold, he gravitated to game management, a practical way for a young man to apply those early ecological principles to a career. He graduated from Cornell University with a bachelor's degree in zoology and went on to graduate school at Ohio State University. There he studied waterfowl production on the Lake Erie marshes and obtained his master's degree in Wildlife Management.

As a newly graduated field biologist, Ralph worked briefly for the New York State Conservation Department in wildfowl and wetland management, but soon joined the US Fish and Wildlife Service. His first assignment was as a refuge biologist in south Florida. That began a forty year career that included assignments in Montana, Louisiana, and at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland, where he headed the wetland ecology section. One of the initiatives he pursued while at Patuxent was research into finding alternatives to lead shot. In 1975 he arrived in New England (where his Vermont-raised wife, Hattie, had roots), having been assigned to the Northeast Regional Office of the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Boston. There his major role was coordinating a wide variety of coastal ecosystem and waterfowl initiatives. As a birder he encouraged the refuge system to promote bird watching and he validated many of the refuges' bird checklists. As one of his final professional assignments he managed the Roseate Tern Recovery Project.

Although Ralph retired in 1992 from his professional career in "applied ornithology", as he calls it, he hardly stepped back from his devotion to birds and the environment. In parallel with his professional career, Ralph has devoted much of his private time to the study and protection of birds, especially in our state and particularly in his home community of Nashua and its neighboring towns.

Ralph has been an active contributor to many volunteer organizations that support the study and conservation of birds. He was elected to the venerable Nuttall Ornithological Club in 1977 and served as one of its councilors from 1981 through 1984. He has been active in the Beaver Brook Association in Hollis, where he formerly served as a trustee and as its president. A long-time member of New Hampshire Audubon, he was asked to join its Board of Trustees in 1989 and remained on the Board for nine years. During that time he served on the Wildlife and Wetlands Committee. Ralph has been the backbone of the Nashaway Chapter of New Hampshire Audubon and, over the years, has served the chapter in many roles, including that of Conservation coordinator, Field Trips coordinator, vice president, and chapter president. He is currently the chapter's Program coordinator, a position he has held for many years.

As an avid birder, Ralph has contributed his skills to a number of important projects that have furthered our understanding of the birds in our state. He was intensively involved in the production of the *New Hampshire Breeding Bird Atlas*. Ralph participated in many of the initial organizational meetings for that project. He was the regional coordinator for the Nashua area and did much of the necessary field work. He also authored several of the species accounts, reflecting his broad knowledge of birds, with chapters as diverse as those covering Canada Goose and Mallard to Bay-breasted Warbler and Grasshopper Sparrow. He was also one of the text reviewers for the book.

Over the years Ralph has participated in innumerable Christmas Bird Counts within and outside the state. Chan Robbins got him involved in this activity while he was stationed at Patuxent. Once he arrived in New England, his Christmas Bird Count participation ranged from Cape Cod to New Hampshire's North Country. It wasn't uncommon for Ralph to participate in a half dozen or so Christmas Bird Counts each season. In the early 1980s he became one of the organizers and promoters of the Nashua-Hollis CBC and served for many years as its compiler or co-compiler.

In many other ways, Ralph has used his personal knowledge of birds to broaden others' understanding of them. He has served as a volunteer for the Breeding Bird Survey. He has led countless field trips for the Nashaway Chapter, enabling him to share his birding knowledge with novice and experienced birders alike. Over the years he has contributed many of his field observations to *New Hampshire Bird Records*. Most recently, Ralph was elected a member of the state's Rare Bird Committee, where he can apply his considerable field expertise and knowledge to further our understanding of the appearance and distribution of birds in our state. Ralph Andrews has devoted a lifetime to the study and conservation of birds, both as a professional and as an avid birder volunteer. For over thirty years he has generously contributed his time and considerable knowledge to advancing our understanding of the birds of New Hampshire. As such, he is a fitting and deserved recipient of this year's Goodhue-Elkins Award.

(reprinted from *New Hampshire Bird Records*, Vol. 24 #4, Winter 2005-06.
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