

In Memoriam: James D. Rising

Nancy J. Flood



Jim Rising in 2015.
Photo: Steven Rowe

JAMES DAVID RISING—Jim to everyone—died in Toronto on 13 March 2018, as a result of complications following surgery. He packed more birding, ornithological research and writing, teaching, and mentoring into his 75 years of life than most of us can hope to do and will be missed greatly by many, many friends and students, as well as his family.

Born in Kansas City in 1942, Jim was a keen birder from an early age. A member of the American Ornithologist's Union (AOU, now AOS) at 14, he was active with the Burroughs Bird Club in Kansas City, participating in the city's Christmas Bird Count in the 1950s and

1960s. He also joined the Kansas, Cooper and Wilson Ornithological Societies in his teens, which surely presaged a career in ornithology.

Jim completed a B.A. in Zoology at the University of Kansas (KU) in 1964. While there, he began working with Richard Johnston at the KU Natural History Museum. Johnston eventually agreed to be Jim's Ph.D. supervisor—as long as he promised to go elsewhere for a post-doc. Kansas was the perfect place for his doctoral project, however, which was on the hybridization of Bullock's and Baltimore Orioles in the Great Plains—a subject he continued to study for many



Jim on a Central American field course. Spencer Barrett, Jim and Mark Engstrom on a field course. *Photo: Chris Darling*

years. In fact, because of the extent of his knowledge of these species, he was the driving force behind the restoration of the two as separate species in 1995 (after they had been lumped into a single taxon, the Northern Oriole, in 1983). Graduating from KU in 1968, Jim went on to do a post-doc with Jack Hudson at Cornell, where he studied the ecological physiology of chickadees, as well as Baltimore and Bullock's Orioles. This increased his skill set, as well as his ability to look at things from a variety of perspectives.

In 1969, Jim accepted a position in the Department of Zoology (now the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary

Biology—EEB) at the University of Toronto (UT). Since he was also appointed as a research associate at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), it was his dream job. For the next 40 years, he taught a variety of undergraduate courses, mentored many graduate students, did research and made good use of—as well as contributing to—the bird collection of the ROM. His contributions to UT go far beyond this, however. From 1992 to 2006, he served as Associate Chair, Undergraduate Studies for the Department of Zoology, a role he found very fulfilling. Another vital contribution was the development of new field courses; although today they may have a different focus, they are now an established part of the EEB curriculum. He taught Field Ornithology at the St. Andrews Marine Station in New Brunswick and on Sapelo Island, Georgia, and Arctic Ecology at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre. With colleagues, he also taught Invertebrate Biology at St. Andrews and Tropical Biology in various locations. When he retired in 2009, a scholarship designed specifically to support students taking field courses was established in his name (<http://www.eeb.utoronto.ca/Assets/EEB+2013+Digital+Assets/James+D.+Rising+Scholarship.pdf?method=1>). Jim was appointed Professor Emeritus at this time and although he was beset by a number of medical issues in his later years, he was still active in the Ramsay Wright building (the home of EEB) until the summer of 2017.

Jim also made substantial contributions to the ornithological profession. He was elected to the council of the Cooper Ornithological Society, which has now

been joined with the American Ornithologists Union, to form the American Ornithological Society (AOS). From 1998 to 2017, he served on the North American Classification committee (formerly the AOU checklist committee). He was vice president and then president of the Wilson Ornithological Society from 2003 to 2008. He was a member of the Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) and Bird Studies Canada, as well as supporting a number of conservation organizations. In 2004, in recognition of his “outstanding contributions to the scientific study of birds in Ontario,” the OFO granted him its Distinguished Ornithologist Award (Falls 2004).

Jim loved teaching and he loved doing field research; stories about his adventures — or perhaps misadventures — in the field are myriad. They often included encounters with bears, venomous snakes, scorpions or unpassable roads. He supplemented dwindling food supplies with savannah sparrow breasts on at least one collecting trip into the wilds and once picked up a bagful of “fresh” specimens—birds that had met an untimely end while gritting at the side of the road and being in a rush, added them to his luggage. They would have been a great addition to the ROM collection had that suitcase not been lost for several days...

As a result of this field work, Jim did indeed make many contributions to the scientific study of birds—publishing over 70 papers in the scientific literature, as well as a variety of technical reports and chapters in scholarly texts. Perhaps more importantly, however, he was able to talk to everyone about birds and any other

type of science. He gave lots of presentations at scientific conferences but was also willing and able to talk to bird clubs, take Boy Scouts on field trips, be the ‘neighborhood scientist’ (open to all types of questions) and take amateurs—including students—out birdwatching. He did workshops on the identification of sparrows for American Birding Association and his last three books (co-authored with David Beadle) were addressed to birders as much as scientific professionals: identification guides to some tough groups, especially the sparrows. In addition, Trudy Rising, his wife of 52 years (who was a graduate student with him at KU), enlisted his assistance in writing many chapters in high school texts. A teacher, writer and Science Publisher, Trudy is skilled at finding people who can translate complex ideas for a high school audience. Trudy and Jim even co-wrote a book entitled, *Canadian Songbirds and their Ways*.

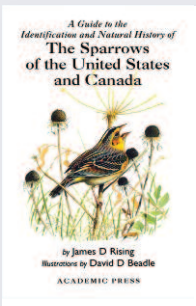
Jim was able to do this because he wasregarious, friendly and indefatigably cheerful. David Beadle writes of feeling some trepidation at meeting Jim for the first time, since to that point he did not have an established reputation as a bird illustrator. Beadle noted that his fears were unfounded, since Jim “turned out to be the nicest guy one could ever meet.” I would second that assessment. As well as everything else, Jim taught me about patience, honesty and maintaining a reasonable work life balance (although I have heard that he sometimes combined his other passion—baseball—with measuring specimens at a card table at home). Trudy attests to his willingness as a young parent of two boys to drive to early

IT WAS WITH SOME TREPIDATION that I first met Jim. Many years ago I had mentioned to Alvaro Jaramillo, a student of his at the time, that I wanted to illustrate a book on North American sparrows, but needed to find a sparrow expert to write the text. "I know just the person!" he said and quickly steered me in the direction of Jim. As it turned out I needn't have worried. We met at a local pub for lunch and Jim turned out to be the nicest guy one could ever meet. At this stage I had no real reputation as a bird illustrator – this was to be my first book – but Jim was willing to take a chance with me. Plans were immediately put into place to work on a definitive guide covering all of the sparrows occurring north of Mexico. Our book was published about three years later and was well received. In fact, it still sells reasonably well today. Our collaboration didn't end there. We produced two more books together—photographic guides to sparrows and finches—and led several sparrow workshops for the American Birding Association to North Dakota and Colorado. Fun times.

Jim was always a pleasure to work with. His immense knowledge combined with his easy-going personality and great sense of humor made for a productive and fun working relationship. I learnt much from him and was

lucky to benefit from the doors he opened for me over the years.

David Beadle
Toronto



morning hockey practice, to do the Boy Scout thing, etc. Shortly after my arrival in Toronto, somewhat homesick, Jim and Trudy took me for a "nature walk" with their two sons—something they clearly did regularly. It was wonderful and set the stage for a strong working relationship and a long friendship. Trudy, David (Heather) and John (Darla) and Jim's three grandsons, Nigel, Justus and Fintan, were adored.

Jim was my graduate supervisor, co-author, teacher and friend. I was his teaching assistant, field assistant (skinning many a Savannah Sparrow in the evenings on collecting trips), bird dog (watching carefully as he dropped a bird with a shotgun and running to find where it had fallen) and friend. I, along with many others, will miss him enormously.

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