

IN MEMORIAM

Howard P. Langridge, 1923-2004

Howard Percy Langridge, a Charter Member of the Florida Ornithological Society (FOS) and an extraordinarily skilled birder who contributed much to our knowledge of birds in Florida, died from complications resulting from a massive stroke on 14 November 2004, at Sycamore Shoals Hospital, Elizabethton, Tennessee, at the age of 81. He was born 31 May 1923 at Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the son of H. R. and Winifred M. Langridge. His childhood and teen years were spent at Cedar Rapids.

In addition to being a member of FOS, Howard held memberships in the American Birding Association (ABA), the Tennessee Ornithological Society (TOS), and the Audubon Society of the Everglades at West Palm Beach. He was a member of the FOS Bird Records Committee from 1985 through 1987, and was Associate Editor (for bird distribution) for the Florida Field Naturalist (FFN) for 10 years (1985 through 1994). He authored or co-authored 21 short articles on significant bird observations he had made in Florida, publishing them in FFN, and was a regular contributor to the seasonal reports in the Field Observations of FFN. He was the editor for the Florida Region for *North American Birds* and its predecessor *American Birds*, writing the spring season reports for 11 years (1986 through 1996), and was a regular contributor of his observations to that journal from the late 1950s up until the time of his death. He and T. Trotsky documented the first Black-tailed Godwit in Florida in 1981 (Merritt Island NWR) and with W. Matthews and G. Hunter had the first sighting of a Thick-billed Murre for the state in 1976 (Lake Worth Fishing Pier). Howard was the compiler of the West Palm Beach Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for an unbroken 40 years, 1958 (the 59th CBC period) through 1997 (the 98th CBC period). No other person has compiled a count or counts in Florida for that length of time. In addition to the West Palm Beach CBC, he frequently participated on CBCs at Ft. Lauderdale, Everglades-Coot Bay, Stuart, and several others. Through 2000 (the last time Howard submitted his list total to the ABA List Report Supplement to *Birding*) he had a Florida Life List of 441 species of birds.

I had the good fortune to have known Howard for 38 years. During the 20 years my family and I lived at Delray Beach, he and I birded together on a regular basis in Palm Beach County and elsewhere in the state from the Dry Tortugas to Jacksonville to Pensacola. Some of his favorite birding areas included the Dry Tortugas, Florida Keys, Everglades National Park, Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee NWR, Hypoluxo Island at Lantana, the Lake Worth Fishing Pier, Blowing Rocks Beach near Jupiter, Duda Farms near Belle Glade, and the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. After Howard retired, he spent a week or so annually during spring migration at the Dry Tortugas, camping outside Ft. Jefferson on Garden Key. On such visits he often was a co-leader for Wings, the well-known birding tour company out of Tucson, Arizona. Over the years he took hundreds of out-of-town birders to see the south Florida specialties. Peter Dunne of Cape May, New Jersey, in his popular book *The Feather Quest: a North American Birder's Year*, referred to Howard as an "alpha alpha birder."

After moving to Elizabethton, Tennessee, in 1997, he continued to bird in the eastern part of that state, often in association with fellow birders in the region, and recorded several first records for Tennessee, including Great Blue (white morph) Heron, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Royal Tern. Howard's last birding with a group was with the Herndon TOS Chapter on 30 October 2004 at Sycamore Shoals State Park at Elizabethton.

Howard had two great passions in life—extreme competition in birding and tennis. He loved a "good chase" for a rare bird. Upon seeing an interesting species or something that pleased him, he would break into a broad smile and rapidly rub his palms together

as an expression of his excitement. In the field he usually wore a light-colored, broad-brimmed, tilley-like hat, a shirt with a collar, lightweight long trousers, and low-cut leather boots or tennis shoes. He always carried crackers to munch on and drank only water. Invariably he used 3x5 index cards in the field to take notes on the birds he observed and make sketches of the rarer species using a lead pencil. He would quickly whip a card out of his shirt pocket to make a notation or sketch and then quickly replace it. These cards were recycled from student term papers; he had saved hundreds or thousands of these cards for this purpose. His sketches were accurate artistic renderings of birds. In my 55 years of birding I have never met a birder who liked to crawl into a dense thicket like Howard in search of furtive species. The man was truly amazing in this respect; he was as agile as a raccoon.

Traveling with Howard was a great pleasure, since there was always interesting conversation about birds and every other topic under the sun, as he was extremely well read in current events, history, literature, and a wide range of other subjects. He and I also held a similar view of "the world." We frequently talked by telephone about birds, birding, and planning trips in and out of state. Upon answering the phone, instead of saying hello or some other greeting, his stock in trade was "H. P. Langridge here"—when I think of him, I can still hear that familiar greeting. His enthusiasm was infectious, and, when he perceived something to be funny, he would break out into his distinctive cackling-like laugh. He was a dynamo of energy, and, for things that interested him, he always gave 100 percent. His family, birding, playing tennis, and making furniture and other items out of wood he had cut on his Tennessee property were among his primary interests. He played tennis with gusto and, because of his skill and stamina, was able to beat players half his age. Howard and his youngest daughter, Daphne (Robin to most of us) were ranked in mixed-doubles tennis in Florida for several years. He played tennis 3-5 times per week up to just before his death.

He was predeceased by his wife of 55 years, Mable Sharp Langridge, a daughter Patsy Langridge, and a grandson William H. Ollmann. He is survived by a brother, Ray Langridge (Marion, Iowa); daughters J. Susan Ollmann (Gainesville, FL), Jane M. Farmer (Pensacola, FL), and Daphne R. Mahagan (Dade City, FL); a son, Howard P. Langridge III (Sopchoppy, FL); four grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

Howard left his native Iowa at the age of 18 and worked for the U.S. Postal Service in Washington, D.C. He served a little over three years in the U.S. Navy as a reconnaissance photographer aboard a PBY aircraft in the Pacific during World War II. On 2 December 1944 he married Mable Sharp of Elizabethton, Tennessee. Following the war he attended East Tennessee State University at Johnson City under the GI Bill, where he earned Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees in English. It is about this time that Howard began birding. He taught English at Unaka High School in Carter County, TN, for six years before moving to Lantana, FL, in 1957. He taught English for 23 years in the Palm Beach County Public School System, first at Palm Beach High School for several years, but most of his teaching career was at Forest Hill H.S. in West Palm Beach, until his retirement in 1981. He often commuted between his home in Lantana and Forest Hill H.S. on his bicycle, using the less traveled streets. This was long before most people gave much thought to conserving fossil fuels and maintaining clean air standards in South Florida. Howard was well liked by his students and fellow faculty members at Forest Hill. He had an energetic teaching style, being very animated in the classroom. He taught a number of different courses in the English Department, his passion being composition. He was head of the English Department for several years, was Student Council Advisor, and Field Biology Club Sponsor, where he taught students bird identification and other skills pertaining to their environmental education.

Friday afternoons during the school year found Howard and the kids in the Field Biology Club hard at work trying not to misidentify a bird and not utter a grammatical error. At year's end, he handed each of his students a 3 × 5 card with the simple



Clockwise from top left. Howard P. Langridge—In his element in the classroom at Forest Hill High School, West Palm Beach, FL, circa 1970s; courtesy Susan Ollmann. Birding on southern Great Abaco Island, Bahamas, 17 November 1990; photo by Paul Sykes. Faculty photo in Forest Hill H. S. Yearbook 1981 (his last year teaching); photo courtesy Susan Ollmann. On “station” at Lake Worth Fishing Pier with a first-year Sabine’s Gull, Lake Worth, Florida, November 1986; photo by Tadzju Trotsky.

inscription “Langridge Product,” a distinction accepted with great pride. Years later, at a moving-to-Tennessee party in H. P.’s honor, many of his West Palm Beach friends proudly asked him to inscribe their field guides with the words “Langridge Product.”

He did graduate work toward a doctorate at Florida State University in Tallahassee, but did not obtain a degree. During the Florida years he lived at Lantana. Summers were spent with Mable and children at the house he himself built on the side of a mountain on their property on the east side of Elizabethton, or traveling and camping in the western United States. In 1997, Howard and Mable left Florida, all their children having fledged many years before, and moved to their home in eastern Tennessee.

His service to the birding community in Florida and Tennessee will be long remembered and much appreciated. We shall all miss this kind, gentle, gracious man who touched the lives of so many of us.

I wish to thank Wallace Coffey, Steve Holzman, Gloria Hunter, Bonnie and Cam Kehler, Susan Ollmann, Daphne Mahagan, Tadzju Trotsky, and Ann and Phil Weinrich for their assistance in preparing this memoriam. *Paul W. Sykes, Jr., 1080 Forest Road, Watkinsville, GA 30677.*