

## IN MEMORIAM

### The Florida Ornithology of Glen E. Woolfenden (1930-2007)

BY JACK P. HAILMAN, FRED E. LOHRER, AND REED BOWMAN



Florida ornithology has lost a giant. Glen E. Woolfenden died on 19 June 2007 of complications following surgery. He was 77 years old.

Glen spent his entire academic career in Florida. He completed his Ph.D. in 1960 at the University of Florida under the supervision of avian anatomist and paleontologist Pierce Brodkorb. Upon graduation, Glen was hired as an instructor at the newly-opened University of South Florida in Tampa. He quickly rose through the academic ranks as Assistant Professor (1961), Associate Professor (1965), and Professor (1970). Other than a

sabbatical at the University of Kansas (1984) Glen remained at USF his entire academic life and retired in 1999. Along the way, he received the highest awards bestowed on faculty at the University. Glen was a dedicated teacher, striving to make his lectures challenging, interesting, and provocative. His classes in Ornithology and Organic Evolution always were full and his enthusiasm for his subjects influenced hundreds of students. He was named Distinguished Teacher in 1978 and Distinguished Lecturer in 1981. For his research, he was named a Distinguish Scholar in 1984 and a Distinguished Research Professor in 1988. Glen supervised over 30 graduate students, many of whom made significant contributions to Florida ornithology. After retirement, he continued his research career as a Research Associate at Archbold Biological Station near Lake Placid. Here he continued his renowned research on the Florida Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*), started in 1969. In addition to Glen's significant contributions to the evolutionary theory of cooperative breeding, he made many important contributions

to ornithology in Florida, including being a charter member of the Florida Ornithological Society.

Glen Everett Woolfenden was born 23 January 1930 in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He grew up mainly in Westfield where he got hooked on birds, like so many of us, at an early age. He often mentioned birding in northern New Jersey's Great Swamp. Cornell University was a Mecca for students interested in birds because of its famous Laboratory of Ornithology, and Glen received his Bachelor of Science degree there in 1953. Three years later, he earned an M.A. at the University of Kansas with the eminent ornithologist Harrison (Bud) Tordoff. Here, he worked on the comparative breeding behavior of *Ammodramus* sparrows.

Even before becoming a graduate student, Glen had begun a collection of bird skins and skeletons. By the time he arrived at USF as a 30-year-old professor, he had prepared more than 2000 specimens. He used his specimens in his teaching. Generations of young ornithologists trained under Glen learned their birds of the world during lunch-time discussions in the gloomy back of the bird museum. Glen frequently published on the specimens he prepared, especially if their occurrence in Florida was rare or unusual. His first publication about a Florida specimen, in 1965, concerned an injured Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) that had been brought to Busch Gardens and died. As was typical of Glen's thoroughness, in addition to describing this unusual record, he took Palmer's *Handbook of North American Birds* to task for an incorrect measurement range and pointed out that two of Peterson's *Field Guides* had errors about booby identification. He also included a careful description of plumage differences among booby species and suggested that an old sight record of Red-footed Boobies in a mixed-species flock of "hundreds perhaps thousands" of boobies made by early ornithologist Outram Bangs following a storm near Sebastian Inlet in February of 1895 were more likely to be Masked Boobies, *S. dactylatra*.

In addition to being a dedicated ornithologist, Glen was an excellent all-around vertebrate biologist and several of his early publications were on squirrels, shrews, and snakes. Although Glen worked on the osteology of waterfowl for his Ph.D, his first publication to come out of field work in Florida was a note in 1958 on gray squirrels in the *Journal of Mammalogy*, coauthored by James N. Layne, the first director of Archbold Biological Station. His earliest publication on birds from Florida, also in 1958, was a breeding-bird census published in *Audubon Field Notes*. Glen began these censuses in a variety of typical Florida habitats because of his interest in the biogeography of Florida and its avian diversity. He continued these censuses of specific habitats, including several at Archbold Biological Station for more than 10 years. It was during these censuses that Glen made his first observations of Florida Scrub-Jays.

Glen observed more than two adults feeding young Scrub Jays—as the birds were called before the complex was split into several species and our endemic became the Florida Scrub-Jay. Being widely read, he was aware of Alexander Skutch’s discovery of “helpers at the nest” in some neotropical species. Glen knew that a temperate species that was territorial and a year-round resident would be easy to study and a gold mine for analyzing cooperative breeding. He color-banded the first birds in 1969 and worked out a simple but elegant methodology that he and subsequent jay researchers followed for more than four decades. From that humble beginning, the study population expanded over the years to the present size of about 75 families in which virtually all individuals are color-banded. It is the longest continuous population study of any avian species that does not nest in boxes. To date, he and his colleagues have published more than 60 papers ultimately derived from the jay project. Glen’s papers on jays helped launch spirited academic debates on the relative influence of kin selection and direct and indirect fitness on the evolution of cooperative breeding. His population data have provided the scientific backbone for efforts to protect the now threatened Florida Scrub-Jay and its habitats.

John W. Fitzpatrick came to Archbold Biological Station in 1972 as an undergraduate summer intern and Glen immediately recognized the considerable and diverse talents of this young man. Glen and Fitz (as Glen always called him) immediately began collaborating on jay projects. After receiving his Ph.D., Fitz became curator of birds at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, which gave him scheduling freedom to be in Florida to work with Glen. The first of their many joint publications appeared in 1977. Working side-by-side, sentence-by-sentence, they drafted their 1984 monograph, *The Florida Scrub Jay: Demography of a Cooperative-breeding Bird*, a 400+ page tome published by Princeton University Press. Ernst Mayr dubbed the book “an instant classic.”

In 1985, Glen and Fitz were honored with the William Brewster Memorial Award of the American Ornithologists’ Union for their exceptional body of work on birds of the Western Hemisphere. Many awards followed. Glen was elected Corresponding Fellow of the Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft, named a Distinguished Animal Behaviorist by the Animal Behavior Society, and honored with the Margaret Morse Nice Award of the Wilson Ornithological Society. Despite his new-found fame, Glen continued to make contributions to Florida ornithology.

Glen was among the charter members of the Florida Ornithological Society and was appointed to the editorial board of the fledgling society’s journal. Glen argued that the journal should focus on “wild species of birds or other vertebrates in or near Florida” and purposely proposed a name that omitted specific mention of birds. This was an

immensely successful formula for a state journal; *The Florida Field Naturalist*, now a quarterly, is in its 35<sup>th</sup> year.

Glen also loyally submitted his work on Florida ornithology to either the *Florida Field Naturalist* or the FOS Special Publications series. With coauthors Robert W. Loftin and Janet A. Woolfenden, a compilation of bird records entitled *Florida Bird Records in American Birds and Audubon Field Notes (1947-1989): Species Index and County Gazetteer* became FOS Special Publication No. 4. This was followed in 1992 by No. 6, the authoritative *Florida Bird Species: an Annotated List*, coauthored with William B. Robertson, Jr. In 2006, Glen authored, with Bill Robertson and Jim Cox, FOS Special Publication No. 7, *The Breeding Birds of Florida*, in which Glen and Bill wrote about the sources of Florida's avifauna and post-human-settlement changes. Glen continued his service to FOS in a variety of capacities. He was: a member of the Board of Directors for several terms, Vice-President (1981-1982), President (1991-1992) and Editor of the Special Publications (1991-2004). He served as member and chair on a variety of committees and rarely missed a meeting over the entire 35-year history of the society. In 1994, FOS bestowed on Glen its highest award, namely Honorary Member; he was only the sixth person to be so named.

If ornithology was Glen's profession, then birding was his life's recreation. Beginning as a youth in New Jersey, Glen participated in well over a half century of the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). In Florida, Glen's first CBC was in 1957, and he often did several counts each season. From 1957 through 2006 he missed only one season, 2005, when he and Jan went on a bird tour of Antarctic waters. Glen compiled the St. Petersburg CBC for 23 years (1962-1984) and the Lake Placid CBC for 11 years (1993-2003). As a CBC compiler he stressed total commitment to finding many species, careful identification of rare species, and careful tabulation of the few species, like some raptors, where duplicate counts were possible. Ornithology informed his birding. Always the teacher, he was quick to point out details of ecology, behavior, or morphology of birds observed for the benefit of his birding companions. In the Tampa Bay region, and later at Lake Placid, he quickly became a potent force for improving birders' skills and knowledge of birds. Thus, he earned respect in Florida's birding community equal to his respect in the international science community.