

# IN MEMORIAM

## David Alan Cutler 5 June 1925–16 September 2004

And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,  
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

— John Masefield

David Alan Cutler was a Regional Editor for *North American Birds*, and its antecedents, from the Winter 1959 issue until the last issue of 2004, a tenure unsurpassed by anyone. His contributions were largely as a compiler, as first drafts were mostly written by fellow editors, including Frederic R. Scott, P. A. Buckley, Robert O. Paxton, P. William Smith, William J. Boyle, and others. For forty-five years, he excelled as a facilitator between birders and editors in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, which in 1978 was reconfigured as the Hudson-Delaware Region. In 2002, he and Bob Paxton initiated a funding campaign for the journal, "The Friends of *North American Birds* Fund." An expert on paper, printing, and publications, Dave brought his professional experience to bear on a magazine that needed revitalization, a better production process, and an influx of funds. On top of these efforts, Dave was its most generous financial contributor as well.

Dave's parents raised the family in a tough section of West Philadelphia; his father was a police detective and his mother worked as well. As a young teen during the Great Depression, Dave used to sell vegetables, with much success, out of a push-cart in his neighborhood. While in the boy scouts, Dave and his brother Herb were inspired to become birders by a scoutmaster whose name is now lost. Soon afterwards, birding mentors took them on car trips to Delaware, the start of their long association with the First State. In 1943, Dave lied about his age and volunteered for the Navy, initially as a "Seabee" (Construction Battalion) do-

ing construction and underwater demolition. He transferred to the Naval Air Cadet Academy gunnery school, becoming an aviation crewman. Later in World War II, he was an instructor teaching instrumentation



on aircraft carriers. Like many of his, the "greatest" generation, he did not talk about his service experience. Neither did he talk about his last illness, unless pressed.

Following the war, Dave attended the University of Denver and graduated with a

degree in chemical engineering. In 1951, he began working for Triangle Publications in Philadelphia, run by publishing magnate Walter H. Annenberg. Triangle's publications included *TV Guide*, *Seventeen*, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Dave rose to become director of engineering at Triangle's rotogravure plant and later the plant manager. Because of his success with rotogravure, he introduced the process, on a contract basis for Triangle, to Brazil and the Soviet Union.

In 1971, Dave started his own business, David Cutler Industries, which revolutionized the commercial paper recycling industry. For his last 32 years, this was the dominant activity of his life. He was devoted to converting the printing industry to his unique approach to paper recycling and thus helping conserve our natural resources. Quite aside from this altruism, David Cutler Industries is a successful business as well. Dave's son, Darryl, carries on as the company President.

I met Dave on December 23, 1956. On that day, my parents rose at 3:00 a.m. to drive me to the house of a man I had never met. Dave had decided to take an unknown kid with him on his Christmas Bird Count at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge. He was a mentor and friend ever since to me and to many others. The Cutlers—Dave and his brother Herb—compiled the C.B.C. at Bombay Hook from 1946 through 1994, assisted in later years by Winston Wayne and Andrew Ednie. But their claim to fame and notoriety lies in pioneering the legendary Big Day adventures in the Delaware Valley region beginning in the 1940s. These "May Runs" soon became an excellent forum for Dave's skills and boundless energy as an organizer, motivator, and competitor. Days of advance work and scores of phone calls preceded each one. He was the quintessential

"telephone man," a medium in which he could trump Trump. I was involved with these in all but a few years beginning in the late 1950s. At that time, aircraft and boats were sometimes employed. The days unfolded as taut, disciplined, and skillfully executed—to compare them to commando raids would be only slight exaggeration.

The May Runs, Christmas Bird Counts, and ultimately the ornithological literature benefited from Dave's impressive business acumen and organizational skills; and yet these events were always great fun, with favorite diners, refuges, and personalities along the way (not to mention creative driving and occasional horseplay). Dave's opening gambit in some restaurants was: "We're in a hurry; we're birders." Service was fast: puzzled as a waitress might have been, Dave's personality always won the day. One year, Dave and I did most of the run using mob accents ("Youse got a problem wit da Bay-breasted, huh?"). In 1976, we were detained by area police outside the Spirit of '76 Massage Parlor (a euphemism) in Wilmington, Delaware while looking for nighthawks ("A likely story, smarty pants"). Once in very rural southern Delaware at 2:30 a.m., a local vigilante rammed our car repeatedly with his pickup truck, convinced we represented some sort of subversive threat; another time, a gas tank that developed a leak was plugged with chewing gum. Dave's May Run team was once featured in *Time* magazine (2 June 1967, p. 47). Pity the poor, non-birding reporter stuck in the back of our station wagon on the entire time!

In the early days often covering 600 or more miles and ranging over Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, the May Run in recent decades was limited to Dave's beloved Delaware, where three times we recorded 201 species in 24 hours. Over the years, cameo team-mates included P. A. Buckley, Ted Parker, Stuart Keith, Bob Smart, Davis Finch, and Bob Pyle, along with "regulars" Carl Perry, Will Russell, Jesse Grantham, Herb and Betty Cutler, Jim Meritt, Howard Brokaw, John Janowski, John Miller, and others. For the past few years, the average age of our team was 68 or so, sometimes referred to as the "has-beens" (but nonetheless usually unbeatable!). As part of the concentrated energy expenditure of the May Runs, there often ensued heated discussions concerning strategy. Carl Perry and Will Russell were especially good in negotiating with Generalissimo Cutler on tactics. After such high-powered, exhausting days, Dave would usually just get up and go to work the next day while the rest of us slept it off. More than a game, the May Runs energize area birders, hone and heighten our appreciation of Delaware's many great birding sites, and even serve as fundraisers. But now, our Mays

will never be the same.

*North American Birds*, the May Run, Delaware, Cape May, and the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club were all vital, even consuming elements of Dave's life. As illustrious as the D.V.O.C. was, and is, at times the club suffered from stodginess and exclusivity in its early decades. Members had to be "proposed" for membership and then voted on. It was, after all, a Philadelphia men's club from its inception, albeit lacking the leather chairs, cigars, and brandy; but what it lacked in smokes and spirits, it more than made up for by transpiring in the midst of the specimen cabinets of the great collections of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. When as a young teen I wanted to join, one of my father's stuffy old friends refused to sponsor me, considering me too young. That is the sort of attitude Dave never espoused: he was always the welcoming mentor, friend, and supporter, especially for young birders. When the campaign to admit women to the D.V.O.C. got underway, Dave voted the right way the first time (but the ladies lost 2:1) as well as the second time a few years later (when, to his delight, they won 2:1). A member of the D.V.O.C. since 1944, Dave was a Fellow and Life Member and was made Honorary Member in 2004. In 1968, he was recipient of its Julian K. Potter Award for outstanding contributions to field ornithology. In addition, he was a Charter member of the Delmarva Ornithological Society, a member of the American Ornithologists' Union since 1952, and a member of the Wilson Ornithological Society since 1963. His publications, mostly in the journal *Cassinia*, included papers on Audubon's Shearwater, Black-headed Grosbeak, Pink-footed Goose, Brewer's Blackbird, Brant, Indigo Bunting, Cattle Egret, and Glossy Ibis.

Beyond his fondness for birding his home turf, Dave had a tradition of Central American trips, from Mexico to Panama. In the 1950s, before there were useful field guides, Dave and Herb essentially made their own Mexican field guide using their own drawings and information they gleaned from the Academy of Natural Sciences collections and from its resident ornithologist James Bond (whose name became the inspiration for the Ian Fleming's 007 books). Even Emmett Reid Blake's *Birds of Mexico* (1953), appearing after their earliest trip, was not terribly

useful in the field. In 1999 through 2003, Dave and several of his friends went on trips to Panama and to the great Pantanal wetlands and other areas of Brazil. His tales of birding the American tropics appear in the *Philadelphia Larus* (spring 2004: "Adventures in Birding: the Dave Cutler story," by Chris Walters).

Dave's other avocational life revolved around antiques. A licensed dealer, he amassed a large collection, especially of Depression-era glass, sconces, statuary, art, and countless other *objets* plus old bird books. In his living room, one was likely to find multiple copies of such venerable compendia as Roberts's *The Birds of Minnesota* or Stone's *Bird Studies at Old Cape May*. On weekends, in the decades before "eBay," he would often hit dozens of yard sales, estate auctions, and other likely venues, relentlessly organizing and prioritizing the day's route and stops according to which neighborhoods held the most promise and other criteria. The result was a sort of May Run focused on antiques. Serendipity and *Wanderlust* served Dave in his quest for collectibles as it did sometimes elsewhere. In 1973, when Kenn Kaufman hitchhiked over 60,000 miles during a Big Year (described in the picaresque tale *Kingbird Highway* [1997]), Dave happened upon the young birder twice, giving him lifts in Florida and New Jersey.

Dave is survived by his sons, Darryl and Stephen, his daughter Hannah, his brothers Herbert, Robert, and Jerry, his sister Augusta, and four grandchildren. What many remember most fondly is a happy, smiling, optimistic man, always with a twinkle in his eye, who was positive, brought out the good in people, and endowed with a hearty laugh. He was ever a charmer, with the ladies and with the rest of us, blessed with limitless enthusiasm and energy, with gregariousness and genuine good nature.

*Ave atque vale.* Hail and farewell, Dave.

—Henry T. Armistead  
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*My grateful thanks to David Cutler's friends and family members, whose contributions made this tribute possible: Hannah Cutler, Herbert S. Cutler, Andrew P. Ednie, Augusta Cutler Gammon, Renie Glassman, Carl Perry, Bob Rufe, Chris Walters, and Frank Windfelder.*

Memorial donations in Dave's honor can be made to the "Friends of North American Birds Fund" that he helped to create and nurture; contributions will be acknowledged as such in the first issue of Volume 60. To donate, send a check to the American Birding Association at P. O. Box 6599, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80934; or go to <https://commerce10.pair.com/ambirder/memformR.htm> and scroll to Option #6, specifying "David A. Cutler/Friends of NAB" in the box provided for "Other" donations. All donations are fully tax-deductible.