

IN MEMORIAM

TERENCE R. WAHL, 1930–2022



Terence R. Wahl, 91, ornithologist, environmentalist, and patriarch to many, died at home on Thursday 17 February 2022.

Born in Bellingham on 18 March 1930 to Ralph Wahl and Jean Kennedy Wahl, Terry graduated from the University of Washington, earning a degree in business, and attended New York University in Manhattan. In 1951 he married Robin Geske and entered the long-lived family business, Wahl's department store in Bellingham.

In 1972 he changed occupations and became a full-time field ornithologist. For over thirty years following his departure from retail, he worked at what he called "the equivalent of three part-time jobs for half pay," writing environmental impact statements concerning breeding bird

habitats for both the state and federal governments. He was a pioneer in bird censusing on the west coast and started one of the earliest ecotourism businesses in the state—leading ocean-going tours out of Gray's Harbor, educating his clients in the identification and ways of pelagic birds. He taught ornithology classes and led local birding trips for many years. In the mid-1970s he was a bird observer on a NOAA ship sailing to Peru and west to find the origin of La Niña, as well as on other trips across the North Pacific and Bering Sea, several aboard Japanese research vessels. His connections in the birding world brought many people to the Washington coast and to Bellingham, and he started many long friendships through this work.

From his birding experiences and his contacts with ornithologists and researchers, Terry developed a strong belief that birders could, and should, contribute to increasing knowledge of the status of the birdlife around them. His first love was seabirds, and so, as he witnessed the decline of a suite of seabird species in the Salish Sea ecoregion, his sense of urgency for careful documentation of trends in status and abundance was fueled. When he started Westport Seabirds as a service to birders wishing to view seabirds off Washington's coast, he immediately understood the value of data that could be accumulated from regular trips offshore, and so he laid the foundation for a database on seabird abundance that has now spanned a half century. He saw the potential of Western Field Ornithologists and the journal *Western Birds* as a valuable forum for birders to add to the scientific understanding of avian ecology and population demographics. He was the author or co-author of 11 papers in *Western Birds*, joined WFO's board of directors in 1978, and served as WFO's vice-president from 1979 to 1980 and as president from 1981 to 1984. He became an early member of the Pacific Seabird Group as well. In Washington, he was the first accomplished birder to cover the entire state, and as a result of his careful observations and record keeping, he became the first statewide expert on distribution and bird finding. He used that knowledge to co-author the "Guide to Bird Finding in Washington" with Dennis Paulson in 1977, with subsequent revisions. The bar graphs in that guide were the only documentation of seasonality and abundance of all the species in the state for several decades. In 1995 he published the "Birds of

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Whatcom County,” his home county, summarizing observations from unpublished journals of early ornithologists in the region and documenting dramatic changes in the avifauna of the area. In 2005, a half century after Jewett et al. published their book summarizing the status and distribution of Washington’s avifauna, Terry published “Birds of Washington: Status and Distribution” (Oregon State University Press) with co-editors Bill Tweit and Steve Mlodinow and contributions from over 40 individuals. This state book documented the evolution of field ornithology in Washington, linked distribution and abundance with habitat associations, and pioneered distribution-mapping techniques that combined information from land-cover maps, standardized bird surveys, and expert knowledge. Thus it provides an invaluable benchmark for measuring future changes in distribution and abundance. Throughout his life, Terry mentored numerous birders, built connections with ornithologists, and inspired all of us to be more deeply aware of our world.

Terry imbued in his children a great love of the natural world, through camping trips in all kinds of weather, days spent in the woods and salt marshes, memorable road trips throughout the West, and in seeking and finding bird species. He taught them basic carpentry, beekeeping, how to shoot a basketball, and how to make a pun that would leave others groaning in despair. His innermost concerns were care of the environment. He was one of the stewards of the world who didn’t mind being called a curmudgeon.

Preceded in death by his younger brothers, Richard Wahl (Donna Wahl) of Los Angeles, and Edward Wahl of Bellingham, Terry is survived by Robin, their six children, and their offspring: Jamie Wahl, of McNeal, Arizona, and his son, Scott Pavek of Burlington, Vermont; Tim Wahl, of Bellingham, his former wife, Eden Alexander, and their daughters, Tobie Wahl (Stephen Feinstein and Ezra) of Austin, Texas, and Phoebe Wahl (Peter Scherrer and Hazel) of Bellingham; Erin Wahl (Richard Weight) of Edmonds, Washington, her daughter Anissa Bower of Seattle and Anissa’s daughter Sabine Weston of Seattle; Erin’s son Joe Bower of Seattle; Maura Wahl of Tucson, Arizona, and her sons Anthony Nicoletta, of Mexico City, and James King, of Tucson; Brendan Wahl of Bellingham; and Megan Wahl (Martin Wahl) of Portland, and her daughter Esme Ace of Dunedin, New Zealand, and many friends.

He will be missed. In Terry’s memory, please consider a donation to the Whatcom Land Trust or WFO’s scholarship fund.

Robin Geske Wahl, Megan Wahl, and Bill Tweit