

IN MEMORIAM

VIRGINIA P. JOHNSON, 1930–2024



Virginia Phillips Coughran Johnson (Ginger to her family and friends) died on 4 March 2024 at her San Diego home of more than 40 years. She was 93.

Ginger was born on 29 October 1930 in Los Angeles, California, and grew up in Palos Verdes, California. She received her bachelor's degree in fine arts from Pomona College, Claremont, California, in 1952.

Ginger was an active and enthusiastic birder for most of her adult life. In 1970 she became a founding member of the California Field Ornithologists (later Western Field Ornithologists) and one of the original editors of the journal *California Birds* (later *Western Birds*). The other members of this pioneering group of San Diego birders were Guy McCaskie, Pierre Devillers, Alan Craig, Jean Craig, and Clifford Lyons. Ginger was known as Virginia P. Coughran at this time.

Ginger was intimately involved with the graphics, layout, printing, and publishing of the journal beginning with *California Birds* Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1970, and continuing through *Western Birds* Vol. 53, No. 1, January 2022. This represents an impressive span of 52 years and an even more impressive total of 139 issues. In the inaugural issue of the journal the editors were Virginia P. Coughran, Alan M. Craig, Jean T. Craig, Pierre Devillers, Clifford R. Lyons, and Guy McCaskie. The main article of this initial issue of the journal was "A Checklist of the Birds of California" by G. McCaskie, P. Devillers, A. M. Craig, C. R. Lyons, V. P. Coughran, and J. T. Craig (pp. 4–32). Beginning in 1973 with volume 4 the journal became *Western Birds*, and the editorial structure was changed. Alan M. Craig became the sole editor with a large editorial board (including Ginger, who was by now Virginia P. Johnson). Ginger's role included "layout and cover design." The first issue with a color cover was Vol. 12, No. 1, March, 1981. Ginger was still responsible for the layout and cover design, but, beginning with volume 13 in 1982, her title changed to "layout artist." In 1987, beginning with volume 18, Philip Unitt assumed the job of editor of *Western Birds*, with Ginger still the layout artist. To better reflect her diverse responsibilities, Ginger's job title was changed to "graphics manager" in Vol. 20, No. 4, December 1989. She retained this title for the rest of her tenure with *Western Birds*. For many years Ginger was also on the editorial board.

Ginger designed the Sabine's Gull logo which appeared on the cover of the first issue of *California Birds* and on every issue of the journal since then. To learn more about the history of this simple but elegant logo see <https://westernfieldornithologists.org/the-wfo-logo-a-brief-history/>. The Sabine's Gull logo also appears on the website pages, on other publications, and on WFO gear.

Ginger was involved in the affairs of Western Field Ornithologists in many other ways. She was a board member from 1984 to 1989. She attended nearly every annual conference up until her last at Albuquerque in 2019. In recognition of her service to WFO Ginger was presented the Alan M. Craig award at the 2010 meeting in Palm Desert, California. This award was given "for her many years of dedicated volunteer

effort on behalf of *Western Birds*, Western Field Ornithologists, and field ornithology in the west.” The Alan M. Craig award is given for “exceptional service, leadership and dedication to WFO over a sustained period of time.” For more information about this prestigious award and further details about Ginger’s award, see <https://westernfieldornithologists.org/awards/alan-m-craig-award/>.

Ginger loved “birding with a purpose” and was involved in many different field projects for more than 60 years. She was a certified bird bander and set up a banding station on Point Loma in San Diego every spring and fall for nearly 50 years. Undoubtedly, she provided valuable information to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service from these efforts. Ginger also participated in surveys of breeding California Least Terns in Mission Bay for many years. She contributed substantial data to the San Diego County Bird Atlas (<https://www.sdnhm.org/science/birds-and-mammals/projects/san-diego-county-bird-atlas/>) and even helped me gather data for the Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas project. Ginger always looked forward to the Christmas Bird Count season in December and January and participated in the San Diego CBC for many years. She was proficient at finding warblers and other rarities in Balboa Park.

Ginger enjoyed traveling to other states and countries with friends on birding expeditions. Arizona was a favorite destination in the U.S., and she birded in Alaska and Texas as well. Foreign destinations included Canada, South Africa, Australia, Belize, Peru, and Costa Rica. No one seems to know the size of her life list, but it must be in the thousands. I know that her one big birding regret was never having seen a Northern Pygmy-Owl in the wild.

Ginger is survived by her four children Annie Marsch of Ramona, California, Bruce Coughran of San Diego, California, Bill Coughran of Custer, Washington, and David Coughran of Ormond Beach, Florida, as well as four grandchildren. She also leaves behind many lifelong friends. We will all miss this quiet and modest but extremely capable and accomplished woman. We will remember her for her enthusiasm for birds and her loving friendship.

Diana Herron