TAS Loses a Dear Friend

Dr. Robert (Bob) Kelley, 1937-2006

By Joe Browder

Bob Kelley was a remarkable man whose quiet ways belied his passions for nature, knowledge, friends and justice. For those of us remaining from the days of Polly Redford, Alice Wainwright, Dade Thornton, Charles Lee and Bud Owre, Bob was our bridge to the modern Tropical Audubon. His dedication to the goodness and importance of Tropical was as strong as his devotion to the animals, plants and wild places that delighted him.

Pale orchids in the Fakahatchee, quicksilver spiders on the old Deering estate, a blue water moccasin in Roberts Lake Strand, Encope tamiamiensis on the Loop Road, panther tracks in the Hole in the Donut, snow white Capers above the mosquitos on the trail to Snake Bight, owls calling early and late... so many elegant, fleeting experiences were shared with Bob over so many years. Like Frank Craighead, Joan Browder, Mel Finn, Renata Skinner, Charlie Brookfield and others with whom we had also walked, waded and canoed, Bob was one of those great Everglades students whose mind worked best when his feet were wet.

Bob’s University of Miami academic life took that mind into the most esoteric theoretical worlds. When our need to fight for the Everglades and Biscayne Bay forced us into the more awkward and messy world of political reality, Bob’s support was always there. He loved it when the two worlds intersected. A great physicist, Murray Gell-Mann, initiated the National Research Council’s first study of the Everglades in 1969, and as Audubon’s Everglades person at the time, I helped contribute to the study. Bob was thrilled, a few years ago, when he met Murray Gell-Mann, who came to us to refresh his Everglades knowledge.

Bob had a good eye for Blue-tongued Voles. His intellectual honesty and his disdain for puffery kept him from par-

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Pelagic birds, which include albatrosses, petrels, shearwaters, storm-petrels, tropicbirds, boobies, jaegers and a few species of terns, are those species that spend the majority of their lives at sea. Occasionally, after periods of strong onshore winds, birds may be able to spot these birds from shore. Otherwise, a boat is needed to find them. In the Outer Banks of North Carolina, offshore trips dedicated to finding seabirds have been taking place for years. As a result, much is now known about pelagic birding in that area. Over the years, a number of rare birds have been found; many of these rarities, such as Herald and Fea’s Petrel, are now being seen regularly. Many of the same species regularly seen off North Carolina can also be found off the coast of Florida. Unfortunately, Florida’s offshore waters have remained relatively unexplored, and little is still known about the abundance and seasonal patterns of many of our pelagic birds. For many years, boat trips to the Dry Tortugas provided one of the few opportunities in Florida to see pelagic species such as Audubon’s Shearwater and Banded Tern. For most birders, a trip to the Tortugas was the only way to see Masked Booby, Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy, all of which breed on the islands, and Brown Booby, a year-round visitor. It was also their only reasonable opportunity for rarities such as White-tailed Tropicbird and Black Noddy. Since these multi-day trips were scheduled in April and early May, to coincide with spring migration, most pelagic sightings took place during those months. What about the rest of the year, what about other offshore areas and what other species are out there?

For the last several years, local bird guide Larry Manfredi, who leads multi-day boat trips to the Tortugas, has also arranged offshore excursions to find pelagic species. These day trips on chartered fishing vessels, scheduled during the summer months, have provided opportunities to explore waters off the Florida Keys, such as Islamorada and Marathon Humps. These are areas where upwelling occurs, carrying nutrients to the ocean surface. Schools of fish are attracted to these areas, in turn attracting both anglers and seabirds. On a trip he led this past June, an excellent selection of pelagic species were seen, including Greater, Cory’s and Audubon’s Shearwaters, Wilson’s and Band-rumped Storm-Petrels, Banded and Sooty Terns and Brown Noddy. The highlight for this trip, though, was a Black-capped Petrel, seen by several participants as it passed within 100 yards of the boat. This large petrel is known to occur off Florida’s Atlantic coast from spring through fall, but is rarely reported by birders. It would be the first of three rare-for-Florida seabirds found this summer.

Local birder (and boater) Roberto “Toe” Torres has in recent years begun to investigate the pelagic possibilities right off Miami’s coast. On trips this summer, he has been able to find many of the same species usually found on Keys or Tortugas trips, including Brown Boobies, which he and his passengers saw regularly at Fowey Rocks lighthouse. On a couple of his excursions, though, he hit the pelagic jackpot. On a trip in early July, an immature tropicbird flew directly over his boat. The bird was assumed to be a White-tailed Tropicbird, but at least one birder on board, Paul “Rock Jetty” Urgelles, returned home that night troubled by the assumption. Luckily, bird photographer Trey Mitchell was also on board and was able to take several shots of the tropicbird as it flew overhead. The photographs were sent to several seabird identification experts, and before long a verdict was returned: wing feather coloration indicated the bird was in fact a Red-billed Tropicbird, a species with only a handful of records in Florida. Inspired by this sighting, Roberto sailed again in early July, and this time found a Manx Shearwater! This species, similar to Audubon’s Shearwater but distinguished by its white undertail, is most common in the North Atlantic. Records of this species in Florida have previously occurred from fall through spring, so a summer sighting was very surprising. Roberto’s sightings were not necessarily restricted to seabirds; on an August trip, he and his passengers crossed paths with an ocean sunfish and two sperm whales!

Evidently, South Florida’s offshore waters are more productive for pelagic birds than ever imagined. Larry and Roberto have clearly demonstrated that rarities are out there, just offshore, waiting to be discovered. In addition, species like Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, once thought present only in very small numbers, but seen on most trips this summer, may in fact be more common than previously believed. Each offshore trip adds to our knowledge, but much remains to be learned. What about other seasons, such as fall and winter? What about other parts of the state? For those with access to a boat and a sense of adventure, the possibilities for offshore discovery are endless.
Tropical Audubon Bulletin

TAS Birdathon a Flying Success!

This year’s Birdathon was another successful event! Dolora Batchelor’s team counted 33 species and won first prize, a $500 American Airlines Gift Certificate, for the most money raised. Roxanne Featherly came in second with 52 species and the next highest amount raised which won her a pelagic birding trip with Larry Manfredi. Nancy Freedman and John Boyd saw an amazing 127 species for the day and won a comfy hammock donated anonymously. The Life is Good Team (Paul Bithorn and Brian Rapoza) logged an astounding 113 species for the day. Cynthia Guerra’s team counted 67 species for the day.

Special thanks to Larry Manfredi, Nancy Freedman, Anonymous, and Eagle Optics for their donations in support of the event. And extra special thanks to all the people who made pledges to support our birding teams and TAS: Brian Rapoza, Paul Bithorn, John Boyd, Dean Murphy, Jean Quincy, Jennifer Huber, Daniel Koch, John Freedman, Brad Tushin, Koch & Tushin, Brenda Roark, Robin Díaz, Mort Cooper, April Gromnicki, Jamie Furgang, David Sanford (in memory of Tilli Sanford), Robin Just, Jean Evoy, John Sorgie, Don Finefrock, Steven Seigel, John Atkinson, Tom Perez, Jeff Guerra, David Pearson, Alan Steinberg Phil Guerra, Lisa Blackwelder, Virginia Lepper, Michelle McCarthy, Clyde Butcher, Joel Ehrenkranz, Jay Seber, Bohn, Sierz, Henderson, Featherly, Dolora Batchelor, Estelle Roth, Diana McCoy, Barbara Hosford, Barbara Crutchfield, Sara Ellenburg, Carol Green, Barbara Stabley, Mary Rose, and Barbara Blank.

Make plans to join the Birdathon in 2007! It’s great fun and a great way to support TAS!

What Our Friends Are Doing:

Fairchild Tropical Garden

International Aroid Show and Sale - Sep. 16-17, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Presented by the International Aroid Society.

Bonsai Show and Sale - Oct. 14-15, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Presented by the Bonsai Society of Miami.

Fine Wines at Fairchild - Oct. 21, 6:30-8:00 p.m., VIP tasting; 8:00-11:00 p.m., general tasting. Taste wines from around the world in a beautiful tropical setting.

Florida Native Plant Society

The Dade Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society meets on fourth Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (social time 7:15). Meetings are free and open to the public. For more information and other activities, call 305-255-6404 or visit www.fnps.org and follow links to the Dade Chapter.

On Sept. 26, Dr. David Janos, Associate Professor, Dept. of Biology at UM, will present “What Does Northern Australian Eucalypt Biology Suggest About Dade County Pine?”

On Oct. 24, David McLean, a horticulture expert retired from Broward Community College, will speak about “New Natives”.

On Oct. 29, The Rare Event: A connoisseur’s auction of rare and uncommon plants and art – 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Want to learn about native plants, help Tropical Audubon maintain our native landscape at the Doc Thomas House and get your hands dirty? We need you! Show up anytime between 8:30-noon and you will find a host of hard workers. This is a great opportunity for students to earn community service hours.

Fundays will be held Sept. 16 and Oct. 21

Birding 101 with Brian Rapoza School Time at Tropical!

Thursday and Saturday October 5 and 7

Learn to bird! This is a 2-part program focusing on the birds, beasts and butterflies of South Florida. On Thurs., Oct. 6 at the Doc Thomas House (5530 Sunset, Miami), Brian will cover nature watching basics and present slides of some of our native species. On Sat., Oct. 8, you can put this newly found knowledge to use on a walk in a local park. Call 305-388-1544 for more information. Fee required: $10 for an individual TAS member/$15 for TAS member families / $15 for nonmember individuals / $20 for nonmember families (family prices include as many kids as you want to bring). Children and adults will enjoy this class. We would love to see more people of all ages interested in our unique natural heritage!
Participating in the Theater of the Everglades, the high-profile celebrity industry that began to envelop us all ten years ago, when the value of Everglades restoration strategies became measured by how many billions of dollars might be spent to promote urban growth, instead of by whether those parts of the Everglades, Biscayne Bay and Big Cypress in the National Parks System will actually get the protection they legally deserve. Bob knew that we couldn’t save the Everglades by degrading Everglades National Park.

At the most personal level, Bob will continue to be one of the very few people who are always with me when I’m alone in nature. Not just because of what we experienced together, but also because in a lifetime filled with wonderful people, I’ve known no one more generous, loving and forgiving than Bob Kelley. Regarding the natural south Florida that Bob knew so well and cared about so deeply, I can think of no better way for people to honor Bob Kelley than to follow Tropical Audubon’s traditional independent path, not get distracted by the theatrics, and continue fighting to make sure that Everglades National Park, Biscayne National Park, and Big Cypress National Preserve are protected and restored.

Note from Cynthia - on August 20, over 200 of Bob’s friends joined us at TAS for a celebration of his life. It was a warm and tender event with much humor and it was a lovely reflection of such a dear man. Thanks to everyone who helped make this such fitting tribute for Bob.
Audubon Assembly 2006

October 19-21 Cocoa Beach

This year, Audubon Assembly goes to the Beach! Relax and enjoy the casual, beachfront atmosphere of the Holiday Inn Cocoa Beach Oceanfront Resort. Join Audubon of Florida for engaging programs that highlight Florida’s coastal environments and issues that affect their well being. Get inspired and sharpen skills to advocate for the protection of birds. Hear scientists share insights on global warming and its consequences for Florida’s extensive coastal areas. Collaborate with other environmentalists and birders from across the region to shape policies and take an active part in saving our birds, wildlife, and habitats. Enjoy one of Florida’s best beaches while you catch up with friends, colleagues, and fellow Audubon members. Field trips will take in some of Florida’s birding hot spots, so don’t forget the binoculars!

Register by September 27 and pay only $99 for all receptions, meals, programs, workshops, and even a movie. (After September 27, this all-inclusive package is $125.) Conference costs are underwritten by Audubon of Florida to keep participants’ costs to a minimum, so make plans NOW to attend! Download the registration form from www.audubonofflorida.org and mail or fax it or call Vicky Johnston at (305) 371-6399 ext. 134 to have a registration form mailed to you. Book hotel accommodations directly with the Holiday Inn (800-206-2724), and take advantage of the special rate for Audubon Assembly participants. Oceanfront rooms are available at an additional cost.

8th Annual Florida Keys Birding and Wildlife Festival

The festival is scheduled for Sept. 29 through Oct. 1 2006 and will be anchored at Curry Hammock State Park, located on the Overseas Highway, at Mile Marker 56.2 in Marathon, Florida. Additional information is available by calling the Key Deer Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center at 305-872-0774 or Curry Hammock State Park at 305-289-2690.

An opening event will be held at the Marathon Garden Club, with hors d’oeuvres at 6:00 PM, followed at 7:00 PM by our keynote speaker. Admission will be $15, which also includes a goodie bag and a Festival T-shirt.

TAS General Meeting and Conservation Meeting Schedule

TAS General Meeting Schedule

Membership meetings are open to the public and held at the Doc Thomas House, 5530 Sunset Dr., near Red Rd. The doors open at 7:30pm and the program begins at 8:00pm. Call for more information (305) 667-7337.

Tue., Sep. 12 - Caught in the Act
Local filmmaker Steve Siegel presents fascinating video he’s collected over the last several years, illustrating idiosyncrasies of bird behavior. Included will be close-ups and slow-motion video of avian feeding strategies, methods of locomotion and courtship displays.

Tue., Oct. 10 - Humpbacks of the Silver Banks
Nancy and Bruce Moreland return to share amazing video and photos of their March, 2005 journey to the Silver Banks, off the Dominican Republic, the southernmost point in the migration route of the North Atlantic population of humpback whales. Join them as they snorkel with humpbacks, study mother/calf interactions and observe rowdy groups of males as they compete for mates.

Conservation Committee Meeting Announcements

Wed. Sept 27 – Environmentally Friendly Virtual Meeting to be held in Cyber Space
Join TAS Conservation Chair Dick Townsend in a virtual meeting. Mr. Townsend would like to hear from you, TAS members, on what you believe are the most critical conservation issues we are facing today. E-mail your notes to Dick.Townsend@mdc.edu and he will respond to you between 7:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. on the evening of September 27th.

Wed. Oct 25, 7:30 p.m. – Miami MetroZoo Family Entertainment Facility Expansion
Meeting at the Doc Thomas House, 5530 Sunset Drive Barbara Falsey from the Miami Dade County Department of Park and Recreation will present information on the November 7, 2006 referendum concerning development adjacent to Miami Metrozoo. The County is seeking to develop a water park and other family entertainment facilities that will draw more visitors to the area and will help support the expansion of the zooological park. The discussion will be focused on the potential impacts of the development plans on the critical natural resources of the area.
Sat., Sept. 2 — Bill Baggs Cape Florida Bird Walk
Jeff Weber will lead birders through Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park on Key Biscayne. Meet in the west end of the Seaquarium parking lot on the Rickenbacker Causeway at 7:30am. Participants will carpool to the state park. Costs include an entrance fee to the park and the causeway toll.

Sun., Sept. 3 — A.D. Barnes Park Bird Walk
Bill Boeringer will lead birders through A.D. Barnes Park. Enter on SW 72nd Ave. just north of Bird Rd. (SW 40th St.) and take the first left to park near the baseball fields. Meet at 7:30am, returning at approximately 11:00am.

Sat., Sept. 9 — Matheson Hammock / Fairchild Tropical Garden Bird Walk
John Boyd will lead birders through Matheson Hammock and Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. The group meets at 7:30am in the parking area on the left side of the Matheson north entrance. Entry to Fairchild is at 10:00am. The Fairchild entrance fee will be waived for TAS members. Return is at approximately 11:30am.

Sun., Sept. 10 — Elaine Gordon Enchanted Forest Park Bird Walk
Alex Harper will lead a group through the Elaine Gordon Enchanted Forest. Meet at 8am in the first covered picnic area just inside the park entrance at 1725 NE 135th St. west of Biscayne Blvd.

Sat., Sept. 16 — Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park Bird Walk
Paul Bithorn will lead. See Sept. 2 for details.

Sun., Sept. 17 — Kendall Indian Hammocks Bird Walk
Brian Rapoza will lead a group through Kendall Indian Hammocks at 11345 SW 79th Street. The entrance is on the west side of SW 112th Ave. at SW 79th Street. The group meets in the parking area adjacent to the baseball field at 7:30am, returning at approximately 11:00am.

Sat., Sept. 23 — A.D. Barnes Park Bird Walk
Robin Diaz and Susan Schneider will lead. See Sept. 3 for details.

Sun., Sept. 24 — Matheson Hammock Bird Walk
Paul Urgelles and Roberto Torres will lead birders through Matheson Hammock on Old Cutler Rd. immediately north of Fairchild Gardens. The group meets in the parking area on the left inside the park entrance at 7:30am. Return is at approximately 11:00am.

Sun., Sept. 30 — Corkscrew Swamp / Tigertail Beach Birding
Brian Rapoza will lead an all day carpool event to Collier County. Meet at 6:00am at the east gate (on SW 55th Ave.) of the Doc Thomas property (5530 Sunset Drive, South Miami). There is an admission fee for Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (discount for Audubon members). Bring lunch and wading shoes.

Sun., Oct 1 — Cutler Ridge Birding
Roberto Torres will lead this carpool trip to birding locations in the Cutler Ridge area, including Bill Sadowski Park, Black Point, Cutler Wetlands and Dump Marsh. Meet at Bill Sadowski Park, 17555 SW 79 Ave., at 7:30am. Bring lunch.

Sat., Oct. 7 — Greynold’s Park Bird Walk
Jim King will lead birders through Greynold’s Park, 17530 West Dixie Highway North Miami Beach. Meet at the park boathouse at 7:30am. Parking is available near the playground and the elevated mound opposite the boathouse. Return is at approximately 11:00am.

Sun., Oct 8 — A.D. Barnes Park Bird Walk
Bill Boeringer and Gigi Pardo will lead. See Sept. 3 for details.

Sat., Oct. 14 — South Dade Birding
John Boyd will lead this all day carpool trip which may include stops at Lucky Hammock, Castellow Hammock and Dump Marsh. Meet at 7:00am in the parking lot of the Burger King on US1 in Florida City (just after the end of the turnpike). This is an all day trip. Bring lunch.

Sat., Oct. 21 — Shark Valley / Loop Road Birding
Paul Bithorn and Juan Villamil will lead this carpool trip. Meet at 7:00am at the east gate (SW 55th Ave.) of the Doc Thomas property (5530 Sunset Drive, South Miami). Bring lunch.

Sat., Oct. 28 — Babcock-Webb / Ft. Myers Beach Birding
Brian Rapoza leads this all-day carpool trip to Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area in Charlotte County and Ft. Myers Beach in Lee County. Meet at 6:00am at the east gate (on SW 55th Ave.) of the Doc Thomas property (5530 Sunset Drive, South Miami). Bring lunch and wading shoes.

Sun., Oct. 29 — Charles Deering Estate Nature Walk
Rick Cohen and Joe Barros will emphasize the botanical and geological features found in the 420 acre park. The park entrance is located just east of Old Cutler Rd. on SW 168th Street. Bring sturdy shoes. Bring water, hat, and bug spray. Rating: easy to moderate. Limited to 10 participants. Reservations required by October 22. Email the TAS field trip coordinator or call 305-388-1544. This is a popular outing, so call early! Fee: $18.00 for members, $20.00 for nonmembers includes Deering entrance.

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