



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## James W. Wiley, 1943–2018

### IN MEMORIAM

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We meet few people in our lives who command unblemished lifelong respect and affection based on both their scientific accomplishments and their admirable personal qualities, and it is with profound sorrow that we recognize the passing of someone with these attributes, one of the most outstanding individuals in the tribe of field ornithologists—James Warren Wiley. Jim died on September 19, 2018, a victim of the cancer he had been battling for a number of years. This fate seems to us a supreme irony for a person who always kept himself in the best of physical shape, even to the extent of him representing the USA as a cyclist at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. Jim's cancer was first diagnosed in Cuba, where he devoted most of his last years to continuing field studies and to guiding the development of this country's budding ornithologists. It had been earlier misdiagnosed as just an infection by stateside physicians.

In our view, Jim's accomplishments in Cuba and on other islands of the West Indies rank him as the most important ornithologist of the Caribbean in modern times, although his legacy also encompasses worthy achievements in other regions. Together with his wife Beth, who collaborated in some of his research and conservation projects over the years, he played a crucial role in guiding the truly desperate struggles to prevent the extinction of the Puerto Rican Parrot, but this is only one of his many pivotal efforts with West Indian birds, especially various psittacids, columbids, and accipitrids. His Cuban studies included intensive natural history research on the Cuban Parrot, the Cuban Parakeet, the Cuban Kite, Gundlach's Hawk, Fernandina's Flicker, and the Bare-legged Owl. Particularly comprehensive was his study of the Cuban Pygmy Owl. His last days of fieldwork, as his health was seriously declining, were focused on the Bee Hummingbird, the world's smallest bird.

James Warren Wiley was born to Robert Mark and Ruby Lorene Wiley on January 16, 1943, in Los Angeles. His sister Joanne's remembrances of Jim as a young boy were of



Jim Wiley on a field trip in Cuba.

many adventures afield. He credited his twin aunts, Betty Wiley Searles and Jean Wiley Brockett, with instilling a love of wildlife and science with many trips to the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History, the La Brea Tar Pits, and the

excellent zoos and aquaria of southern California. His early field observations included the fortuitous and stunning sighting of a mountain lion stalking and killing a deer while he watched from a nearby blind on Palos Verdes Estates.

Jim completed his B.S. at the University of Montana in 1964 where his love of raptors and fieldwork flourished under the mentorship of the Craighead families. In 1969 he earned a M.A. under David Greenfield at California State University, Fullerton. His thesis was on the taxonomy, behavior, and ecology of the eastern Pacific gobiid fish (*Coryphopterus nicholsii*), reflecting another of his early interests, scuba diving (he was a 2-time national spear-fishing champion). From there, Jim went on to begin Ph.D. studies on the ecology of the Red-shouldered Hawk at the University of South Florida under one of us (NFRS). These studies, however, were interrupted in 1972 when NFRS moved to Puerto Rico to take over leadership of the conservation program for the Puerto Rican Parrot for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and where Jim soon joined him to take charge of conservation efforts for Puerto Rican columbids, most notably the Puerto Rican Plain Pigeon, White-crowned Pigeon, and Zenaida Dove for the Department of Natural Resources of Puerto Rico under another one of us (HR). These studies were followed by a detailed study of the Hispaniolan Parrot in the Dominican Republic for the U.S. Forest Service from 1975 to 1977, and then by his assuming leadership of the Puerto Rican Parrot program for the USFWS in 1977, a role he pursued until 1986.

Though this may sound like a busy enough time for Jim, he somehow also managed to complete simultaneous intensive studies of several Puerto Rican raptors, several Amazona parrots of the Lesser Antilles, the St. Croix ground lizard (*Ameiva polops*), the Hispaniolan Trogon, the Palm Chat, the White-necked Crow, Ridgway's Hawk and, perhaps most importantly, the Yellow-shouldered Blackbird of Puerto Rico and its brood parasitism by the Shiny Cowbird. The last of these studies was the subject of his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Miami under the expert guidance of Oscar Owre in 1982. In the same year he became an Elective Member of the American Ornithologists' Union.

The reader may justifiably wonder when Jim ate or slept through these years, as his primary responsibility at the time was conducting incredibly demanding and highly successful conservation efforts for the severely endangered Puerto Rican Parrot. These efforts combined intensive study and nest-guarding of the few remaining wild pairs with captive breeding and fostering of captivity-produced hatchlings into wild nests, which led to a steady increase of the remnant wild population to nearly 50 birds by the time he left the program. Jim's work also included development of radio-telemetric and release techniques for captive adult Puerto Rican Parrots, based on the results of experimental

releases of captive Hispaniolan Parrots to the wild in the Dominican Republic.

From 1986 to 1991, Jim's base of operations shifted to Camarillo, California, where he participated in efforts to develop release methods for captive California Condors for the USFWS through work with surrogate Andean Condors both in California and in South America. Additionally, he continued ongoing studies of contaminant problems affecting California's scavenging birds. These studies were concurrent with field studies of the endangered Light-footed Clapper Rail and with studies of hurricane effects on avian species of the Caribbean in collaboration with JW.

In late 1991, Jim became leader of the Grambling Cooperative Wildlife Research Project of the U.S. Geological Survey as a professor at Grambling State University, a position he held until 2001, when he transferred to another Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, which he supervised until his retirement in 2006. His primary duties at both co-ops centered on guiding the graduate training of students in wildlife sciences, especially students from the West Indies, but he also continued numerous research and outreach projects with a special emphasis on Cuban birds, until his death.

As most alumni will attest, Jim had high expectations of his students. He was known for his academic rigor and devoted considerable time and effort to reviewing student research papers, theses, and examinations. There were no easy grades in Wiley courses, but his students were uniformly appreciative of all the help he provided them in acquiring research and writing skills. While Jim was editor of *El Pitirre*, many even developed editing skills by contributing to the work on manuscripts submitted for publication.

From our admittedly personal view, Jim's most outstanding achievements over his long career were (in no particular order): (1) his success in promoting effective recovery of the severely endangered Puerto Rican Parrot; (2) his highly informative studies in collaboration with Will Post on the Yellow-shouldered Blackbird under stress from the Shiny Cowbird; (3) his ground-breaking studies of various raptor species of the West Indies; (4) his many studies of various columbid species of the West Indies; (5) his exhaustive and incredibly useful annotated bibliography of references pertaining to birds of the West Indies, published by the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology in 2000—a publication covering more than 11,600 references; (6) his close collaboration with ornithologists of Cuba (including AK) in studies of many its endemic avian species; (7) his detailed studies of the parrots of the Cayman Islands; (8) his mentoring of numerous young West Indian ornithologists, especially in Cuba, but also through his leadership of Cooperative Wildlife Units in Louisiana and Maryland; (9) his collaborations with other

ornithologists (including HR) in producing important field guides to birds of the West Indies (*Birds of the West Indies*, *Birds of the Dominican Republic and Haiti*, and *The Birds of Hispaniola*); and (10) his role as an editor of ornithological publications for the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology in Los Angeles and for the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB). Jim was a founding member of the SCSCB in 1988, and his long tenure as editor of its publications (*El Pitirre* and *The Journal of Caribbean Ornithology*) continued until 2004. His own research efforts resulted in more than a 100 publications with a long list of collaborators.

These achievements were honored by several awards: (1) a special award of Los Ornitólogos Cubanos in 2001 for Jim's many contributions to Cuban Ornithology, (2) a 2010 issue of *The Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* (volume 23, no. 1) honoring his achievements, (3) the 2014 Alexander Skutch Award from the Association of Field Ornithologists, and (4) the Gundlach Award of 2014 from La Sociedad Cubana de Zoología in recognition of his research and conservation efforts in Cuba.

These awards only begin to reflect the immense feeling of awe and gratitude we hold for a remarkable scientist whose life was mostly devoted to the study and conservation of

avian species and who inspired many others to follow him along this path. All 4 of us had the good fortune to have collaborated with Jim in various studies over the years, and we value the memories of these efforts as some of the very best of our own lives. His capacity for hard work was extraordinary, and he never slackened in his commitment to conservation values and to good-humored aiding of others engaged in similar efforts. His modesty and humility were legendary, but what we remember most was his boundless empathy for the natural world. On one occasion, for example, Jim was grief-stricken by the absence of an incubating Bee Hummingbird from her nest for more than 2 hr. His sadness for the missing, and likely deceased, bird was overwhelming. But when she nevertheless returned in good health half an hour later, Jim's demeanor transformed into intense and infectious joy. He cared deeply about the welfare of our companion species on the planet.

Jim is survived by his wife Beth Nethery Wiley, a fellow Californian whom he married in 1969, and by his sister Joanne Wiley Bower of Humboldt County, California.

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