

Francis "Fritz" G. Scheider, M.D.
26 Aug 1932 - 19 May 1989

Fritz Scheider was a longtime benefactor of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs both through his many contributions to this journal and also through his many contacts with individual members of our organization, especially in upstate New York. His passing left a multitude of friends hard pressed to go afield without thinking of the wonderful times shared in common interests and pursuits. The stuff of obituaries and memorials has appeared in *New York Birders* [18(5):4-5; 1989] and in newspapers in the Syracuse area. Rather than repeat them again, his friends were asked to submit brief "Fritz stories" to commemorate the warm and lasting feelings we will have for him always. The quantity and quality of these stories is true expression of how much he was loved and respected.

The Editor

First impressions

In the early 1940s Mr. Aubrey Stevens was a letter carrier on the northwest side of Syracuse. He had a great interest in bird study and would talk to people along his route about birds he saw while delivering the mail. He took a special interest in a group of five or six boys, including me, whom he took on weekend "bird hikes." Mr. Stevens also was a hunter. He had a new shotgun which did not fit him properly. On his mail route lived a city fireman, Charles Scheider, who was also a skilled woodworker and gunsmith. Mr. Stevens asked Mr. Scheider to adjust his gun and, when visiting the Scheider home in early 1942 to pick up the gun, noticed a copy of *Birds of America* on a living room table. He asked who in the family was interested in birds and was told that it was Mr. Scheider's 10-year old son, Fritz. Mr. Stevens had been planning a "bird hike" for the following weekend and asked if Fritz would like to come. Fritz quickly accepted. In preparation for the hike, Mr. Stevens asked the other boys not to mention the number of birds they had on their annual lists because the new boy had only six species which he had seen in his back yard. Fritz more than doubled his list on his first hike, and we all carefully avoided any discussion of list size. There were many other trips with Mr. Stevens and before very long Fritz was the best informed birder in the group. He also had, by far, the largest bird list.

Robert L. Richardson

As I remember, Fritz became interested in birds after having been given a book on birds by his mailman. Todd and I would frequently take him birding with us when he was a student. Montezuma swamp was a favorite weekend birding location. We would either pick him up or he would ride his bike to a central pickup spot. We were always impressed by his accuracy, his thoroughness, his intensity and his competitiveness. He was always eager to be first to locate the unusual. He learned quickly and was always generous in sharing his knowledge with others.

Terry Farnham

Heavy snow blanketed Comstock Avenue and Oakwood Cemetery on the morning of 30 Mar 1955. We had answered an ad for birdwatching in the evening paper, which said there would be a leader to show us how to do it. We sat nervously awaiting someone to appear. Finally, a car roared up and out stepped a young man. We walked over to him and inquired if this was the Audubon Bird Walk. Since no others had shown up, he said, "Follow me," and we were off on our first bird walk. From my Life List, a shrike was the most unusual bird we saw - but that isn't what I remember best about that day. At the end of the walk, Fritz guided us to a shelter of pines behind a mausoleum. Having no idea what was to take place, I must admit I was somewhat unnerved when Fritz started to make a very odd noise - and suddenly down came a chickadee - at eye level! At that moment I decided that Fritz must be a direct descendent of John Audubon.

(Jean W. Propst &) Ede Estoff

As a Boy Scout in the early 50's, I went to Camp Woodland, north of Oneida Lake where Fritz was a counselor. He was teaching a merit badge called "Bird Study." Although I attended the course and went on many field trips with Fritz and my father, I drifted away from birding after a stint in the Marine Corps. My interest returned in the 1970s. Local birders mentioned a "Dr. Scheider" and I found he was the same person. He called me to go shorebirding with him. It was the start of innumerable field trips from Sandy Pond on Lake Ontario to remote Attu Island in Alaska. Without him, birding will never be the same for myself and many, many other birders and friends of Fritz. The memories of these trips and hundreds of live birds shown to us by Fritz have helped to fill the void.

John Hanyak

I first met him at the old Seventh North Street dump in Syracuse. I had been told that there would be shorebirds to see. Fritz was a big bonus. There was instant rapport. Had he not been holding binoculars, he would have rubbed his hands in glee: a neophyte birder who needed help! And I who needed the help had a teacher. He explained that a small shorebird with yellow legs was a Least Sandpiper. The one with a drooping brassiere was an immature Ruddy Turnstone. The crazy one spinning in circles was a phalarope. I can usually tell them apart now if they are relatively close (while Fritz could pick them out in flight a long way off). Most of what I learned about birds this past 20 years has come from Fritz—with his patience—repeating the same fieldmarks over and over. I will try to pass on some of what I have learned to other new birders, always with Fritz in mind.

Dorothy W. Crumb

There have been a few extraordinary people in my life and Fritz Scheider was one of them. Though looking myopic, with the air of a slightly overgrown schoolboy, I soon discovered that he had eyes like the hawks he identified so quickly and accurately and ears as sensitive as a Long-eared Owl's. He was totally dedicated and totally professional in his approach to both his medical vocation and his avocation. He became the Gilbert White of upstate New York but with a coast to coast reputation as an ornithologist. I am very glad to have known him, to have punned with him, to have envied his relish of a cup of hot water, and to have bewildered him with my Sony Walkman.

Michael J. Thomas

Personal Glimpses

This happened on an annual junket to Cape Ann, Mass. It was the first year that the speed limit became 55 mph. After nearly three hours on the road with everything passing us - including boys on bikes - Paul Paquette, who was in the front seat with Fritz, leaned over and said, "Straight Arrow, don't you think you could up it to 57?" Because of the lovely rapport between Fritz and Paul, Fritz enjoyed it too.

Ede Estoff

I was always aware that Fritz had a very good and dependable sense of direction. When I asked him about it, he said he got lost once, and the experience frightened him so much that he decided never to get lost

again. He didn't tell me his system, but over time I realized that he observed and memorized landmarks, route numbers, county road numbers or letters, which way was North, the lay of the land, and I don't know what-all else. I think he started doing this when he was very young, venturing out by himself to go birding. When he got his first car, he began to drive all over Region 5. He learned the names of back roads and noted names on POSTED signs on wood lots and fields. Then he would look up the people in charge and get permission to bird there. He talked to people, he got to know them and be known. At a public place, like Montezuma, he learned the names of people in charge and told them who he was, and asked questions. He was interested in wildflowers too, and learned where and when to go to see them in bloom. I think that he never forgot their names, wildflowers or birds. After a while he began to take his friends to see some of the places he had discovered and he could name all the birds and flowers there. It seemed as though he knew them by some kind of instinct. What we - or at least I - didn't know was that he had been to such places many times alone, knew how to get there and back, and knew what to expect to see. He had developed his sense of direction and his memory. I would follow him through a soggy stand of cattails that were over my head with perfect confidence.

Sylvia Paquette

I began birding with Fritz in 1949, when I was just out of college and he was still in high school. On a hitchhiking trip to Toad Harbor, after seeing our third Loggerhead Shrike, I said, "We're out." Fritz took the bait and asked, "What do you mean?" "Shrike three!" I replied. It was a simple beginning that led to much distress for many. Fritz took to punning like a shrike takes to sparrows. It would have been only a matter of time until someone set off his proclivity for punning, and according to him, I was the culprit.

William F. Minor

You never knew when a pun would strike. Shortly after I arrived in Syracuse, during the demise of the Penn-Central Railroad, Fritz and I were birding along its main tracks in central Cayuga County. The roar of diesels and honking of horns announced the approach of an eastbound train, soon answered by an oncoming westbound. The papers had been full of stories of railroad mismanagement, so after the trains had passed, I innocently commented, "Gee, it's a wonder those trains weren't on the same track." "Not to worry," Fritz replied, "they

let a Norwegian drive the westbound and a drunk drive the eastbound."
"Oh?" I asked innocently. "Yes, you know. Norse is Norse and souse is
souse and never the train shall meet!"

Paul DeBenedictis

We were sitting on Cape Ann, Mass. There were lots of birds going by
- loons, gulls and eiders. But there were lots of loons, flocks of them.
Fritz got tired of keeping track of them, so he turned to me and said,
"You keep track of them. You can be the loon-a-tic for the day!"

Gordon M. Meade

Fritz always bemoaned the commercialism surrounding the Holiday
Season. On one Syracuse Christmas Bird count, our party found
ourselves bogged down by the traffic of Christmas shoppers. Suddenly
with an air of indignation, Fritz exclaimed "Bah Humbug. Scrooge was
right!"

Gene Huggins

Fritz tended to overreact to adversity and was stubborn about
changing his mind. Apparently as a young man, he had become seasick
on a ferry boat so he swore he would never go to sea. When a group of
us decided to take a trip on the Bluenose Ferry from Bar Harbor, Maine,
to Nova Scotia, he declined. Well, the trip was smooth, the ferry was
huge and we came back with life birds that Fritz had never seen. It took
a whole year of convincing but he finally decided that new birds
overruled his fear of seasickness, so he loaded up on Marezine for 24
hours before the trip and we had to escort him aboard. Well, he was so
loaded with medicine that he slept in his chair for all of the trip except
when a good bird came by. We would get him up to see the bird and
then lead him back to the chair. Thus, he conquered his fear of pelagics.

Another quirk Fritz had concerned his choice of drinks. He never
drank alcohol, he said, because he had been sick on beer once. When I
first birded with him, he used to drink quarts of tea daily. (It's a good
think we birded out in the woods). When he developed high blood
pressure, he suddenly switched from tea and coffee to hot water. This
always produced a dialogue with the waitress in each restaurant. After
a few years, they got to know him in Oswego County and he didn't
have to ask. On a trip to Arizona three years ago, the waitress, in a deep
southern accent, asked "What's the kick in that?" Fritz answered in a
low voice with a straight face, "Ma'am, that's nature's best." I think he
enjoyed being different and he prided himself on not being addicted to
drink, TV or spending money.

Robert E. Long.

Years ago (looking back at old issues of *The Kingbird* I found it was 1961) Fritz asked me to take over writing Region 5 quarterly report. I protested that I did not know the observers well enough having only moved into the Syracuse area at the end of 1959. "Don't worry," he replied, "I'll give you a list." He produced a stack of 3x5 cards with not only the name and address but also his ranking from one to four of their ability as birders. I still have these cards, but good readers, do not fear, Canadian freedom of information laws are weak and I have left instructions that the package is not to be opened until 50 years after my death.

David B. Peakall

Fritz's additions to the Ten Commandments:

Know thy Region.

Fasten thy seatbelt. ("Dirt is a lot easier to clean up than blood!")

Never be separated from your lunch!

Tom Shuman

His willingness to share and to tell you all you needed to know was really marvelous. At first we birded in spots near Syracuse, then we expanded out to all of Region 5. As the migration and weather changed, Fritz could always find a place where the birds were. Fritz made Region 5 and its birds an adventure and lots of fun.

Jean W. Propst

Birding

I was spending my summer vacation at Boy Scout Camp Woodland. Early one morning, before camp came to life, I went for a walk to listen to the call of the Whip-poor-will. Suddenly, I saw hawks soaring overhead. Quickly I ran to Fritz's tent, awakened him and encouraged him to come out and look at the hawks. Looking skyward, he said only one word before crawling back into his sleeping bag: "Crows." It was a humbling experience.

Joseph Albino

Fritz was forthright. In the early 1950's he and I went to Montezuma to look for Red-bellied Woodpeckers. At that time it was possible to drive on the dike around Tschache Pool. We walked, and at the west side of the pool noticed a parked car, occupied by a lady who was

knitting. Fritz stopped at the car window and asked, "Have you seen any Red-bellies?" I managed to stifle my laughter but the lady didn't drop a stitch. "Ask my husband," she replied, "he's out there somewhere watching birds." We didn't find her husband but we found the woodpeckers. Periodically over the years I would innocently ask Fritz, "Have you seen any Red-bellies?" and we would laugh about the incident.

William F. Minor

On a Christmas count a few [23] years ago, Dr Scheider [even though most friend call him "Fritz" I called him Dr. Scheider because I was just in junior high then] and I were in a semifrozen marsh woodpecker woods somewhere east of Syracuse busy running an inventory of birds. Amongst the trees we found Hairies, Downies, and lots of chickadees. I saw a woodpecker I didn't recognize, and said "What's that?" "What's that?" "What's that?!! That's an Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker, that's ' "What's that?"" Birds excited him. The next day he presented me with a medal for the Order of the Silver Woodpecker for sighting the most unusual bird of the count. He had cut out a cardboard silhouette of the Black-backed Woodpecker and covered it with aluminum foil. I still have it.

Smokey Pastel

During February 1972 a Dickcissel appeared at a feeder in south Syracuse. Jean Propst took me down several times - it would have been a life bird for me - but we never did find it. Two years later, a group of us went to Texas with Fritz. One morning we were rolling down the highway when Fritz came to a screeching stop and we all reached for our binocs. In the formal tones of a proclamation announced, "There, Mrs. Estoff, is your Dickcissel - in fact, a tree full of them." And he was right! He had seen them while driving and had remembered I needed it for a life bird! He had a remarkable memory and seemed to take enormous pleasure in getting a lifer for someone.

Ede Estoff

Years ago I went on my first birding trip led by Fritz. My husband had forewarned me "Fritz take birding very seriously — so you must be quiet!" A group of ten met at Cicero Swamp in the Spring around 7PM. Our goal was to see the woodcock mating ritual and maybe see a N. Saw-whet Owl as well as hear it. Fritz imitated the owl with a soft lovely whistle. All was quiet - dusk was falling. After many calls from

Fritz, the howling of a dog was heard from a nearby farm. Next to me a man replied, "Oh my god, he got a dog!" The silence was broken by many giggles — Fritz never moved nor said a word.

Anne & Bill Brosseau

Soon after we moved to Arizona in 1973, Fritz began appearing each year to participate on local Christmas Bird Counts. His schedule each late December was to fly to Tuscon, rent a car and drive the 150+ miles to Portal. He always arrived with arm loads of food for us, especially fruit. He made his own lunches to take in the field, usually turkey sandwiches with lots of lettuce or lettuce alone, and a sack of fruit, grapefruits, tangerines, oranges, which he peeled in the field. Shredded Wheat was always his breakfast before heading out for the day. Usually he took pleasure in contrasting the dry sunny weather in Arizona with that of upstate New York counts. "Look - no boots, no down jacket!" But one year he arose to be greeted by 12 inches of snow and was unable to make the Elfrieda census, to his dismay. His favorite Portal census area started amidst sparrows in the open desert and continued up a canyon, Sulphur Draw. Sometimes he was alone but often he had a companion. They always came up with birds seen by no other participants, such as Mountain rather than the expected Mexican Chickadee. One year he came upon a Golden Eagle in a coyote trap and was able to release it, taking great pleasure in seeing it fly off, with just an injured foot. On one Peloncillo Mountains count, he and Walter hiked five miles to reach his Skull Canyon area because the mud was too deep and the road impassible. Everyone taking part in the three censuses in which he participated eagerly awaited his reports at the compilations and delighted in his findings. It was a measure of the recognition of his ability and the affection which all felt for him that there was never any skepticism or jealousy. When he returned to Syracuse [to attend yet another count there!], usually around 4:00 AM so he could attend the Elfrieda count en route to Tuscon or catch a morning flight, he would leave a note on the kitchen table thanking us and looking forward to next year. He visited Portal other times at different seasons, but he really loved the midwinter visit, with all the different birds, his new friends and the escape from snow and ice. There are several Arizona Christmas Bird Counts which will not be the same without Fritz.

Walter and Sally Spofford

In May 1989 Fritz and I joined a Will Russel trip to Big Bend in Texas. Before that trip we spent several days along the Rio Grande below Falcon Dam. Fritz was especially eager to see a Red-billed Pigeon because he had not seen it and I had. We finally found a small flock across the river in Mexico. Fritz watched for an hour as they fed and flew out over the river, but all of them turned back to Mexico before they reached the halfway point. What frustration! Fritz finally gave up when they moved inland. Although he was in the U.S., they were in Mexico and he would not count them for his U.S. list until he finally saw them north of the river on a later trip.

Dorothy W. McIlroy

Early one Saturday, November 1989, heading home from the Regional Market, I saw a falcon I couldn't identify. Luckily, upon phoning Fritz, I found him home. As he showed great interest in a look at the bird, I took him to the same spot. Though it took about an hour to locate the bird, he needed only one good look before identifying "Merlin." A first CNY winter Merlin for Fritz. It was thrilling.

Judy Thurber

It always seemed to me there was something magical about the way Fritz could summon up the new or rare bird wherever he was. For instance, we were driving by a farmer's fields along Lake Ontario where perhaps 3000 or more gulls were feeding, swirling up from the ground. Suddenly, Fritz called out "Franklin's Gull!" and threw on the brakes. It took me a while to get on the bird but there it was, one bird among thousands! This sort of thing happened time after time and could only be greeted with amazement and awe by his lucky birding partners. I thought of him in these terms so often, the magician at work, although we all knew it was the combination of skill and hard work. But there was that extra something which made birding with him so much fun.

Ruth Knight

In March 1983 Fritz and I went to Oklahoma to see the Lesser Prairie Chicken. On the 11th we sat scrunched down, knees touching chins, in the half-sunken hut and watched their courtship for 3 hours. The next day as we headed for the Salt Plains NWR, we stopped to check some ducks on a pond in a sand pit beside the Cimmaron River. Suddenly Fritz exclaimed, "Dee, there's a male Baikal Teal in breeding plumage!" We both watched with binoculars and telescopes from 1:45-2:05 PM. Each wrote detailed notes on plumage and behavior, and Fritz drew a

sketch. Then we headed for our motel. Fritz tried to telephone George Sutton, but he was ill. Finally (it was Saturday afternoon) the Univ. of Oklahoma telephone operator found someone else for Fritz to talk to. We returned to watch the teal from 4:05-5:25, adding further plumage notes when the bird reared up and flapped its wings, then scratched its head as it preened. That evening we combined our notes into a final description which Fritz sent to Dr. Sutton. On 16 July 1982 Dr. Sutton wrote to Fritz that the two ornithologists found the bird still on the pond the next day and confirmed our identification. The director of the local zoos then checked with 30 other zoos and wildfowl breeders to find out if a Baikal Teal had escaped. None had. The record was accepted as valid for a wild bird, the first for Oklahoma, and would be published in the Oklahoma Ornithological Society bulletin. We were jubilant! At that time Marguerite Baumgartner was editing a book of Oklahoma birds, bringing records up to date. Our teal was the last record to be accepted for inclusion.

Dorothy W. McIlroy

[Of his many exploits, Fritz perhaps was most proud of the following — The Editor.]

From Puerto Rico, where he was stationed in the Medical Corps, Fritz wrote me often because of my interest in tropical American ornithology (and because he'd in turn receive my reports about birding in his beloved Region 5): "12 Oct [1963]...Today went...trying to see the Puerto Rican Parrot — no luck but...I also climbed El Yunque. On the way up and on the way down saw a strange warbler. Please check skins for me on this as it may be lifer #400 if it's what I think it is." There follow detailed descriptions of the bird's behavior and plumage, a diagram of the "see's" and "zeet's" of its song, and careful pencil drawings of the whole bird and its head. "I think it may be a Black-throated Gray Warbler which would be very very strange for Puerto Rico but my only picture [doesn't match some of the features seen]." On 12 Nov., after my Cornell connections had come up with no solution, back in D.C. Fritz wrote "After a careful perusal of every Black-and-white and every Black-throated Gray in the National Museum...I don't know what my crazy warbler is and never will...Probably a hybrid or a freak...Better forgotten than stewed over." But back in Puerto Rico on 25 Jan 1964 "...up to El Yunque...saw that weird Bl-thr Gray X B&W beast — and singing too! — again. It has not changed pattern one bit and I think it should be shot." By this time, I was thinking "Possible

new species; should be written up and published." But Fritz had a prescription for dealing with uncertain *Kingbird* reports: "When in doubt, throw it out." With his own records, his practice was along the more drastic lines of, if you didn't know what it is, publishing isn't worth the paper it's printed on. But I don't believe Fritz ever really "forgot" it! When I flew to Puerto Rico for spring break in 1969, a visit to Kay and Cameron Kepler, studying the endangered Puerto Rican Parrot on El Yunque was on my itinerary and "Fritz's warbler" very much on my mind. If Cam's written directions hadn't omitted one item crucial to finding their camp in the dark and the fog, they would have heard about Fritz's bird three years before (and months before their own discovery of it). When its description (Kepler, Cameron B. and Parkes, Kenneth C. 1973. A new species of warbler (Parulidae) from Puerto Rico. *Auk* 89:1-18.) finally was published, it was too late to formally acknowledge the reticent, unpublished, first observer of the Elfin Woods Warbler.

Marge Rusk