

DR. PAUL A. DEBENEDICTIS 1942-2006

“Quick. Lie down and pretend you are a pine cone.” A flock of Pine Grosbeaks had just flown over. Birding with Paul DeBenedictis was always productive and fun. I met him when he and his wife Virginia and two children, Tim and Lisa, moved to Syracuse in 1970. His intellect was incredible. He was knowledgeable in so many fields.

Paul grew up in Berkeley, California and started his college work at the University of California. Then on to Michigan for his Ph.D. in zoology and ecology. He met his wife, Virginia, at Ann Arbor. They came to Syracuse, where he was manager of Academic Computing Services at SUNY Upstate Medical University.

Birding was only a hobby with me, and Paul taught me that there was so much more to know about birds. He was very interested in gulls and few of us had paid much attention to them. He started discussing plumages and aging and made us really look at these birds.

Several of us traveled to Cornell on Monday nights to attend the seminars. I listened to Paul and Fritz Scheider discuss so many things that were way above my head. And we often visited the Spoffords and their many friends after the seminar. So much to absorb.

Paul worked on the birdathons in the spring and the annual Christmas counts. Then in the 1980s came the first New York State Breeding Bird Atlas. Paul would have liked to have been coordinator for Region 5, but with a full time job, it was easier to let me take the job and he would assist. He contributed so much, not only in the field, but with records on the computer. He served on a committee to review the artwork. He was sorely missed when the second Atlas project was started.

Paul was very active in the Onondaga Audubon Society, served on its Board of Directors, and led field trips. He was also interested in The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs (now the New York State Ornithological Association). He wrote eight Region 5 reports for the *Kingbird* between 1986 and 1989. He was instrumental in the formation of the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC) in 1977 and served as its first Chairman for seven years. Paul subsequently served as Editor of the *Kingbird* from 1985 (Volume 35, Number 4) through 1995 (Volume 45, Number 4). Paul received the Gordon B. Meade Award in 1996 and the Elon Howard Eaton Memorial Award in 1997 for his contributions to the scientific study of birds and other assistance to the Federation.

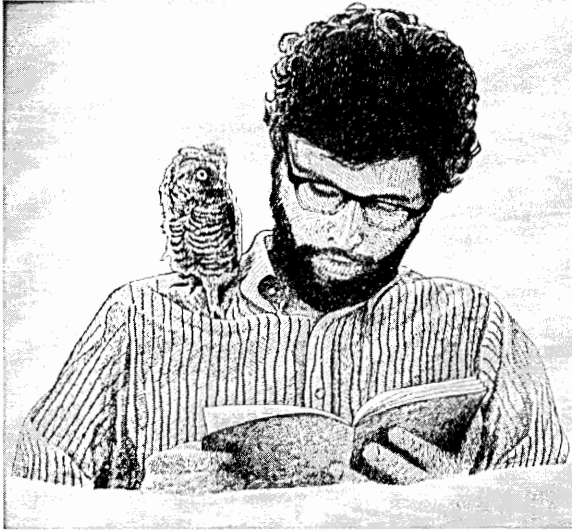
Working with local organizations was not enough. He also wrote a series of articles for *Birding*, the magazine of The American Birding Society. He was a member of their Avian Records Committee.

Paul became interested in studying the DNA of various species of birds and had become known nationally for this work. But it ended too soon. In 1996, Paul suffered cardiac arrest which resulted in brain injury that

rendered him disabled. Although he could answer questions and still identify birds if you asked him, he had lost his ability to communicate. Virginia saw to it that he kept up his interest in the natural world. They traveled to many places including Alaska, the Canadian Rockies and even Europe.

Those of us in Central New York who knew Paul are sorry to have lost him and his fabulous knowledge of all things around him. We will all remember him fondly and Pine Grosbeaks will always have special meaning for me. Goodbye Paul.

—Dorothy W. Crumb



*Illustration by Cynthia J. Page
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