

ROBERT FORD SCHUMANN 1921-2011

We first met at a secluded bird sanctuary tucked into a ravine in Binghamton, New York. John Fitzpatrick and I had been invited to join Bob Schumann for lunch and bird watching. Bob, a towering man of strong moral stature, had a fondness for birds, especially the White-breasted Nuthatch, namesake of his personal sanctuary, Nuthatch Hollow. Bob liked nuthatches because their nasal calls enabled him to quickly focus in on them with binoculars, but even more because they are inextricably linked to healthy ecosystems.

Bob's fondness for birds was but one of his many passions. He was fervently dedicated to family, democracy, art, science, libraries, public broadcasting, big-band jazz, environmental conservation, and personal friendships. For decades, he and his brother, Ford, led the Florence and John Schumann Foundation, named in honor of their parents. That foundation, now called the Schumann Media Center and under the leadership of Bill Moyers, has taken on some of the most urgent challenges of democracy. In addition, Bob tackled major environmental dilemmas as a board member of National Audubon, and at Wesleyan University, his alma mater, he funded the Robert F. Schumann Environmental Studies Program.

At the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bob was a friend, a long-time Administrative Board member, and a champion for conservation. The Cornell Lab engaged Bob's affection, with birds and staff. He referred to the latter as "the gang." They all enjoyed Bob and Marilyn's participation at Administrative Board meetings, and many of them partnered with him in bird conservation endeavors. Bob's passion for bird conservation culminated in the creation of the Robert F. Schumann Faculty Fellowship, a new directorship for the lab's Conservation Science program.

At Bob's memorial service in December 2011, close lifelong friend Bill Moyers presented a thoughtful, heartfelt, and sometimes humorous remembrance of Bob's life. Bill remarked that, "He talked about his friends to me every chance he had. He valued what was close to him, and kept close to him

what he valued." When another long-time friend and Schumann Center board member, Bill McKibben, heard of Bob's death, he wrote, simply: "A life well-lived, which leaves behind uncountable good."

Bob's "uncountable good" lives on in Bob's family and the institutions he advocated for and supported. At the Cornell lab, Bob is honored in many ways: by his unending friendships, his passion for birds, and the conservation programs he championed. As a small but immensely significant tribute to Bob, we've linked his name to the diminutive little bird he so admired; we've dedicated the White-breasted Nuthatch account in *Birds of North America* in his honor.

Scott Sutcliffe
December 2011



White-breasted Nuthatch, © Lloyd Spitalnik.

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