

Kansas Ornithological Society

BULLETIN

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

Vol. 59

September, 2008

No. 3

REMEMBERING

Marvin D. Schwilling
(November 18, 1924-June 28, 2008)

Marvin D. Kuehn

Emporia State University, Emporia, KS 66801



One meets many individuals in a lifetime but many fade from our memory with the passage of time. Sometimes we remember someone who made a particular impression on us and we realize how lucky we were to have known them. How many of us will have our names on the internet and have 290 references listed about our contributions, publications, and research projects?

Marvin Schwilling qualifies as one many of us will remember. He was one of those significant people that many of the “senior” KOS members had opportunity to know. Marvin passed away on June 28, 2008, after a long struggle with the residuals from a stroke eight years ago.

Many members of KOS had the opportunity to interact with Marvin and many provided information for this tribute about his contributions and accomplishments in KOS and other organizations involving wildlife, conservation, and wetland dependent species. A few of these friends, colleagues, and fellow researchers are listed: Chuck Ely, Max Thompson, Stan Roth, Ed Martinez, Dan Mulhern, Tom Mosher, Gene Young, and Helen Hands. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Floy Schwilling for her contributions in the preparation of these comments.

I recall I was introduced to Marvin in 1957 by Orville Rice and L.B. Carson at an Audubon Society Meeting in Topeka. Marvin was conducting research at the Marais des Cygnes Waterfowl Management Area at the time. What stood out about Marvin at that time was his interest in us as beginning birders; he took time to visit with us about what kind of binoculars to buy and to answer some pretty elementary questions about ornithology and bird identification.

The following facts and activities have been shared with me and reflect the history and memories many KOS members have about Marvin. He graduated with a degree in zoology from Colorado State University in 1950; he married Floy in the same year. They were blessed with four children, seven grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. He was a member of KOS joining in 1952 and became a life member in 1980. He was also a lifetime member of the Kansas Academy of Science and active in the Emporia Gardeners of Kansas. He was a member of the Wildlife Society and the Kanza Audubon Society. He was President of KOS in 1958 and again in 1966. Much of his early research (1953-1958) was centered on the Marais Des Cygnes Waterfowl Management Area. In 1958, he left Kansas and went to Nebraska but returned in 1962 to work at the Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Refuge where he became Refuge Manager. He was the Waterfowl Project Leader at Cheyenne Bottoms from 1962-1976. He was also an adjunct professor in the Department of Biology at Emporia State University. He retired as a non-game biologist in 1990.

Marvin published his first article in the KOS Bulletin in 1953 and his last in 1994. During this period he published a total of 44 papers with 18 different co-authors. For those who never met Marvin his influence on Kansas waterfowl management, the documentation of butterfly distribution, and avifauna research and related studies were significant. Many of his papers and publications involved new state or county records; most dealt with wetland dependent species. The diversity and breadth of his interests are seen in some of the avian species that were the focus in his many publications; they included: nesting warblers; shorebirds; Band-tailed Pigeon; Black-legged Kittiwake; Cinnamon Teal; Ross's Goose; White Ibis; Little Blue Heron; Bobolink; Arctic Loon; Violet-green Swallow; Common Ground-Dove; Cattle Egret; American Wigeon; Rufous Hummingbird; Clark's Nutcracker; Tricolored Heron; American Woodcock; Louisiana Waterthrush; Henslow's Sparrow; Curve-billed Thrasher; Brewer's Sparrow; Sedge Wren; Bald Eagle; Tree Swallow; Wood Stork; and Parasitic Jaeger. Marvin studied Kansas avifauna in all four corners of the state and everywhere in between.

Marvin was also well-known in Kansas for his knowledge of Lepidoptera (mainly butterflies), his extensive egg collection, and his role as a teacher/educator. According to Chuck Ely, he collected butterflies in all counties in the state and he had extensive knowledge of plant species and their distribution in the state. Some of Marvin's more unusual Lepidoptera collection records included Zebra Heliconian, Great Purple Hairstreak, Geyer's Patched Butterfly, Henry's Elfin, and the first Isabella Heliconian for the state. Marvin was responsible for the publication of the "Checklist of Kansas Butterflies" in the Kansas School Naturalist (1991, vol. 37, no. 4, publ. Emporia State University), which he co-authored with Ely.

His accomplishments related to KOS were many. Many of his activities involved Kansas migratory game birds, research at Cheyenne Bottoms, and studies on upland game birds. He was Kansas' first state waterfowl biologist and also the first non-game biologist in Kansas. He coordinated the Kansas portion of the nationwide mourning dove banding project (1967-72). He initiated long-term statewide waterfowl migration surveys, which are still conducted today. He initiated long-term shorebird banding at Cheyenne Bottoms in the early 1960's and long-term shorebird surveys in 1976; the shorebird surveys continue across the state today. He was elected to the KOS Board for fifteen years, he was President twice, served on the Kansas Bird Records Committee four years, and served fifteen years on the Ten Best Birds of the Year Committee. Marvin was recognized in 2003 for his outstanding contributions and service to KOS when he was selected to receive the Dr. Ivan L. Boyd Recognition Award.

His dependability, honesty, integrity, and competence are reasons he was asked to serve in so many capacities on KOS committees over the years. Marvin was enthusiastic, unselfish, and indefatigable in the field. He was the epitome of a competent, biologist/naturalist and a skillful teacher who communicated through his actions and beliefs the value and beauty of birds and butterflies. He always seemed to focus on the goal of identification versus who got credit for the effort/project or who observed the species first.

He loved to share his experiences with young students in public schools and to help others learn what to look for in identifying a bird or other animal. Floy Schwilling indicated that Marvin was influenced in his early years by his mother. Floy stated, "Marvin was always patient and almost never complained even when he realized he was going to have difficulty in communicating effectively with others after his stroke. He was always positive and had the ability to help children learn by asking questions about what they had observed."

Some would say Marvin's greatest contributions may not have been his research and publications but his attitude and concern for helping others learn and identify species. Many words have been used to describe his influence on others. He was dedicated and devoted to his children, grandchildren and Floy. As a researcher, committee member, and scholar, he was thorough, task oriented, and made detailed notes. He always tried to be helpful and to teach rather than to correct or argue about disagreements on identification. He would never criticize or embarrass someone but would visit with an individual later if he viewed or perceived an observation differently. The only time I ever observed some frustration in Marvin was on a spring field trip shortly after he retired; he commented on someone's report of hearing a Parula Warbler. He said he just couldn't hear it and he frowned. He indicated he just had too much sensorineural loss (high frequencies).

Marvin leaves many friends who will have many meaningful memories of him. KOS has lost an outstanding naturalist, role model, advocate, teacher, and genuine gentleman. We have benefited significantly from his contributions, integrity, and competence, and he will be missed.

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MARVIN D. SCHWILLING'S PUBLICATIONS IN THE KOS BULLETIN

Marvin Schwilling published 44 papers with 18 different co-authors in the KOS Bulletin from 1953 to 1994. He was most prolific during the 1970's and 1980's when he published 27 articles. Most of his publications were on new state or county records; almost half dealt with aquatic or wetland dependent species. Much of his research was centered on or near Marais des Cygnes Waterfowl Management Area and Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Management Area while working in those areas. Marvin's contributions to Kansas ornithology are vast and will be sorely missed.

Bibliography

- Schwilling, M. D. 1953. Nesting Warblers in Kansas. 4(2):17.
_____. 1953. A Heron Rookery Observed in Western Kansas. 4(4):36.
_____. 1954. Notes from Garden City. 5(2):17.
_____. 1955. News: Garden City Area. 6(2):10.
_____. 1956. Noteworthy Records of Birds from Southwestern Kansas. 7(2 and 3):12-13.
_____. 1956. Bird Notes and Nesting Records from the Marais des Cygnes Waterfowl Refuge and Surrounding Area. 7(4):21-22.
_____. 1958. Notes from the Marais des Cygnes Waterfowl Refuge. 9(2):11-12.
Schwilling, M. D. and D. L. Kerr. 1968. Green-winged Teal Nesting in Kansas. 19(4):23
Parmelee, D. F., M. D. Schwilling, and H. A. Stephens. 1969. Charadriiform Birds of Cheyenne Bottoms: Part I. 20(2):9-13.
_____. 1969. Charadriiform Birds of Cheyenne Bottoms: Part II. 20(3):17-24.
Schwilling, M. D. 1969. A Band-tailed Pigeon Specimen from Kansas. 20(4):26.

- _____. 1969. A Specimen of Black-legged Kittiwake Taken in Kansas. 20(4):27.
- _____. 1969. Ross Goose Taken in Kansas. 20(4):27.
- Schwilling, M. D., and E. Martinez. 1969. Cinnamon Teal Brood at Cheyenne Bottoms. 20(4):27.
- Parmelee, D. F., M. D. Schwilling, and H. A. Stephens. 1970. Gruiform Birds of Cheyenne Bottoms. 21(4):25-27.
- Schwilling, M. D. 1971. Another White Ibis Visits Kansas. 22(2):11.
- Schwilling, M. D., and R. Boyd. 1971. Little Blue Herons Nest Near Cheyenne Bottoms. 22(3):14.
- Schwilling, M. D. 1971. Bobolinks Nest Again in Kansas. 22(3):14-15.
- _____. 1971. Rapid Increase and Dispersal of Boat-tailed Grackles (*sic* = Great-tailed Grackle) in Kansas. 22(3):15-16.
- _____. 1972. Arctic Loon Taken at Wilson Reservoir. 23(3):13-14.
- _____. 1972. Violet-green Swallow at the Cheyenne Bottoms Waterfowl Management Area. 23(4):18.
- Schwilling, M. D., and S. W. Capel. 1972. Ground Doves in Barton and McPherson Counties, Kansas. 23(4):19-20.
- Martinez, E. F., and M. D. Schwilling. 1974. Cattle Egret Nests at Cheyenne Bottoms. 25(3):18-19.
- Schwilling, M. D. 1973. First Attempted Nesting of American Wigeon in Kansas. 24(4):36.
- _____. 1974. Rufous Hummingbird Taken at Great Bend, Kansas. 25(3):22.
- _____. 1974. Possible "Nest" Construction by Clark's Nutcracker Far East in Kansas. 25(3):23.
- _____. 1975. Louisiana Heron Nest in Barton County. 26(4):22.
- _____. 1976. Wood Stork at Marais des Cygnes Waterfowl Management Area, Linn County. 27(1):11.
- _____. 1976. In Memoriam: Frank W. Robl. 27(2):22.
- _____. 1977. Review of Kansas Scoter Records. 28(3):25-27.
- Schwilling, M. D., and J. A. White. 1977. Parasitic Jaeger in Finney County, Kansas. 28(3):30.
- Schwilling, M. D. 1980. A Review of Curve-billed Thrasher Records from Kansas. 31(3):24-25.
- Thompson, M. C., M. Schwilling, and J. A. White. 1980. New Distributional Records for the State of Kansas. 31(3):26-27.
- Schwilling, M. D., E. Schulenberg, and J. Schulenberg. 1981. Southeast Kansas Nesting Notes. 32(1):18-19.
- Ports, M. A., M. D. Schwilling, and M. C. Thompson. 1981. The Brewer's Sparrow in Kansas: Status and Breeding Habitat. 32(2):23-25.
- Schwilling, M. D. 1982. Sedge Wrens Nesting into September. 33(2):22-23.
- Ptacek, J., and M. Schwilling. 1983. Mountain Plover Reintroduction in Kansas. 34(2):21-22.
- Schwilling, M. D., and T. E. Webster. 1983. American Woodcock Nest in Bourbon County. 34(3):26-27.
- Schwilling, M. D., and S. Roth. 1987. Violet-Green Swallow Nesting in Wallace County, Kansas. 38(4):35.
- Schwilling, M. D., and J. Brier. 1987. Louisiana Waterthrush Nests in Lyon and Shawnee Counties, Kansas. 38(4):35.
- Schwilling, M. D., D. Mulhern, and G. Horak. 1989. The Bald Eagle Nesting in Kansas. 40(4):35-36.
- Schwilling, M. D. 1990. Tree Swallows Nesting in Bluebird Nest Boxes in Kansas. 41(2):24.
- _____. 1991. Ash-throated Flycatcher and Probable Western Screech-Owl Nesting in Morton County, Kansas. 42(4):37-38.
- Schulenberg, J. H., G. L. Horak, M. D. Schwilling, and E. J. Fink. 1994. Nesting of Henslow's Sparrow in Osage County, Kansas. 45(3):25-28.

Eugene A. Young, Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Division, Northern Oklahoma College, PO Box 310, Tonkawa, OK 74653-0310. (e-mail: Eugene.Young@north-ok.edu)