

August 15, 2021

Thoughts of Bert ...

My husband, Richard Hardy, and I arrived in Jackson from Los Angeles with our son, Jesse, in November of 1993. Temperatures had dipped to -40 and we were “camped out” in our “new” home which, we soon discovered, had little or no insulation! We anxiously awaited the arrival of a moving van with all our “stuff”. The day before Thanksgiving, it finally arrived and was unloaded but the driver found that the van had frozen to the ground and he couldn’t move it down the road. He stayed for Thanksgiving dinner.

We knew, literally, no one in Jackson Hole. Back then, we were downhill skiers and we were excited about the new terrain and the powder, but we felt isolated because of the “remoteness” of our rural Hoback, Snake River neighborhood. Bert’s warm welcome to Bird Club did much to offset that.

We observed and related to Bert, the construction of an enormous bald eagle nest in a tree across the river from our home, and we set up a remote camera to record the birth of the eaglets, since we had to be away on a shoot elsewhere. Upon our return, we watched the footage and sadly discovered that the tree had fallen into the river carrying the nest and the eaglets, although the female took flight at the last moment.

In October, 2009, I called Bert to report what I thought was an Anna’s Hummingbird. I recognized the call, which I had often heard in Arizona. I didn’t know that it was a rare species for Wyoming. We still had a feeder out and the bird was coming in to the feeder. Bert came out to see it. And he stayed until he did!

I screened my film about the peregrine falcons of Henry’s Road, “The Old Ones”, for Bert and everyone else present...at one of the last gatherings we had at his home in Skyline. He watched the peregrine’s behavior intently with the respect and insight of a master birder. He was always appreciative of the effort it takes to be observant and watchful. He saw the faces in the cliffs...

His field guides continue to guide me. Finding the Birds of Jackson Hole is always in my car or on my desk. I return often to Birds of Sage and Scree, especially the Rock Wren, who I see when I’m hiking Wilson Canyon. Bert’s sense of humor is ever present in this beautiful book.

These memories are of a personal nature but of course not nearly as relevant as the legacy that Bert bestowed on our entire community which will continue through generations of birders. The formation of the Jackson Hole Bird Club, a venue that invited scholars and specialists from within and outside of Jackson Hole to share and discuss their books, research, and projects and brought the wider world to our

small town. And The News & Guide column that included “our” sightings and much more, that we all eagerly read. Due to his dedication, Jackson Hole and Teton National Park are on the birders’ to do list where they belong! And the Bert Raynes Wildlife Foundation will continue to fund wildlife projects vital to the area.

And I will miss him...I will miss him.

Diane Birdsall