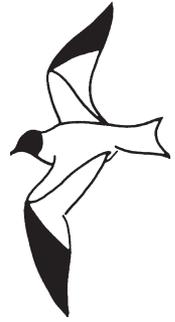


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ROBERT W. DICKERMAN: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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It is my greatest pleasure that I have the opportunity to introduce Dr. Robert W. Dickerman. The year 2011 marked the beginning of the seventh decade of Bob's career as a publishing author, and it is fitting that *Western Field Ornithologists* publish an issue of *Western Birds* to honor his contribution to biology. Although I and most others know him as a specimen-based ornithologist *par excellence*, Bob has also made lasting contributions in mammalogy, animal behavior, and human health. In order to celebrate his remarkable career thus far, the editors of *Western Birds* have solicited from Bob's friends and colleagues manuscripts on subjects of interest to Bob. Those papers constitute the festschrift you see before you. We hope Bob approves.

I first met Bob in the latter part of June 2000, days after I had arrived at the University of Alaska Museum to start graduate school. I found him as I have grown accustomed to seeing him: sitting in the prep room. He was wearing shorts, sandals, heavy-rimmed glasses, and a yellow t-shirt that said "pendejos" with a circle around it and a line through it. In the 13 years I have known him, I have found that to be one of the most customary situations in which to find him: in a prep room, preparing specimens. My advisor Kevin Winker introduced us, and Bob said to me, "All the stories you've heard about me are true!" From that moment, I began to know the man behind the initials "RWD" that are



Bob Dickerman with RWD 27413, a Helmeted Guineafowl (*Numida meleagris*), Free State, South Africa, January 2011.

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so ubiquitous on the labels of museum specimens throughout North America.

Bob was one of three boys of a farming family in upstate New York. He was drafted into the army and served during the occupation of Japan after World War II. After his military service, he attended Cornell University on the G.I. Bill. Although he was an undergraduate student, he was as old as the graduate students and was given an office among them, which afforded him opportunities younger undergraduates might not have had. He worked with Brina Kessel on her dissertation on the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and prepared many of the specimens that resulted from her research. At other times, they worked together on preparing the study skins. "I was 'Skinny' and she was 'Stuffy,'" he says of their division of labor. He left Cornell with his bachelor's degree and an ethic of specimen-based science that serves him to this day. He completed a master's degree in range ecology at the University of Arizona, where he forged a lasting friendship with his mentor, Allan R. Phillips. It seems to be through Allan's influence that Bob's true calling in ornithology was cemented: avian taxonomy. Bob discovered this underexplored world in the context of Mexican bird subspecies under the tutelage of Phillips, and together they revised many genera and species of New World birds. He then took this expertise and revised taxa wherever such revision was warranted, and has described new taxa of birds from four continents over his remarkably productive career as an ornithologist.

Bob's contribution to ornithology is legendary. He is the quintessential field naturalist: a keen observer and a tireless collector and preparator of scientific specimens. He also is a prolific author, with 224 papers published to date and with more in the works. He is best known for his work in northern Latin America, especially Mexico, having collected over 8000 bird specimens in ~35 years of fieldwork in that country alone (Navarro-Sigüenza 2010; Wilson J. Ornithol. 122:813). He did his dissertation on the Song Sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*) of the Mexican Plateau and had a special affinity for marshes and other wet habitats. "My advisor [Dwain Warner] joked that I had webbed feet," he says. He made his mark on the ornithological world exploring Mexico, especially its marshes, mostly during the 1960s and 1970s, describing many new taxa and rediscovering at least one, Goldman's Yellow Rail, *Coturnicops noveboracensis goldmani* (Dickerman 1971; Wilson Bulletin 83:49–56).

Although he has worked primarily in the ornithological realm, Bob also is an accomplished mammalogist. His first field work in Mexico was as a mammalogist, collecting for E. Raymond Hall at the University of Kansas from 1953 to 1955. He worked primarily in northern Mexico, with half of his 3132 KUMNH mammal specimens coming from the northern two tiers of Mexican states and additional significant collections from Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Michoacán, Guerrero, and México. These specimens were used in taxonomic and systematic studies by Hall and his students and also resulted in the description of a new species of mallophagan louse, *Geomydoecus dickermani* (Price and Emerson 1972, J. Med. Entomol. 9: 463–467). Bob and his Mexican colleagues also revolutionized the task of preserving animals in the field by freezing specimens on dry ice in insulated chests (Dickerman and Villa 1964, J. Mammal. 45:141–142).

Bob has a naturalist's eye and is keenly interested in the world around him. He takes an interest in all taxa about him. This is demonstrated through his publication record and the myriad species in his personal catalog, but even more in his observations afield: the uniform size of individual saguaros in a vast stand on a Sonoran desert hillside, the morphology of termite mounds in Botswana, regional differences in human social interactions in southern Africa, patterns of defoliation in broadleaf trees in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, or the behavior of guppies in his fish tank in his home. He always has an eye open for interesting natural phenomena.

Although he spent his professional career as a virologist at the Cornell University Medical College in New York, he held an appointment in the Bird Department at the American Museum of Natural History and published most of his scientific work on bird

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taxonomy, with additional notes on the behavior and natural history of birds and some mammals. At first it seems incongruous that such an accomplished avian taxonomist had a career in something other than ornithology. Yet Bob was part of a team of biologists studying encephalitis and arboviruses in Latin America. A component of this research was screening wild populations of vertebrates for these viruses, and thus Bob, who already had the skills as a collector to obtain and preserve specimens, was in a perfect position to use the specimens not only for virus research but also to archive them as scientific specimens and to use them for taxonomic studies.

In 1989 he retired and moved southwest to Albuquerque and adopted the collection at the Museum of Southwestern Biology, University of New Mexico, as his own. This fortuitous association gave an energetic retiree a focus for his enthusiasm and resulted in the transformation of a small regional collection to one of the most rapidly growing research collections of birds in the world. He was soon appointed acting curator and spent the next 18 years curating and building the collection from a modest 6000-specimen teaching collection to one of the southwestern United States' best regional collections, which exceeded 24,000 specimens when he stepped down as acting curator in 2007. He did this through active collecting, trades with other institutions, and tireless salvage. Of particular importance in the salvage realm was the relationship he forged with New Mexico's wildlife-rehabilitation community.

By demonstrating that the collection was growing and properly curated, he also garnered donations of small to medium-sized personal collections, including that of Amadeo Rea, an invaluable collection primarily from Arizona. In conjunction with New Mexico bird expert John Hubbard, Bob also began an effort to "repatriate" important specimens from New Mexico that had been deposited elsewhere. For instance, via trade, the Museum of Southwestern Biology now holds the first New Mexico specimen of the Aplomado Falcon (*Falco femoralis*), collected by Frank Stephens.

It was through his tireless effort in building the collection that Bob generated a need for full-time dedicated curatorial staff for the Division of Birds. He was able to garner support for a collection-manager position and showed that the collection was active enough to warrant hiring a specimen-focused faculty member to replace the retiring faculty curator. Thus through Bob's hard work and generosity, the Museum of Southwestern Biology's Division of Birds finally has full-time curator and collection-manager positions and remains one of the most active collections in North America. Bob, meanwhile, is enjoying his second retirement but still keeps actively involved in the museum. He prepares birds several times per week (his personal catalog is over 27,000), and he continues to tackle the taxonomic problems of southwestern birds, including the Northern Flicker, Common Nighthawk, Flammulated Owl, and Common Poorwill.

Apart from his contributions to biology, Bob is an artist: a sculptor in clay and a painter. He also is a collector of fine art and erotica. Bob is a proud and loving father and grandfather, a warm friend, and a great colleague to many around the country. He still travels regularly, rarely missing meetings of the American Ornithologists' Union or Western Field Ornithologists, and although his trips generally are research-related, he takes plenty of time to visit his friends along the way, relishing time with his people. He maintains a broad network of friends across the continent, and his house is always available to unexpected visitors. I have found him to be a great friend, a patient mentor, and a strong supporter of my efforts professional and otherwise.

This issue of *Western Birds* is a tribute to a legend in specimen-based science, a man who has had a significant impact on the field of biology, the ornithological world, and the lives of scores of field biologists along the way.

A complete bibliography of Bob Dickerman's 229 publications is available at westernfieldornithologists.org/dickermanbibliography.pdf.
And an annotated list of the 59 subspecies of birds he described is at westernfieldornithologists.org/dickermantaxa.pdf.