

IN MEMORIAM

GALE MONSON, 1912–2012

For many western ornithologists the most prominent event of 2012 was not the centennial celebrations of the statehood of Arizona and New Mexico. It was the passing of Gale Monson, who would have celebrated his centennial year on 1 August 2012. The patriarch of Arizona ornithology died peacefully on 19 February 2012 in Albuquerque with one of his daughters and his caregiver at his side.

In addition to the 1964 classic *The Birds of Arizona*, which he co-authored with Allan Phillips and Joe Marshall, and the 1981 *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Arizona*, co-authored with Allan, Gale's written contributions number about 192 articles, mostly on birds, but a significant number also on another animal on which he was an authority, the desert bighorn sheep. But the written word was only part of his legacy, and perhaps not his greatest contribution.

From his home state of North Dakota with a B.S. in biology he came to Arizona in July of 1934 for his first professional job, surveying ranges for grazing on the Papago (Tohono O'odham) Indian Reservation for the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. After that stint he worked for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, surveying wildlife around Arizona until hiring on with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1940. Between then and 1946 he spent half his time managing wildlife refuges in Arizona and New Mexico and the other half in the U.S. Army, receiving a Bronze Star in 1945 for service in Kunming, China.

From 1946 to 1962 Gale managed four national wildlife refuges in southwestern Arizona: Havasu, Kofa, Cabeza Prieta, and Imperial. During his last seven years of federal service he was in Washington, D.C., working on issues affecting refuges. After his retirement from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in October 1969 he and his wife, Sally, moved to Tucson.

Settling in Tucson afforded Gale an opportunity to use his professional skills along with his gentle and giving nature for the good of the wildlife of Arizona, as well as for all the people fortunate enough to cross his path. Gale's knowledge of Arizona's wildlife was frequently tapped by local conservation leaders seeking his expertise for their causes and by local amateur naturalists who just liked getting out with him.

Gale's life spanned an important period in Arizona ornithology. Fortunately, his constitution was a wonderful match for the age. His science acumen was shaped to a large degree by his youthful days immersed in the nature of his family farm in North Dakota. This experience set in him a tone of reverence for nature that was evident when he stepped afield, and likely rivaled that of John Muir. In his early teens he was influenced by a traditional field ecologist, O. A. Stevens, and later by the developing science of wildlife management and Aldo Leopold. These inspirations along with his



Gale Monson on Aztec Peak, Sierra Ancha, central Arizona, 1989.

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intellect and work ethic made him an outstanding naturalist who observed and recorded with accuracy and detail the natural world around him.

During his later years Gale witnessed a dramatic increase in public interest in birds, from casual birdwatchers to budding scientists wanting to dig deeper into birds' lives and habits. A deluge of numerous unknown individuals reporting species in new places had Gale scrambling to ensure that the integrity of Arizona's avian records was not being compromised. In time he embraced this new guild of birder, but it was not without very close scrutiny and frequent expressions of doubt. But in the end it was his ability to share nature with others and to be open to new possibilities that bridged the generations of ornithologists.

Gale's retirement job as weekend supervisor at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum afforded many people a chance encounter with this friendly distinguished gentleman. I was the recipient of one of these happenstances in February 1973 after trapping and returning an Aplomado Falcon that had been stolen from the museum. I will always remember the unselfish interest he took in my studies of raptors, helping me secure funds from Tucson Audubon Society with a personal visit to the home of Edward Chalif, then president of the society. That first encounter with Gale was the beginning of three decades of field adventures, phone conversations, and letters... my relationship with the mentor of a lifetime!

I learned so much about Gale from reading his journals—not, unfortunately, until last August, after his passing. They document 70 years of his life, from age 12 through 92. He wrote in books of various shapes and sizes, a literature that took up six feet of bookshelf and weighs 178 pounds (yes, I weighed the totality). Although not part of Gale's 192 scientific publications, they offer a unique glimpse of the origins and maturity of a man... a carefree boy, a student and career man, a father and husband... the span of an incredible life. The entire collection of Gale's journals is now housed at the Special Collections Library, University of Arizona.

The centennial birthday party last August so many of us were anticipating was not meant to be, so on 18 March 2012 about 100 friends and family gathered in Tucson to share memories. Since there was not enough time for all attendees to share their tales about Gale, Bill Broyles and I decided to gather the stories into a book.¹ The 243-page volume is a collection of stories from 50 contributors about one of the most intriguing and influential naturalists of our time.

This past fall I found myself wondering about Gale's greatest contribution. After reviewing his personal journals, reading all the stories about Gale in the lives of others for the book, remembering the times we walked in nature together and talked about birds and life... after all this, I am left with the clear notion that his written scientific contributions are dwarfed by his wonderful ability to see a bigger picture, to embrace the human lives around him, to share his natural world, and in doing so spawn a legion of associates who carry on with the elements of life that fascinated him. He was the model mentor.

Richard L. Glinski

¹*Counting Birds with Gale Monson* by Bill Broyles and Richard L. Glinski is available from the Arizona Field Ornithologists; please visit their website (www.AZFO.org) or contact Janet Witzeman (jlwitzeman@aol.com). 100% of the money raised by the sale of this book goes to the Gale Monson Research Grant fund established by Arizona Field Ornithologists to assist studies of Arizona's avifauna.