

IN MEMORIAM

JERRY R. OLDENNETTEL, 1942–2019



Jerry Oldenettel, an outstanding figure in New Mexico field ornithology during the past quarter century, passed away on 11 April 2019, aged 76. It would be difficult to overstate Jerry's contributions to New Mexico ornithology, or his impact on the state's birding community.

Jerry grew up in Illinois and as a young man served in the United States Navy. Highly intelligent and mathematically inclined, he earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from San Diego State University, and with this background launched a successful career as a manager of large, complex research and development projects related to high-resolution satellite imaging and atmospheric correction. His career took him from

San Diego to Maui and then to New Mexico. He became prominent in the California birding community in the early 1980s and made substantial contributions to ornithological knowledge both there and in Hawaii before arriving in Albuquerque in 1994.

For a variety of reasons but especially because of its small population, New Mexico has been an underbirded state for most of its history. In the early 1990s there was a small community of birders and ornithologists who were beginning to deliberately seek out and document rarities, and to explore parts of the state where the birdlife had hitherto received scant attention. Jerry almost immediately took birding in New Mexico to another level, spending two full days in the field virtually every weekend, exploring new areas, discovering new birding locations, and working the "hot spots" as no one had done before.

Jerry's ability to find and photograph rare birds was remarkable. During his time in New Mexico, he found and photographed nine firsts for the state, of the Long-billed Thrasher (1995), Prairie Warbler (1995), Piratic Flycatcher (1996), Swainson's Warbler (1999), Lesser Black-backed Gull (2001), Henslow's Sparrow (2003), Little Stint (2005), Eastern Whip-poor-will (2010—this bird netted and the identification confirmed by DNA analysis), and Common Crane (2014). The Piratic Flycatcher he discovered at Rattlesnake Springs in September 1996 was the first to be identified as such in the United States, though it was preceded by a Florida record that for many years was thought to represent a Variegated Flycatcher. Jerry also photographed more than 25 additional New Mexico firsts that were discovered by others. With his long hours in the field and knack for obtaining high-quality photos, Jerry probably provided more documentation on rare birds in the state than did any other individual over the past 25 years. While his talents were deployed throughout New Mexico and elsewhere, he had a special affinity for the Melrose or North Roosevelt migrant trap (16 km west of the town of Melrose), and he did more than any other individual to document rare occurrences at that oasis and give it the prominence among birders that it enjoys today.

Jerry made numerous other contributions to New Mexico ornithology. He served for many years as the treasurer of the New Mexico Ornithological Society, was sev-

IN MEMORIAM: JERRY R. OLDENNETTEL, 1942–2019

eral times a member of the New Mexico Bird Records Committee, compiled detailed reports of his records each season for publication in *North American Birds* and the New Mexico Ornithological Society's *Field Notes*, and conducted multiple breeding bird surveys each year. Perhaps most importantly, in the early 2000s he played a key role in mentoring several excellent young New Mexico birders who have gone on to become among the best and most active in the state. In the last decade of his life, Jerry branched out into other areas of natural history, becoming an expert on New Mexico's butterflies and orchids.

Though Jerry's interest in listing waned somewhat in his last years, he certainly enjoyed this aspect of birding, and his enthusiasm was contagious. In 2005 he set a New Mexico record of 428 species that is likely to stand for many years. His big year sparked the interest of the entire state's birding community, and many birders made special efforts to seek out rarities and help Jerry find key species. In the end it seemed like a team effort, and Jerry always treated it as such.

Jerry was in all respects an exceptionally generous individual. He gave generously of his time to the New Mexico Ornithological Society, the Friends of the Bosque at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, and the Socorro Rotary Club. He was also extremely generous with his money. When sharing rides with other birders, he always offered to pay more than his fair share for gas. He donated substantial sums of money to charitable causes and especially to conservation, and provided considerable assistance to members of his extended family who lacked his financial means.

Everyone who knew Jerry knows that he was the consummate gentlemen, always kind and thoughtful, and always willing to help and mentor others. His death leaves a huge gap in the New Mexico birding community. All of us who had the privilege of birding with him gained from the experience, and will miss him.

John Parmeter