



IN MEMORIAM

Ned Keith Johnson
Professor of Integrative Biology
Curator in Ornithology
Berkeley
1932 — 2003

Ned Keith Johnson, a distinguished professor in the Department of Integrative Biology (formerly Zoology) and curator in ornithology at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ), University of California, Berkeley, died on 11 June 2003 at his Orinda home after a 15 year struggle with cancer. His passing ends a lifelong career dedicated to teaching and research on birds.

Ned was born in Reno, Nevada, on 3 November 1932 and first got hooked on birds at the age of seven. Whenever possible, he would nurture his love of the outdoors by birding, hiking, or fishing in the mountains and desert near Reno (then a small town). Always the scientist, he took meticulously labeled photographs of birds when he was a teenager. While in high school and as an undergraduate at the University of Nevada-Reno (UNR), he tagged along with his older brother Kay on field trips and got a job working in the UNR bird collection as a curatorial assistant. It was during that period that Ned met his mentor Ira LaRivers, a UNR professor and expert on insects and fishes of Nevada. LaRivers encouraged Ned to collect birds by adding him as a sub-permittee on his scientific collecting permit, and took him along with other students on numerous collecting trips throughout the state. Ned soon realized the importance of scientific collecting for careful documentation of avian distribution and variation. He collected and prepared over 7,200 specimens, most of which are deposited in the UNR museum and the MVZ, and was known among colleagues as a true champion of museum collections and specimen-based research. He spread this word to his students, in particular emphasizing the value of specimens for studies of natural history, evolution, and conservation.

Ned received his B.S. in biology from the UNR in 1954, married, and was drafted to serve in the U.S. Army in Germany from 1954 to 1956. After returning to the United States, he enrolled as a graduate student at UC Berkeley. Although courted by E. Raymond Hall to study mammals at the University of Kansas, Ned chose Berkeley so that he could study avian systematics with Alden H. Miller (former director of the MVZ). By the time he started graduate work, Ned had already published 10 papers, the first of which appeared in 1949 when Ned was only 17 (“Loggerhead Shrike Steals Shot Sparrow”). The topics of these early papers ranged from new distributional records for birds and mammals of Nevada, to natural history notes such as “Dipper Eaten by Brook Trout” and “Food of the Long-Eared Owl in Southern Washoe County, Nevada.” Never daunted by a challenge, Ned chose to study the biosystematics of Empidonax flycatchers for his Ph.D. dissertation. He soon became the leading authority on this difficult group of birds, which are notorious for problems in identification, and his thesis and subsequent studies became a model for studies of sibling speciation in birds. He completed his degree in zoology in 1961.

Although Ned’s initial passion in research was to learn everything about the birds of Nevada, he branched out to explore a wide range of topics in avian biology, including systematics and speciation, biogeography and

avifaunal change, molt, migration, bioacoustics, plumage pigmentation, evolution of feathers, and sexual size dimorphism and food habits in raptors. Ned's papers were notably scholarly and detailed, and, as one colleague wrote, he showed an eagerness "to embrace and apply new concepts and techniques in ornithology, while never discarding the good features of the old ways." Throughout his career he published 125 papers, including two monographs on the systematics of Empidonax; a description of a new species of flycatcher from Peru; a co-edited book, *A Century of Avifaunal Change in Western North America*; and the coauthored Check-List of North American Birds, 7th edition. At the time of his death, he was collaborating on numerous systematic and bioacoustic studies and was writing a book on geographic variation and evolution in birds.

Ned joined the UC Berkeley faculty in the Department of Zoology immediately after receiving his Ph.D. and remained until his death only two weeks before his planned retirement. Although his appointment included a 50 percent commitment as curator in the MVZ, he maintained a full departmental teaching load throughout his career. Moreover, his teaching was a model of competence and effectiveness, and his students responded enthusiastically to his efforts. His dedication to teaching was felt at all levels from lower division to graduate. Two of our favorite quotes from undergraduate students say it best: "He always made the time to help me out with anything, and he did an amazing job at connecting with his students. Not only was he my teacher, but he was my pal. Hands down, Ned was my favorite professor at Berkeley." "He was a good professor, a good person, and he did so much for me; ... I can still see him sitting in his office with that smile of his;... maybe chuckling a little at some joke he just made."

His most consistent teaching assignment was the team-taught course in Vertebrate Natural History (Integrative Biology 104), in which he taught for 37 of his 42 years at Berkeley. This unique course includes a four hour field trip every week in addition to the usual laboratories and lectures, and students are required to accomplish an independent field research project. It is world-renowned and has profoundly affected the lives of numerous students, orienting many toward careers in field biology. Ned was a tireless advocate for this and other field courses, most of which gradually disappeared from the curriculum under the pressures of budgeting and faculty time constraints. Poignantly, Ned died only a few weeks after turning in the grades for this course in spring 2003.

Ned's second most influential course was the senior/graduate course in ornithology, which also was a premier experience for those fortunate enough to have taken it. In addition, he developed a popular course in zoogeography, which later was expanded to biogeography when he teamed up with Integrative Biology Professor Robert Ornduff. He also gave an upper division course in evolution, provided seminars for freshman and senior zoology majors, sponsored several undergraduate honors projects, and mentored numerous undergraduate students in independent research.

At the graduate level, Ned offered frequent seminars on a variety of topics such as avian biology and vertebrate speciation. Furthermore, he was involved in the full gamut of graduate student independent study and research courses. Special mention should be made of a seminar course in the former zoology department (Zoology 294), which was required of all incoming graduate students for about 20 years. This course served as an introduction to the research interests of the zoology faculty as well as a mini-course to acquaint students with the various sub disciplines in the field. Finally, he participated weekly in the well-attended evolutionary biology seminar series (Integrative Biology 264) in the MVZ ("Museum lunch"), to which he contributed frequent insights and questions.

As the academic grandson of Joseph Grinnell (first director of the MVZ), Ned continued the legacy of strong scholarship at Berkeley by sponsoring three master's students and 15 Ph.D. students. Although he encouraged his graduate students to work independently and to be original in their thinking, he was strongly supportive and readily available for consultation. As one former graduate student wrote, "In some ways he is not gone because his influence lives on in many of us."

Besides his outstanding research and teaching accomplishments, Ned served the University, the departments he was a part of, and the MVZ in numerous capacities. He was a long-standing member of the Department of Integrative Biology's Academic Program Committee, which he chaired for two years, and in that role he helped to define the undergraduate curriculum for the department. These activities focused on ensuring that students' needs were best served while maintaining academic rigor. He also served on the usual number of departmental committees, such as ad hoc review committees and the Emeriti Committee. His role in the widely popular natural history course led to his appointment to a Graduate Council advisory committee (1992-94) that dealt with teaching programs that utilize large numbers of graduate student instructors. Other major administrative posts included vice chair of the Department of Zoology (1967-68) and acting director of the MVZ (1981-82 and at later intervals).

In addition to being an active member of the UC Berkeley campus community, Ned was active in many professional organizations, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science (elected fellow, 1997), American Ornithologists' Union (elected fellow, 1971; president, 1996-98), California Academy of Sciences (elected fellow, 1981), Cooper Ornithological Society (president, 1981-83), International Ornithological Committee (permanent member), and Point Reyes Bird Observatory (fellow). He won the A. Brazier Howell Award from the Cooper Ornithological Society in 1960, and the William Brewster Memorial Award and Marion Jenkinson Service Award from the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) in 1992 and 2001, respectively. The latter, given while he was recovering from major cancer surgery, was awarded in recognition of Ned's 69 committee- years of service to the AOU, including 36 years on the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of North American Birds.

Ned was the ultimate field biologist. He carried his zest for fieldwork throughout his life, and took trips all over the western U.S. as well as Canada, Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Argentina, Venezuela, Trinidad, Germany, New Zealand, and South Africa. He often brought his family on field trips, including two yearlong sabbaticals to Central and South America. In an interview with *Living Bird* (Cornell University, 1996), he stated, "I'd die if I couldn't get in the field." He also felt a strong need to live among the birds while studying them, and traveled in a four- wheel drive truck equipped with a camper for sleeping, cooking, and field research.

Although Ned is well known for his many academic and professional contributions, he had many other passions including music (especially classical, opera, and medieval folk songs) and fly- fishing. He made every effort to combine scientific work with fishing, and was looking forward to spending more time in both endeavors during retirement. He also loved to play guitar and sing, and his legendary voice made listening to him a memorable occasion. Likewise, he had a dry sense of humor and wit that were unforgettable. Ned's death leaves a void in many arenas that will not be filled easily. He will be missed by family, friends, colleagues, and students, although we are all richer for having known him. In addition, society at- large has benefited immensely from his exemplary career as a teacher, and should be grateful that he was so good at it.

Ned is survived by his partner, Carla Cicero, of Moraga, California; daughters Heidi Ingrid Johnson of Berkeley, Rebecca Dawn Monson of Richmond, California, and Amy Bowman Johnson of Oakland, California; son Alexander Konrad Johnson of South Korea; sisters Xelva Eliza Flury of Reno, Nevada, Catherine Ivaloo Fagg of Reno, and Norma Ruth Young of Henderson, Nevada; brother Virgil Kay Johnson of Fernley, Nevada; and grandchildren Kerry William Moriarty of Oakland, Kelly Nicole Monson of Richmond, and Ben Stuart Monson of Richmond. He was preceded in death by a son, Nathan Kirk Johnson, and a brother, Max Kirby Johnson.

Anthony D. Barnosky
Carla Cicero
William Z. Lidicker Jr.