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IN MEMORIAM

M. Philip Kahl, 1934–2012

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On December 4, 2012, Phil Kahl, as he was known to all his friends, died in his sleep at home in Sedona, Arizona, from a massive brain tumor. He was 78. Although he had suffered chronic fatigue for many months, and had seen several doctors, his two-year-old tumor growth went undiagnosed until eight days before his death. It was decided that he not be told. He had been an AOU Member since 1952; became an Elective Member in 1967 and a Fellow in 1979. He was also a Life Member of both the Cooper and Wilson ornithological societies.

Phil had dual, parallel careers as a field researcher and a wildlife photographer—both depicted in the adjoining photos. As ornithologist, he is best known for his studies of large wading birds; in particular, the breeding behavior of storks, flamingos, and spoonbills. As photographer, his greatest achievement probably was seeing his work appear on two *National Geographic* covers (the 'Holy Grail' in photography), along with *Audubon* (3), *International Wildlife* (5), *Natural History* (1), et al.

Marvin Philip Kahl, Jr., was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, on September 28, 1934. His mother, Kathryn Black Kahl, with whom he was very close until her death at age 95, lived her entire life in Indiana. His father, who went by 'Marvin,' was, in Phil's eyes, a disappointment despite having a fine education (University of Chicago and University of Indiana School of Law). Most of Marvin's

lackluster career was as a CPA in his own small accounting firm. Phil attributed this as well as their strained relationship to his father's heavy drinking, which was, no doubt, the reason why Phil dropped the "Marvin" and the "Jr.," and went by M. Philip Kahl throughout his professional life.

Phil graduated from The Orchard School, a private grade school in 1948, and Shortridge High School in 1952, both prestigious institutions in Indianapolis. It was at Shortridge that he fell under the influence of a biology teacher, Robert L. Black, who got him interested in both science and birds. Throughout his life Phil credited Black as being one of the two most influential persons in his career as an ornithologist. Having limited financial support, Phil attended nearby Butler University as a day student, and graduated with a BS degree in botany and zoology in 1956.

Exactly how and why he ended up in Florida following graduation is not clear, but it was a pivotal event in his life. It was there that he became friends with Robert Porter Allen, the National Audubon Society's Research Director, on the Florida Keys. In this epiphanic encounter, and during several late-night beer sessions, Bob Allen zeroed in on the beleaguered Wood Stork, a hitherto unstudied bird, and America's only stork—then and now in serious decline. A spark was lit that would burn brightly for the next 35 years. Allen immediately arranged for an Audubon research grant, and Phil headed to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, home to the largest Wood Stork rookery in the United States. Photos from 1957 show him standing beside the legendary Sam Whidden, and proudly sporting one of National Audubon's distinctive shoulder patches. Allen also directed Phil to conduct the first statewide survey of stork populations in Florida. Phil's life had been changed forever, and a dormant passion for research, something that would characterize the rest of his life, was clearly revealed. But it was interrupted. Later that year he was drafted into the United States Army.

Faced with the inevitable, Phil wangled a do-little, paper-shuffling job in the medical library at an army facility in Atlanta, and spent every conceivable moment doing literature research on all aspects of wading-bird ecology. With his characteristic wry smile, he forever claimed to have gotten the lowest efficiency rating possible for an 'honorable' discharge from the army. What he did instead was to undergird his academic development in graduate studies that would soon follow.

While based in Atlanta, he managed to connect with Dr. Eugene P. Odum, the esteemed ecologist at the University of Georgia, in Athens. He got an early release from the army in order to enroll in the Graduate School at the University. Phil greatly admired Odum, and never had any regrets about making this choice, but Bob Allen remained his hero and mentor for the rest of his life. In 1962, he and his wife Doris named their only child Robert Allen Kahl.

As a graduate student, Phil quickly displayed an unusual talent for creative research for which he was awarded the university's first annual Herbert L. Stoddard Research Prize in Ornithology. His experiments with captive-reared Wood Storks led to papers on bioenergetics (*Condor* 64[3]:169–183) in 1962, and the bill-snap reflex (*Nature* 199[4892]:505–506 with L.J. Peacock) in 1963. The latter attracted the attention of *Time* magazine, which gave it a writeup in its Science section on August 23. Three additional papers appeared in 1963: in *The Auk*, *Limnology & Oceanography*, and *Physiological Zoölogy*, respectively. In this latter, landmark paper (Vol. 36[2]:141–151), he described what he termed *urohidrosis,* a thermoregulatory mechanism to prevent hyperthermia in certain species of birds by excreting urine on their legs. Phil received his MS in 1961, and his Ph.D in 1963, both from the University of Georgia. This was immediately followed by a National Science Foundation Post-doctoral Fellowship to study storks and related species at Makerere College (affiliated with the University of London) in Kampala, Uganda, for two years. He arrived there on December 2 when, as he described it, "Idi Amin was still a short order cook." Thus began his 34-year love affair with a continent that he would visit on 18 separate trips.

Over the 11-yr period 1959–1969, Phil studied the breeding behavior of all 11 of the then-recognized species of storks in the world. [Since that time, two former subspecies have been elevated to full species: Storm's Stork and Oriental White Stork, both endangered and having restricted ranges.] Such work took him to 11 countries on 5 continents: American Wood Stork (Florida); Yellow-billed Stork (Kenya); Painted Stork (India); Milky Stork (Indonesia, Cambodia); Asian Openbill Stork (India, Thailand); African Openbill Stork (Kenya, Uganda); Abdim's Stork (Kenya, Ethiopia); Woolly-necked Stork (Kenya, India); White Stork (Poland); Black Stork (South Africa, Poland); Maguari Stork (Argentina); Black-necked Stork (India); Saddlebill Stork (Kenya, Uganda); Jabiru Stork (Argentina); Greater Adjutant Stork (India); Marabou Stork (Kenya, Uganda), and Lesser Adjutant Stork (India). These behavioral studies led to his reordering the classification of the *Ciconiidae* in 1971 (*The Living Bird* 10:151–170).

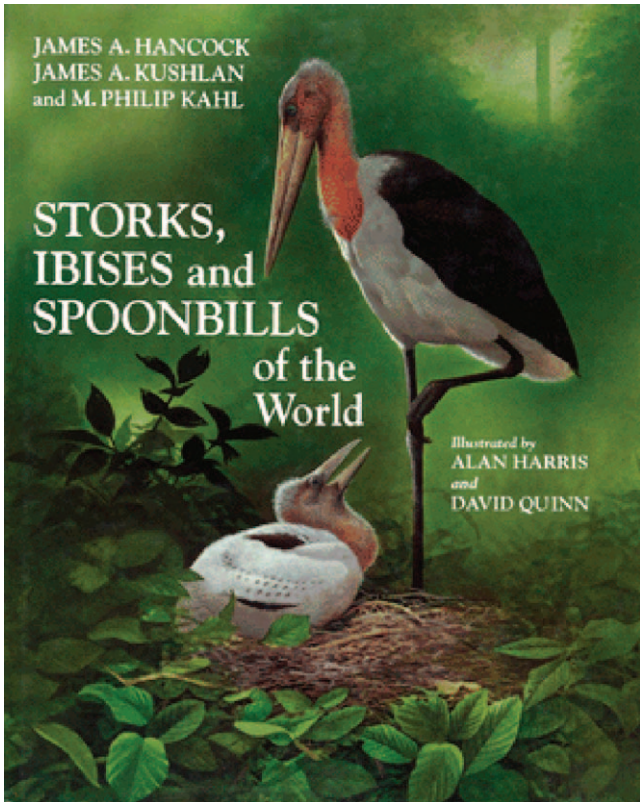
Living in East Africa, it is not surprising that he was seduced by flamingos, which he began studying in earnest in 1964. He ended up studying all 5 of the world's species in the wild over the next 16 years, as well as captive birds at Slimbridge, in the U.K., and in major zoos elsewhere.

He studied and photographed *Phoenicopterus ruber ruber*, the nominate 'Caribbean Flamingo,' in Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles; Galapagos Islands, Ecuador; Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico; and on Great Inagua Island, Bahamas.

The 'Greater' race, *P.r. roseus*, was studied in Kenya (Lakes Nakuru and Elmenteita); Tanzania (L. Natron); S.W. Africa (Etosha Pan); Mauretania (Banc d'Arguin); Turkey (Tuz gölü and Karbaga gölü); Iran (Rezaiyeh); Afghanistan (Ab-I Estada and Dasht-I Nawar); and India (Great Rahn of Kutch).

The other African species, Lesser Flamingo, *Phoeniconaias minor*, was studied in Kenya (Lakes Nakuru and Bogoria); Tanzania (L. Natron); S.W. Africa (Etosha Pan); and Mauretania (Aftout es Sahel).

The 3 New World endemics, Chilean Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus chilensis*), Andean Flamingo (*Phoenicoparrus andinus*), and James' Flamingo (*Phoenicoparrus jamesi*), were intensively studied during 1972 and 1973. *P. chilensis* was pursued in Bolivia, Chile, Peru, and Argentina; *P. andinus* and *P. jamesi* in Bolivia and Peru. All told, Phil published 6 scientific papers on flamingos, and an additional 6 semi-technical articles.



Soon he would turn his attention to spoonbills. The 6 living species of spoonbills fed Phil's peripatetic nature, taking him once again to all the continents except Antarctica between 1979 and 1989. These would become as much wildlife photojournalistic as scientific forays.

Wherever Phil went, he always selected the longest (and often slowest) passage, a route that inevitably took him to new cities and countries. Along the way, he visited every relevant museum, library, and zoo, and took major side treks to photograph rare and exotic birds. Returning to Naples, Florida, from South Africa, for example, he visited Raleigh Falls Reserve in Surinam to photograph Sunbittern (*Eurypyga helias*). In 1974, on his way to the International Ornithological Congress in Canberra, Australia (the only meetings he regularly attended because they could generally be combined with travel plans already made), he visited New Guinea to photograph Salvadori's Teal (*Salvadorina waigiuensis*), and Archbold's Bowerbird (*Archboldia papuensis*). Other trips took him to Lago de Atitlán in Guatemala to track down the now-extinct Giant Grebe (*Podilymbus gigas*), to Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, to Alaska, to New Zealand, to sub-Antarctic Campbell Island, and to a host of other distant places that most of us can only dream of visiting. He even made it to Tristan da Cunha!

His fame as both field biologist and photographer led to his being featured in Marlin Perkins' TV series *Wild Kingdom* in both Africa ('72) and India ('73). It also allowed him to be a guest lecturer aboard cruises to Antarctica in both 1980 and 1983, a place where his normal research would never have taken him.

Phil was devoid of traditional ambition, eschewing professorships, committee chairmanships, titles, and other trappings of success. His journals reveal not only an incredible amount of travel (a total of 18^{+} years living outside the U.S. living in or visiting 83 countries), but a dedication to go everywhere and see as much of the natural, especially avian, world as could be done in a lifetime. He let few obstacles stand in his way, but North Korea was Phil's 'Waterloo.' The breeding range of the rare and local Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) is centered in North Korea, with an important component in the politically charged (not to mention explosively charged) Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Phil's repeated requests for an entry visa were resoundingly denied; he had to settle for encounters with small wintering populations in China. The breeding biology of this endangered bird remains virtually unknown to this day. These and other experiences with ever-declining bird populations worldwide weighed heavily on Phil who once commented "I'm afraid our technology has outstripped our common sense when it comes to conservation."

In July, 1988, Phil was awarded a MacArthur Foundation fellowship in the amount of $320,000 to be paid out over a five-year period. When he got the call, he had not even heard of the MacArthur Foundation, and thought the whole thing pretty "fishy." He was one of 31 grantees in the U.S. that year, and it gave him additional freedom to pursue his research around the world.

One of the more remarkable aspects of Phil's career was that he never had a 'real' job during his entire adult life. He survived on a series of research grants and fellowships

beginning with the National Audubon Society (1959–1962), National Science Foundation (1963–1965), and National Geographic Society (10 in all between 1966 and 1985); Chapman grants (1960, 1962, 1963–1967), and a Fellowship (1970) from the American Museum of Natural History, as well as the MacArthur "genius" grant and a half-dozen or so smaller ones. In a 1988 interview (*Sedona Times,* July 27), he said "I think my greatest accomplishment is that I never wasted time doing things I didn't want to do." He led the kind of life that most biologists envy, yet few could live so Spartan an existence, or one so focused. He never earned more than $25,000 annually—primarily from the sale of photographs—and his average was closer to $20,000. Yet his only permanent residences were in tony Naples, Florida, and upscale Sedona, Arizona, in houses he had bought or built. It is safe to say that he managed what money he had very well.

The MacArthur grant enabled him to stay home for a bit and concentrate on *Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills of the World*, a book he agreed to co-author with James Hancock and James Kushlan (Academic Press, 1992, 385 pp.). He found working with one of his co-authors in particular—and hence the entire project—so disagreeable that, when finished, he badly needed a break from all things avian. The final stage of his adventurous life as a field researcher awaited him.

In between grants and fellowships, he had been sustained by the sales of his photographs. His work was handled by many of the world's leading photo agencies, including Bruce Coleman, Black Star, Auscape, DRK, Gallo, Okapia, and others. For more than twenty years he had been selling photographs directly to New Jersey–born Peter Capstick, stockbroker turned big game hunter and author (12 books), for illustrations. They became good friends.

In September 1989, Peter invited Phil to join him on an elephant hunt, leading, it was hoped, to another book. Phil would document the safari with photos. After meeting up in Pretoria, South Africa, they traveled to Camp Klein-Dope, Namibia, where Peter shot a large male elephant. It took eight shots from an experienced hunter to kill the brute, and its trunk, which Phil held in his lap, twitched for another ten minutes. For Phil, it was "something I never want to see again, and something I will never forget." Fully sensitized by the experience, Phil attended an elephant workshop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in October 1990 where he befriended Hezy Shoshoni, an Israeli elephant researcher. As they talked, Phil's mind was being made up. *[This is extraordinarily reminiscent of a similar Epiphany that redirected another ornithologist, Dr. Roger Payne, from birds to giant mammals. It hit him as he stood beside a dead Common Dolphin (Delphinus delphis) on a rainy beach one night on the Massachusetts coast. What is it about caressing these mysterious and highly intelligent dying mammals? Payne went on to become one of the preeminent cetologists of the 20th century.]*

Five months later, Phil set out once more for Africa—traveling to South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Namibia in search of the ideal spot to begin a five-year behavioral study of the African Elephant. He settled on Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe, where he spent 4–5 months every year thereafter—the very last years when such studies could be done safely, under Robert Mugabe's rule. He departed Africa for the last time in 1997 disheartened by the continent's decay and destruction. But with him went 226 hours of digital videotape of intimate pachyderm behaviors—"enough for years of productive analysis," he claimed. And this is what Phil was doing, six hours a day, six days a week, until he died.

Despite his abundant charm, wit, and genuine appeal to both sexes, especially women, Phil was remarkably unlucky in his two marriages. He married Doris Yates in Germany in 1960, and was divorced in 1973. Their son Bob was raised by his mother with unhappy consequences for all. In 1981, he married Zimbabwean Lindsey Beatrice Scott, in Harare. After it was learned that this had been part of a plot to gain American citizenship, this union also ended in divorce five years later. He viewed this as a betrayal, and it hurt him deeply.

It should be added that he had another son, Michael William Walter, who lives in Tennessee. When Phil was a graduate student studying Wood Storks in Bartow, Florida, he became good friends with his neighbors, Bobbi and Kirby Walter. Among other things, Kirby helped Phil build the first of what became innumerable observation towers erected adjacent to stork nests around the world. The threesome did everything together, including the raising of captive baby storks. But Bobbi fell in love with Phil, and when he returned to Georgia he left her with child. To Kirby's everlasting credit, he lovingly raised this child who he knew was not his, and the family prospered together until Kirby's death in 1991. But Phil never forgot, and in his will, he bequeathed a portion of his estate to Michael. Then, and only then, did Michael learn who his biological father was.

Fortunately, Phil spent his last 20 years in the company of Billie Armstrong, his constant and loving companion, and perhaps, Muse. Billie accompanied him on his last 4 elephant trips to Africa, and a final trip to Sri Lanka, as well as being of enormous help with the photo-analysis back in Sedona. She was co-author on his final 5 papers on elephants, and Phil died confident that she both could and would carry on with the work. His dream of comparing the behaviors of African and Asian Elephants may yet be realized.

Having no permanent institutional affiliation, Phil left no body of personal or professional history by which to trace his unique life and accomplishments. It seemed that

the world was destined to remember him solely from his 3 books, the thousands of published photographs, or his 45 scientific papers and numerous popular articles. But a bibliography does not adequately portray the story of a man. This is why Billie Armstrong asked me, as Phil's oldest and closest friend, to leave some permanent, synoptic record of his remarkable life. And it was she who graciously provided much of the material necessary for this tribute. I hope I have met her expectations.

I first met Phil Kahl on December 14, 1959, on the boardwalk at the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in south Florida. I was there to help open the sanctuary to the public, and to act as temporary warden. He was an incipient graduate student, and my first real contact with a budding ornithologist of similar (5 years older) age. Having lots in common, even personal traits, we hit it off instantly, and became lifelong friends. He was my Best Man at two weddings, and served both as older brother and revered colleague.

I convinced him to buy a camera—one of the first Japanese single-lens reflex cameras that had just appeared on the market, as I had just done, and we sold our first photographs at about the same time (I to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and he to the publisher of Bob Allen's *Birds of the Caribbean*), but, unlike mine, his career as a photographer rose to dizzying heights. In 1966, having meanwhile obtained a pilot's license, I flew Phil up and down the Rift Valley and over much of northern Tanzania and southern Kenya. He rejoiced in retelling the story about our close call when a Wildebeest nonchalantly sauntered onto the crude, short runway on the floor of the Ngoro-Ngoro Crater at a critical moment on takeoff. Some the aerial shots Phil took on these flights were later featured in *National Geographic*.

He was hugely disappointed when I took a different career path by accepting a flying job with an airline in 1967. The friendship survived, but it was never quite the same. I think he had always envisioned some kind of partnership for us in the as-yet-undefined field of conservation biology. Undoubtedly for the best, because Phil went on to make his unique and important contributions to science. It will be a long time before we see his like again.