

## In Memoriam: Martin Keli McNicholl (1946–2017)

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## In Memoriam: Martin Keli McNicholl (1946-2017)



Martin Keli McNicholl enjoying the wildlife at the Reifel Refuge, Vancouver, British Columbia, in 2000. Photo by Sigrid Zueff.

Martin Keli McNicholl was a Canadian ornithologist whose training and career took him from one end of the country to the other. Keli, a short form of the name Rafknel, was Martin's Icelandic maternal grandfather's name. Martin was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on 16 April 1946, and spent the first third of his life there. Following that, his studies and career took him to Alberta (1971-1977), Prince Edward Island (1977), Ontario (1977-1993) and British Columbia (1993-2017). Martin, as he was known to everyone, was a gentle, soft-spoken fellow. He passed away on 15 December 2017 from medical complications after an extended hospital stay in British Columbia. At Martin's request, his ashes were scattered at the Reifel Bird Sanctuary in Delta, British Columbia, on 16 April 2018 (his birthday); he would have been 72 years old.

In childhood, Martin displayed all the traditional signs of a budding ornithologist: a 3-year old's recollection of a Com-

mon Loon (*Gavia immer*) yodeling as it flew over him, his father, and his grandfather in their family rowboat; his first bird list, started as soon as he could print; and dotting, bird-watcher mentors close at hand—his aunt (Gertrude McNicholl) and cousin (Grace Keith), and relatives he visited in the wilds of Gimli, Manitoba, and Ingolf, Ontario.

Sigrid Zueff (nee McNicholl), Martin's younger sister, recalls his affinity for birds: "I remember early birding experiences with Martin were frequent trips to a forested cemetery within walking distance from our Winnipeg home. Martin often talked about an incident at Gimli. On returning to the cottage after playing at a local park, I mentioned that I'd seen a woodpecker. Being the big brother, he feigned interest in what I said until I added I didn't know woodpeckers had a yellow stripe on their heads. I'd seen a three-toed type of woodpecker (I forget exactly what) that he'd never seen. I found my-

self making another trip to the park to see if it was still there. He wrote about the incident in some club publication.”

Martin lived at home while completing his Honors B.S. in Zoology at the University of Manitoba in 1968. As an undergrad, he met and worked with Roger Evans and became enamored with the marshes at the Delta Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Station on the south end of Lake Manitoba, just over 100 km away. His fascination with the marsh led to his voluminous 650-page M.S. Thesis on the breeding biology and ecology of Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) (McNicholl 1971). Other mentors at Delta and the University of Manitoba included Al Hochbaum and Bob Nero.

Upon completing his research at Delta, Martin moved from the eastern edge of the Canadian prairies to their western edge in Edmonton, Alberta, to pursue his Ph.D. on Dusky (Blue) Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*) on Vancouver Island under Fred Zwickel at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. While in Edmonton, he became very active in the local, provincial and national natural history societies: he served on the Executive Boards of the Edmonton Natural History Club, the Edmonton Bird Club, the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, the Saskatchewan Natural Society and the Canadian Nature Federation. It was in Alberta where Martin and I first met in the early 1970s when we were both graduate students there; he at the University of Alberta in Edmonton and I at the University of Calgary in Calgary, Alberta.

Besides his ornithological research interests, Martin was an internationally recognized bibliophile, an abstractor and a very keen supporter of natural history/field naturalist club publications: local, provincial, national and international. His resume features over 365 papers, and includes the major North American ornithology journals (*Auk*, *Condor*, *Journal of Field Ornithology*, *Wilson Bulletin* and *Waterbirds*) and at least 60 other local, provincial, national and international publishing venues. He was an avid book reviewer with over 150 book reviews to his credit.

Martin spent most of his career as a freelance ornithologist, writer and editor with intermittent professional teaching and program management positions. He was a teaching post-doctoral fellow at Brock University (St. Catharines, Ontario) from 1977-1978. He served first as General Manager and then as Executive Director of the Long Point Bird Observatory in Port Rowan, Ontario, from 1984-1987. During 1988-1994, he undertook several sponsored trips to Cuba for winter bird surveys and to help train naturalists there in bird-banding techniques. His forte, however, was that of a contract biologist/ornithologist with various consulting firms and governments, including: LGL Ltd, Canadian Wildlife Service (Ontario Region) and B.C. Environment; he was also a major ornithological contributor to the Canadian Encyclopedia.

Martin's avocation was natural history-type societies (Weseloh 1981). Wherever he went, he immediately immersed himself in the local and provincial natural history-related societies. In Manitoba, he was active in the Natural History Society of Manitoba as well as the Manitoba chapter of the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada. While in Alberta, he was active in The Edmonton Natural History Club, the Edmonton Bird Club, the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, the Saskatchewan Natural History Society and Canadian Nature Federation. Upon moving to Ontario, he became involved in both the Western (and Ontario) Bird-banding Associations, the Toronto Ornithological Club, the North American Loon Fund, the (Colonial) Waterbird Society, the International Council for Bird Preservation and the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Upon moving to British Columbia, he was active on the Executive Boards of the B.C. Field Naturalists, the Langley Field Naturalists, the Federation of B.C. Naturalists, the Vancouver Natural History Society and the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies.

Martin's other hobby, much to the delight of his colleagues, was amassing his extensive bibliographic knowledge; he was a human abstracting resource, a living combination of Biological Abstracts and the Zoological Record (this was in the days before Google). If

you ever needed a reference for something, you'd often hear "Oh, just call Martin; he'll know." In this vein, he published or edited: *A Bibliography of Manitoba Ornithology* (McNicholl 1975), *A Bibliography of Alberta Ornithology* (McNicholl *et al.* 1981; Ealey and McNicholl 1991), and *Ontario Ornithology* (McNicholl and Cranmer-Byng 1994).

Martin was the recipient of several awards: The Loran L. Goulden Award (1983) for contributions to the natural history of Alberta, an Elective Member of the American Ornithologists Union (1986), the Ernest Thompson Seton medal for contributions to Manitoba's natural history (1995), Honorary Life Member to the Langley Field Naturalists (2001) and the British Columbia Field Ornithologists (2002) and the Steve Cannings Award for contributions to bird study in British Columbia and elsewhere in Canada (2014).

Martin is survived by Kevin Young, his partner of 28 years, as well as his sister and brother-in-law, Sigrid and Don Zueff, nephews Stefan Zueff (wife, Diana) and Eric Zueff (partner, Shannon Smith), niece Heather Zueff (partner, Craig Patterson), and aunt Jean Dempster. Martin requested that his extensive ornithological and nature-related library be donated to the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies in Victoria, British Columbia.

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