

In Memoriam: Guy Andrew Baldassarre, 1953–2012

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IN MEMORIAM: GUY ANDREW BALDASSARRE, 1953–2012

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Guy Andrew Baldassarre, 1953–2012

Guy Andrew Baldassarre, 59, passed away peacefully at his home on 20 August 2012 from complications due to chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL). During Guy's eulogy, his son Daniel quoted his father as saying, "The first priority in life is family; the second priority—there is none." In his 2011 AOU Bibliographical Questionnaire, Guy listed his major areas of interest simply as "Family, friends, and birds—that's about it." Indeed, Guy's priorities were very clearly established and perfectly ordered, and he was a consummate husband, father, colleague, educator, and friend. Eileen, Guy's beloved wife and best friend of 30 years, and two sons Daniel and Adam were with him as he came to the serene end of a life well lived following a battle with CLL well fought.

Guy hailed from Medford, Massachusetts, where as a young child he developed a consuming interest in all things wild. Guy often went for walks with his mother in Oak Grove Cemetery, across the street from the family's home. An older cemetery, Oak Grove had many mature trees as well as bordering woodlands and ponds—ideal habitat for a great variety of birds in suburban Boston. Those childhood walks sparked a passion for ornithology and birding that ultimately became Guy's profession.

After graduation from Matignon High School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1971, Guy enrolled at the University of Maine, where he earned a B.S. in wildlife management (1975), followed by an M.S. in natural resources—wildlife management from the

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (1978) under the guidance of Dr. Lyle Nauman. As a graduate student at Stevens Point, Guy was an instructor of Wildlife Management while simultaneously completing his thesis, entitled "Ecological factors affecting waterfowl production on three man-made flowages in central Wisconsin."

His M.S. completed, Guy entered the doctoral program at Texas Tech University, where he began his lifelong friendship with his graduate advisor and mentor, Eric Bolen, who remarked, "Guy quickly developed a research topic that focused on the role of field feeding for the hordes of waterfowl, mainly Mallards, using the playa lakes in the Southern High Plains. His research also elucidated the importance of wetland plants and invertebrates in the playas in meeting the winter nutritional needs of waterfowl. Guy's studies, coupled with work by other graduate students, including his future wife Eileen, became a cornerstone for understanding wintering waterfowl ecology in the Southern High Plains." Guy earned his doctoral degree in 1982 with a dissertation entitled "Field-feeding ecology of waterfowl wintering on the Southern High Plains of Texas."

Upon conferral of his doctoral degree in 1982, Guy married Eileen Quinlan, who shared his passion for birds and wild places, and whom he always introduced as his "best friend." Concurrently, Guy also accepted an assistant professor position at Auburn University and enthusiastically began his teaching and research career with his usual boundless energy, teaching three undergraduate courses

in wildlife management and graduate-level waterfowl ecology and management. In 1987, Guy accepted the position of assistant professor of wildlife science at the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse (SUNY-ESF). Guy had a number of sayings, known fondly by his family, students, and colleagues as “Guyisms”—including “This isn’t a job. If I was independently wealthy I would work here for nothing.” Such was Guy’s view of the work he loved, and he quickly advanced to associate professor in 1989 and professor of wildlife science in 1994.

Guy taught waterfowl ecology and management, ornithology, and field ornithology at SUNY-ESF for 25 years, keeping the course material current and teaching with the same level of energy, passion, and excitement each time. During his career, Guy advised 42 graduate students to 46 postgraduate degrees. In 1994, Guy went on sabbatical, taking his family to spend a year in Yucatan and assisting his then graduate student Felicity Arengo with data collection on American Flamingos. Arengo recalled, “I could talk about Guy as a gifted teacher, a meticulous scholar, a caring mentor, and a generous colleague, but what struck me as so admirable about Guy was that he was a life-long learner. He loved learning alongside the rest of us; it was always a shared path.”

Guy truly loved to teach and often indicated that teaching is what provided him the most satisfaction in his professional life. He had an insatiable appetite to pass on knowledge of waterfowl, wetlands, and birds—and his passion energized hundreds of students to put forth their best efforts as scientists, ornithologists, and waterfowl and wildlife managers to fight the good fight for science-based conservation of birds and other wildlife. Outside his office at SUNY-ESF’s 207 Illick Hall, there was always a single chair for a student to sit and wait while Guy counseled another student in his office. Students seeking guidance and willing to sit and wait is perhaps the highest compliment to a teacher and mentor, and it is one Guy received almost daily. Indeed, Guy was awarded the rank of distinguished teaching professor at SUNY-ESF in 2004 for outstanding teaching competence at the graduate, undergraduate, and professional levels. Notably, Guy was nominated for this prestigious rank by the SUNY Undergraduate Student Association, a nomination that speaks volumes about how much the students truly appreciated Guy for his passion, teaching excellence, and counsel. Guy loved working with students, and he was an extraordinary educator, mentor, and supporter of students throughout his career.

Guy described his research interests simply and humbly as “waterfowl and waterbird ecology.” In reality, Guy’s ornithological research interests were quite varied and included multiple aspects of Nearctic waterfowl ecology, Nearctic waterfowl wintering in the Neotropics, investigations of Neotropical Black-bellied Whistling Ducks and Muscovy Ducks, ecology of American Flamingos in the Yucatan Peninsula, studies of Least Bitterns and wintering Piping Plovers, and, most recently, abundance and distribution of waterbirds in the Llanos of Venezuela. Guy’s pioneering research effort in the Yucatan enabled him to advise several graduate students from Mexico, many of whom are now leading conservation professionals there and, as such, are an important part of his conservation legacy.

Guy maintained memberships in the Wilson Ornithological Society, Cooper Ornithological Society, and Waterbird Society from 1973 on. In 1982, he joined the AOU and was elected a Fellow in 2011. Over his career, he authored or co-authored 80 peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles (54 in collaboration with his graduate students) in a wide variety of professional outlets,

including *The Auk*, *The Condor*, *The Wilson Bulletin*, *The Journal of Field Ornithology*, *Waterbirds*, *Conservation Biology*, *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, *Wetlands*, and several others. He was a member of The Wildlife Society since 1973, serving as Editor-in-Chief for *The Journal of Wildlife Management* in 1998 and 1999. Guy received the Wetlands Conservation Achievement Award in Research/Technology from Ducks Unlimited in 2008 for his career contributions to waterfowl ecology and management.

Guy had a truly remarkable capability to review, remember, and synthesize technical literature and concisely present it in pre-eminently readable and understandable form. Hence, he served as lead author, collaborating with co-author Eric Bolen, for both the first and second editions of *Waterfowl Ecology and Management*, which remains the first and only complete treatise on the subject. The first edition, published in 1994, filled a long-standing void in the literature on wildlife ecology and management. A second edition (2006) included new and updated material, increased its geographic coverage beyond North America, and added numerous “info-boxes” that presented biographies and topics of special interest. Another “Guyism” he often said in regard to daunting tasks was “Beat it into submission.” Such was Guy’s standard response to challenges, including writing *Waterfowl Ecology and Management*.

More recently, Guy agreed to take on another monumental task—the revision of Frank Bellrose’s *Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America*. Guy completed the two-volume set in spring 2012, just before the onset of complications of his cancer treatment that ultimately took his life. Those privileged to review various chapters of the revision know that it will appropriately honor Bellrose’s initial effort, while also synthesizing all of relevant new information that has emerged since 1980. Rick Kaminski of Mississippi State University had this to say about Guy’s scholarship: “Guy and Frank Bellrose had the most incredible ability to amass and synthesize technical information on waterfowl into legacy books for our profession. *Waterfowl Ecology and Management and Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America* will be the treatises to serve our profession during the 21st century.”

Guy said it best, of course, in response to the last item on his AOU Biographical Questionnaire—“Please add anything else you would like to say about your career as an ornithologist”—when he wrote, “As long as I’ve ‘worked’ with birds, I’ve never really had to work at all. All true ornithologists understand that statement.” He is survived by his devoted and loving wife and best friend of 30 years, the former Eileen Quinlan; two sons, Daniel of Ithaca, New York (the next Dr. Baldassarre, Cornell University, Ornithology 2014), and Adam of Glendora, California; two sisters, Lydia Baldassarre of Wyckoff, New Jersey, and Patricia Birchem of Wakefield, Massachusetts; and two brothers, Marshall of Bedford, New Hampshire, and Andrew of Bloomfield, Connecticut. He also leaves behind a legacy of hundreds of successful undergraduate and graduate students whom he mentored over the years. The family requests memorial contributions to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, 6th Floor, 10 Brookline Place West, Brookline, Massachusetts 02445. Please make checks payable to Dana-Farber Cancer Institute with “CLL Research: Dr. Jennifer Brown” in the memo line.

I thank Rick Kaminski, Eric Bolen, John Thompson, Felicity Arengo, and Anne Marie Moorman for their contributions and reviews of earlier versions of this memorial. Mike Anderson and Bill Hohman graciously directed the opportunity to prepare this memorial to those who knew Guy best. I am especially grateful to Eileen and Dan Baldassarre for their insights, memories, and contributions.