

## IN MEMORIAM: LAWRENCE KILHAM, 1910–2000

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Lawrence Kilham died at his home in Lyme, New Hampshire, on 21 September 2000. Born 10 August 1910 in Brookline, Massachusetts, Lawrence grew up in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. He graduated from Harvard University with a bachelor's degree in history and literature in 1932, earned a master's degree in biology from Harvard in 1935, and an M.D. from Harvard Medical School in 1940. While serving as an intern in Cleveland, Ohio, he met his wife, Jane, a fellow intern. Both went to England early in World War II, and Lawrence served in field hospitals under General George Patton. After leaving the Army in 1945, Lawrence returned to graduate school doing virology research and teaching epidemiology. From 1949 to 1960, he worked as a research virologist. He joined the faculty at Dartmouth Medical School in 1961, where he remained until he retired in 1978.

Lawrence Kilham was widely recognized for his research with viruses and infectious diseases, publishing nearly 150 articles and discovering a new group of viruses with single-stranded DNA. At first his interest in birds was recreational, stemming from a lifelong quest for solitude and nature that led him to identify with Henry David Thoreau and to seek wild places. After his marriage, his wife Jane shared his quests and often illustrated his articles and books; to better learn from nature, they went their own ways in the field, coming back together every few hours to share their observations.

By the early 1950s, Lawrence was serious about birds, joining both the AOU and the Wilson Ornithological Society in 1952. It was while doing viral research in Uganda in 1954–1955,

that he developed a research interest in bird behavior. From that point on, his work with the behavior of birds and mammals, an avocation, became a passion that led to more than 90 publications in the ornithological and behavioral literature. I suspect that for him, the joy of birds relieved the pressures of teaching and laboratory work. For his ornithological contributions, he was made an Elective Member of the AOU in 1962, and a Fellow in 1974. Truly Lawrence Kilham successfully lived two outstanding careers in science!

In addition to his journal articles, he published four books relating to his studies of nature: *Never Enough of Nature* (1977, Droll Yankees Inc., Foster, Rhode Island); *On Watching Birds* (1979, Chelsea Green Publishing Company, Chelsea, Vermont), reissued as *A Naturalist's Field Guide* (1981, Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania); *Life History Studies of Woodpeckers of Eastern North America* (1983, Publications of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, no. 20); and *The American Crow and the Common Raven* (1989, Texas A & M University Press, College Station, Texas). For *On Watching Birds* he was awarded the John Burroughs Medal for outstanding nature writing in 1988.

Although he studied a great diversity of birds, Lawrence Kilham is best known for his work with woodpeckers. Indeed, it is difficult to find a major study on the behavioral ecology of woodpeckers that was not influenced by Kilham's work. Much ornithological research today is problem oriented; some remain species oriented; his work was often *individual* oriented! His research was not couched in systematic



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(Lawrence Kilham preparing to feed an injured Great Horned Owl in the late 1960s.  
Photograph courtesy of his son, Benjamin Kilham.)

sampling with large sample sizes, sophisticated statistical analyses, and results discussed in terms of probabilities and accepted or rejected hypotheses. His was long, careful observation of the behavioral ecology of individuals unfettered by bird bands and the potential negative reaction to the observer who had captured them. His was the insight that can only come from living with a bird day after day—both literally, such as his successful breeding of woodpeckers in captivity, and figuratively in terms of his patient, silent rendezvous with wild birds in their natural habitats on their terms.

To be sure, hypothesis testing, experimentation, modern statistical analyses, and computer modeling contribute much to our understanding of bird biology. But in our rush to “do” science, we all too often lose sight of the first step of the scientific method: to observe. Lawrence

Kilham took that first step that has allowed so many others to climb higher. Although he formally mentored no graduate students in ornithology, I considered him a *de facto* mentor and recommend his philosophy, as described in *On Watching Birds*, to those who wish to understand nature. Goethe believed that a good book can only be understood by one who has something personal to contribute; in essence, Kilham viewed nature as a book to be read and felt that those who personally experience nature can best understand it. Observe first. Then build on those observations; with personal experience, books and journal articles become more meaningful.

Lawrence Kilham outlived his wife, Jane, and a son, Peter. He is survived by three sons, Benjamin, Michael, and Joshua, and a daughter, Phoebe.