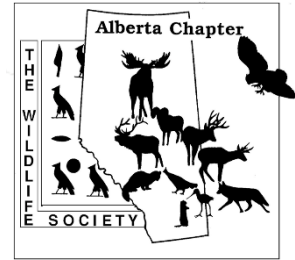


Memorial



Robert (Bob) K. Goddard¹

We all experience death. Some deaths are lamentable, but because of distance barely touch us. Others, although sad, come at the end of long life and are in some ways, a kindness. The deaths that touch most of us deeply are the tragic ones where life ends long before the allotted time. Such is the case of Bob's death in November 1995.

Bob died near Pincher Creek on the way to an elk hunt, a pursuit that had taken on the aspect of a search for the holy grail. Ironically, the vehicle that collided with Bob's had three young men also on their way to a Saturday hunt. That Bob died in pursuit of something he loved eases the pain of his passing somewhat, but the gap he leaves is large.

I helped sort through Bob's office a week after the accident and the archeological dig in his office represented brought back many memories of a man eclectic in his interests, with a passion for his profession. The sorting also reminded me that Bob managed to find something funny in even the blackest of situations; his often perverse, silly sense of humour was always an antidote for the blues.

Bob began his Fish and Wildlife career at the Brooks Pheasant Hatchery (or, as it was known in the 1980s, the Brooks Wildlife Centre) as a wildlife technician involved in pheasant rearing. Where some might have looked at pheasant rearing as glorified chicken ranching Bob delved into life history, physiology, behavior, habitat, and pheasant utilization (i.e., hunting and predators). That was typical of Bob - don't learn a little when you can learn a lot.

Whether pheasants were the spark, or the broad base of research happening at the Brooks Wildlife Centre in its formative years, or Bob's interest in natural history, all became a springboard for his talent in bird identification, both by sight and sound. There are very few people in Alberta considered proficient at bird identification, especially by calls and song, but Bob was one of the elite. Bob put that talent to work as he matured into an ecologist, determining the relationships of many prairie bird species to rangeland habitats. One of Bob's bits of unfinished business was an investigation of the ecological relationship of Baird's sparrow to range condition. He was going to turn this research into a Bachelor's degree in Science, a major step in his career.

Bob's aim, as he matured as a wildlife manager, wasn't research. It was to demonstrate how careful, intelligent use of a landscape can produce many benefits especially if landscape health is the goal instead of products. To do that Bob drew on another rare talent - the ability to help people see both sides of the equation. One of the toughest assignments he had, as a habitat technician when the province still had the Habitat Branch, and later as a habitat specialist for NAWMP (North American Waterfowl Management Plan) was wetland conservation in the irrigation districts of southern Alberta. On the irrigation industry's march to "efficiency" thousands of acres of wildlife habitat have been eliminated. Bob had a long, hard, uphill battle to convince irrigation farmers of the value of bits of "wasteland" covered with willow,

¹ Scholarship established by ACTWS in 1995 and named in tribute to Bob, as endorsed by the Goddard family.

cattails or rank grass growth. Skepticism towards the value of wildlife and habitat to support wildlife is a problem all wildlife professionals face. Bob dealt with it often by taking the message directly to the farmer. As a testament to Bob's communication and negotiating skills, as well as a large measure of patience and persistence, his successes are numerous. You likely won't recognize those successes - the best habitat protection and development contains no monuments and few signs of intervention. Yet, those creatures who find a haven in these natural pieces of the agricultural landscape are a tangible expression of the efforts of one man to convince others that wildlife is important.

Bob's achievements are a legacy on the land, the only place where it really counts. Bob had a big streak of humility; he didn't seek rewards or credit for all the success stories he was a part of. He had that rare quality of being as excited about other people's successes as his own.

In a larger sense, because of his philosophy and qualities, the people of Alberta have been well served by Bob's efforts to conserve wildlife. In a smaller, more personal way, a lot of us were touched by Bob, by his compassion, his concern for people, and by his sharing nature - he couldn't say no to a request for help. Bob also had the rare quality of adding just the right measure of silliness into our lives. The stories of Bob's humour and practical jokes are legion. It's not surprising he attracted a large circle of friends. That is a pretty impressive legacy too, and a measure of the man.

Lorne Fitch

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