

*Tribute read by former Forbush Bird Club President Joan Zumpfe, at the annual dinner and business meeting on April 26, 2012:*

## **FRANCIS X. McMENEMY MEMORIAL TRIBUTE**

The Forbush Bird Club suffered a great loss on March 10<sup>th</sup> of this year with the passing of Trip Leader, Editorial Committee Member of The Chickadee, Past President and Forbush Fellow Francis X. McMenemy. Many have considered Fran to be the “Heart and Soul” of our club. He was a constant. Everyone who attended a club trip or meeting gained from his steadfast presence. Fran was our mentor, our encyclopedia of Worcester County bird ornithology, our helper and our friend. The number of us who benefitted from his knowledge, his creative mechanical abilities and his generosity is immeasurable. He designed and created hearing devices for his fellow birders who shared an inability to hear the high frequency songs of many birds. He repaired countless spotting scopes and devised attachments for them to increase the speed and efficiency of locating birds. He was an expert in sound and amplification processes and used his knowledge for recording and playing bird songs.

Members looked forward to the trips Fran led in the spring at Bolton Flats and in the towns of Princeton, Westminster and Gardner and to the afternoon fall trip at and around Wachusett Reservoir and we especially enjoyed the results of his Common Loon nest monitoring by attending his summer trip at that reservoir. He ensured that the club still received access into various gates at the Quabbin Reservoir in order to continue the annual tradition of an all-day car trip there that has been going on for decades. These trips were successful because Fran would ‘do his homework’ by scouting out these locations before the actual day of the trip.

Fran kept up with technology, even as he became a senior citizen. He learned how to use a personal computer for recording bird sighting data from various bird counts and for doing research. He purchased an MP3 player for saving bird songs and to replace his cumbersome Sony recorder. He even bought digital camera equipment and dabbled in photographing birds. He offered to produce the CD copies of The Chickadee publication by providing Rick Quimby with all copies of them, produced since the club’s inception in 1931, so Rick could scan them and create files to be placed on a CD. He then worked diligently on designing, printing and pasting labels on the CD’s requested by club members and others doing research.

Fran was a huge contributor to the history of Worcester County bird activity for close to 60 years by participating in Federal Bird surveys, in National Audubon Christmas Counts, serving as the Compiler for the Worcester Christmas Count and also Mass Audubon’s Wachusett Meadow Breeding Bird Survey for over 40 years. He participated in Mark Lynch’s Waterfowl surveys for The Blackstone River Heritage

Corridor. He eagerly participated in our local Mass Audubon Sanctuary, Broad Meadow Brook, in Worcester's annual Bird-a-Thon fundraiser and its breeding bird census. Fran helped Mass Wildlife in its winter Eagle Count every January, but Fran especially enjoyed monitoring nesting loons and sharing his observations with biologists of the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Fran assisted fellow birders and club members in school projects. An example was how he worked in the classroom with Mark Blazis' middle school students, on a project to create a field guide of the Birds of Auburn.

Fran loved to look for wildflowers in the spring. He introduced me to Blood Root, Trout Lily, Hepatica, Canada Mayflower, Starflower, Gay Wings, Rue Anemone and Colt's Foot to name a few. Another side of Fran was his ability to actually make the calls of some bird species. His most impressive was the Veery. By coincidence, his favorite Poem was **The Veery** by Henry van Dyke, which he could fully recite.

Fran was adventurous. He loved to put his car to the test. Some of you may remember the deep water he drove through a couple of years ago at Bolton Flats. Nothing stopped him from his quest for seeing birds. We traversed a lot of bumpy, muddy and icy roads.

Fran also showed me many habitats that I would have never imagined frequenting, like cemeteries, filter beds, swamps, marshes, sewer plants, deep water requiring waders and mud flats that sucked your boots up. He even led me on a treacherous walk across a beaver dam at Quabbin's Gate 40, as a supposed short-cut to see the Cerulean warblers nesting on the nearby hill. The first time I was ever in a canoe was on a club trip on the Quaboag River in Brookfield, Unfortunately, I ended up in the river, but it was next to the shore as Fran tried to secure the boat. Birding with Fran was unpredictable but enormous fun.

Fran and I were birding partners for over 20 years. I was still in my 40's and Fran was only 61 when I joined the club. We were in good shape and could handle long hikes, all kinds of weather extremes, getting caught in the rain and climbing to high points. Fran already needed help hearing high-pitched bird songs and I fulfilled that need, so it was a 2-way partnership. He taught me about birds and where to find them and I acted as his 'ears'. Fran would ask me to edit any reports or articles he was asked to write. One example is the article in a booklet printed by the Worcester Land Trust where Fran wrote about the bird species that can be found in the city of Worcester and where to find them.

I had a rocky start as a new birder. I was definitely a candidate for "Birding for Dummies". I owned a \$35 pair of Service Merchandise binoculars which Fran declared useless on my second bird club trip, being held at Buck Hill. He quietly left the group and returned with an extra pair of his own which he let me use for 2 months till I got new and better quality binoculars. Fran knew he could find me if I gave up on birding because I worked with his nephew John's wife Barbara at Multibank in Auburn.

We had a lot of fun exploring and that was what Fran really enjoyed. He didn't like to 'bird on demand', looking for birds found by others. As Rodney Jenkins pointed out in his moving memorial printed in The Chickadee you received tonight, Fran was known for finding many rare visitors to Worcester environs which brought excitement to many. I acted as his lookout while he drove around Auburn trying to find the Cattle Egrets seen at Mark Blazis' school. I spotted them on a lawn near Dark Brook Reservoir on May 6, 1991, exactly one year after my first Forbush Bird Club trip. I had never seen a Cattle Egret before.

One of my fondest memories of Fran occurred last summer at the end of the Birds and Butterflies trip. As I lingered in the grassy area across the Worcester Airport runway, Fran walked back to his car. From this distance, I watched as each and every member flocked toward his car, stood by him and chatted with him for at least 15 minutes. It was a very touching scene to see how much Fran was admired, respected and loved.

The best way we can extend a tribute to the memory of Fran McMenemy is by supporting the Forbush Bird Club he was so devoted to, by attending and / or leading bird trips, attending meetings, contributing bird sighting reports, participating in bird counts and surveys and by being ambassadors for our club to attract new and especially young members to help continue the existence of our great club.

Thank you all for your attention