

Tributes to Gale W. Monson (1 August 1912 - 19 February 2012)

By Mark W. Larson



Though his Arizona friends bemoaned their loss, it was my good fortune that Gale Monson was transferred to the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the early 1960s. He made a lot of new friends there, some of whom were to become friends and mentors of mine when my family moved to Northern Virginia in 1967. I never met Gale in Virginia, but our mutual friends connected us when I came to Tucson for graduate school in 1976.

Gale was born in Munich, North Dakota in August 1912 only 15 miles south of the International Boundary and was raised on a wheat farm near Argusville just north of Fargo. The farmhouse and barn were protected from the cold northwest winds by a dense stand of trees planted by the homesteader. These trees were the only cover in an otherwise treeless shortgrass prairie, and they sheltered many exotic migrants—colorful warblers, vireos, orioles, and grosbeaks—as they traveled to and from their breeding grounds in the boreal forests of Canada.

These exciting birds caught the attention of a young farm boy who was already interested in the natural world. They must have served to widen his world; after all, these birds didn't nest on the prairie, but where did they nest and why did they appear on the farm every spring and fall? It is likely he found the answers to those questions long before he reached North Dakota State University in Fargo.

By the age of about 12, he began a journal to record his bird sightings on the farm and he continued it with few interruptions for over eighty years. When I visited him in Albuquerque recently, we were talking about one of the first trips we took together—to Redfield Canyon in the Galiuro Mountains east of Tucson. He said, “Do you see that third volume on the lowest shelf? Why don't you bring it over to me.”

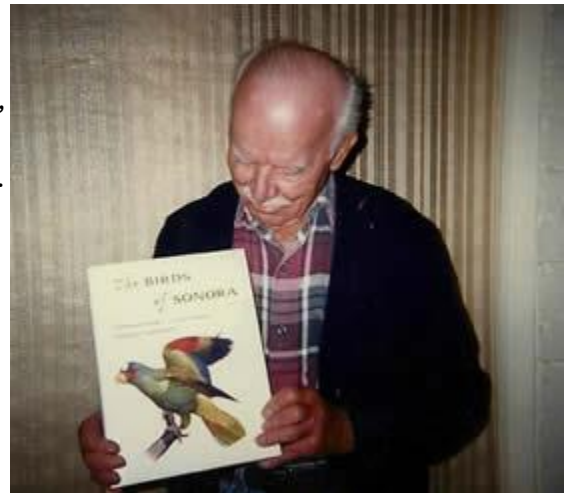
He opened the book and turned right to the pages describing that trip. There was a color photograph of the impressive canyon walls. There was a list of the birds we encountered, the weather we experienced, the roads and 4X4 paths we took to get in there, and notes about our campsite. As he read a passage, my memories of that day came flooding back.

Typically, he took me to places that were not listed in my copy of Jim Lane's *Birding Southeastern Arizona*, although one spring morning we did go to the famous Sonoita Creek Sanctuary in Patagonia where we found a Yellow-throated Warbler, an Eastern species that had seldom been seen in Arizona!

In those days, Gale wasn't giving me a birding tour of this region; instead, he was taking me to places where the bird life was unknown or little known as a part of his larger quest to document Arizona birds.

In later years I had moved to Phoenix for a job, but Gale kept me involved in his pursuits. Not long after my move north, Gale told me that he and Professor Steve Russell were researching a book on birds in the state of Sonora, Mexico. Gale asked me to accompany him on several of their exploratory expeditions. We inventoried birds from the Sea of Cortez to the high pine-covered Sierra Huachinera on the border with Chihuahua and from the Río Magdalena in the north to the Río Mayo near the border with Sinaloa.

Many of the streams in the mountains had no bridges, only fords. I remember one crossing of the Río Bavispe, in northeastern Sonora, where cottonwoods held Rose-throated Becard and Streak-backed Oriole nests. This Eastern kid was concerned that Gale's old Ford pickup truck would flood attempting to ford the swollen river, but we made it easily. His considerable experience had paid off, as it would again and again throughout the data gathering phase of the book, *The Birds of Sonora*, published by the University of Arizona Press in 1998.



In December 1988, Gale arranged to conduct a Christmas Bird Count around one of the watering holes his men had built when he was the manager of the vast desert country southwest of Tucson. This was no small matter because he needed permits from the US Air Force to cross the Barry Goldwater Bombing Range. Our base of operations was at Heart Tank in the Sierra Pinta.

On the night before the count the sky was clear, so clear that stars by the billions spangled the moonless dome over us. We sat on stones around an ironwood campfire. "Eight hundred eighty thousand acres on the Cabeza Prieta Game Range," he said, "and we are the only ones in it."

The next morning, we found a wintering Gray Vireo near our camp. It was just where Gale knew it would be in an Elephant Tree, *Bursera microphylla*, where it was feeding on fruits. This was probably the only Gray Vireo reported that year on Christmas Bird Counts in the United States as most of its winter range is in northwest México.

Gale's first job was in 1934 with the United States Indian Service, surveying and mapping range conditions by horseback on what is now the Tohono O'odham Reservation west of Tucson. He once told me of a day he rode his horse to the top of Tabletop Mountain south of Casa Grande just because he wanted to see what was up there!

Not long ago I wrote to Gale and told him that not a day goes by that I don't think of him and the adventures we had together. He taught me how to get along in the desert without breaking my neck or stepping on a rattlesnake. But, more than that, he taught me by his example.

Yes, he was an exemplary field ornithologist, a fine all-around naturalist, and a well above average writer who could, in few words, convey the beauty and enchantment of his beloved desert home. But he was also even-tempered, slow to anger, and quick to see the humor in an otherwise difficult situation. All who knew him will recall the twinkle in his eye. I can see it now....

By Janet Witzeman

Because of submitting records from Maricopa County for *American Birds* to Gale, and later submitting drafts of *American Birds* reports for him to critique, I have a wonderful file of correspondence with him from the 1970s and 80s. One of the frequent words in those letters was "skeptical" – "I'm afraid I have to be skeptical on this one" – "I think I'll have to continue to be skeptical" – "I am naturally a rather skeptical person, but I don't mean to intimate that anyone is at all careless with their identification. We just need more documentation." - "However, I will continue to be of a skeptical turn of mind where field observations are concerned, and I hope that _____ and others of this new breed of 'field ornithologists' won't object too much if I and possibly a few others will continue to be unregenerated doubters."



Thanks to Gale's skepticism and the fact that he was the arbiter of the Arizona State List, the Arizona Bird Committee was formed, and birders became more careful in their observations and documented their records in writing and with photographs.

But Gale was also so polite and such a gentleman that he always mollified his criticisms with such words as "Here's another one of those nit-picking letters I know you just love receiving." and "I hope

you won't feel too bad about getting this letter that is nothing but corrections, criticisms, and things for you to do. Keep up the good work." and "I am very grateful for these and appreciate having them more than I can tell you."

Nor were all his letters so serious. Probably few people know that he was as enthusiastic a state lister as the rest of us. We kept track of each other's lists and called one another if a rarity appeared in Phoenix or Tucson. In 1975 he wrote "How about staking out an Ovenbird for me to look for on the 3rd?" In 1982 he wrote "With the appearance of the new supplement to the A.O.U. Check-list I have been able to up-date my Arizona species count. As of now with my list 'laundered' I have 442 species."

He was never one to let you be too proud - one time when my state list was listed first for Arizona in the American Birding Association List Supplement, he wrote "Congratulations. It looks as though you have some close competition—uneasy rests the head that wears a crown!" You could almost see the twinkle in his eye.

An example of the breadth of his knowledge was the answer he gave when we invited him to give a program to the Maricopa Audubon Society. He asked if we would like one on the Natural History of Cabeza Prieta Game Range or the wildflowers of Virginia.



We are fortunate to have the legacy of Gale's writings. In addition to co-authoring *The Birds of Arizona*, the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Arizona*, and *The Birds of Sonora* are his chapters on six of the hawks and owls in *Raptors of Arizona*. He served as editor of the Southwest Region for *American Birds* in the late 1940s, the 50s, early 60s, and early 70s. While he lived in Virginia, he was the editor of the *Atlantic Naturalist*, a publication of the Audubon Naturalist Society. My first knowledge of the different habitats of Arizona and the birds that were associated with them came from Gale's chapter in Pettingill's *A Guide to Bird Finding West of the Mississippi*. But perhaps his most poetic work was the chapter he wrote about Arizona in Pettingill's *The Bird Watcher's America*.

I am thankful that Troy Corman came up with the idea to honor Gale with the AZFO Gale Monson Research Grants while he was still alive, so that he knew how much he meant to us. Also, while he was still alive, he learned about our appreciation of his historical discovery of the association of wintering Gray Vireo with the elephant tree and his description of the call note of the Gray Vireo in winter. In my Christmas letter, I told him about our survey and the presence of both elephant trees and wintering Gray Vireos in Maricopa County.

What a fine man he was and what a wonderful, long, full, productive, and happy life he led-and an example for us all!

By Dale Zimmerman

When Marian and I moved to Silver City, NM in 1957, one of my first priorities was writing to Gale Monson, then the editor of the Southwestern Region for *Audubon Field Notes*. At that time, no one was reporting seasonal bird observations from this vast area of southwestern New Mexico, so Gale made it known how pleased he was to have a resident ornithologist eager to submit data from there. I, in turn, welcomed his advice and counsel on species status and distribution in this region with which we were unfamiliar, though we knew the birds themselves well from our Mexican fieldwork. Thus, considerable correspondence flowed between us from that point forward, initiating our decades-long association.

Some time passed before we actually met; eventually, though, we converged at some ornithological society meeting, I believe in Tucson. For several years thereafter our encounters were infrequent, typically brief, --most of that time he was in southwestern Arizona -- so my early impressions of the man were gleaned largely from his correspondence. Apart from his transmission of knowledge, I was from the outset impressed by Gale's letter writing. He was a stickler for accuracy, clarity, and economy of words. He wrote exceptionally well, reminding me not a little of George Miksch Sutton, under whom I had worked for some years -- studying Mexican birds and bird illustration, and perfecting my own writing. Gale's letters revealed something of the man himself. When I came to know him in person those same qualities were obvious: he was straightforward, erudite, professional in all that he dealt with. Birds, naturally, were the overriding topic of all correspondence and our conversations, and it was immediately clear that they were as important in Gale Monson's life as they were in mine. Despite his missives being devoted largely to "business," hints about the depth of his *appreciation* of birds crept in through his choice of words, his use of unnecessary (but appropriate) adjectives here and there, the occasional digressions into bird-plant associations and other ecological matters.

After being with Gale a few times, I learned of his deep interest in all the other forms of life. At first, I felt that he would mention some mammal or other non-avian organism almost apologetically, as if feeling he should not stray too far from birds. But once he learned that I possessed a Ph.D. in botany and taught that discipline in addition to ornithology, that I was a lepidopterist, and quite keen on mammals, he no longer hesitated in getting "off the subject." Always birds were the principal focal point, the center of his interest and



important in their own right, but also as components of an endlessly fascinating environment for whose preservation he was genuinely concerned.

Insight into the depth of his feelings about such things was adroitly revealed in his chapter on the Arizona Desert that he contributed to Sewall Pettingill's *The Bird Watcher's America* for McGraw-Hill almost a half-century ago. I knew before that time that he could be as intrigued by a Desert Bighorn as by some choice bird – perhaps even more so, but it was from those pages I first became aware of his passion for the desert wilderness itself, and for protecting it – not just for “all the interesting plants and insects and mammals – and birds” but for ensuring “that the essential feeling of space and time and distance will always be there to savor.”

So, when I began to see Gale more frequently in Tucson during the following decade, I was well aware of his universal biologic interests. By then we had the time to enjoy long conversations, as he and Sally would join us for relaxing afternoons and evenings in the pleasant garden of our dear friend Grace Gregg with whom Marian and I would regularly dwell when we were in town. Gale knew that we had been to Africa several times, and one day – not surprisingly – he confessed that he always had wanted to see something of that continent's fabled natural wonders. Marian and I had been leading birding tours to Kenya and Tanzania, and once Gale learned that our ventures were not single-minded pursuits of birds, and that we traveled rather leisurely, spending much time with the big mammals, he asked if he might join us one year.

Thus, we had the pleasure of introducing him to our favorite portion of the planet while it was still incomparably rewarding and satisfying to the naturalist. Always soft-spoken and undemonstrative, Gale nevertheless relished the spectacular animal diversity surrounding him there. The sparkling eyes and smile always would give away his pleasure, and he'd gaze long and admiringly at everything from *Agama* lizards to elephants and, of course, the several hundred kinds of birds. Of these, his announced favorite was the rare and charming Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye we called down from the dark greenery of the Kakamega Forest canopy to perform invitingly in front of us. It so impressed Gale that he had me do a painting of it for him. This hung on a wall in the Monsons' living room for years thereafter, reminding him of western Kenya.

I have felt especially favored knowing Gale as long as I did, and to have traveled a bit with him; yet I would like to have known him even better and longer. He really was the “Grand Old Man” of southwestern ornithology -- and a good deal more.

By Chuck LaRue

Gale Monson enriched my life as I am sure he did for so many others. I first came across his name about 1970 in the 5th grade. I was in Keams Canyon and in a copy of *The Birds of Arizona* I saw all the 1930s bird observations from Keams Canyon that Gale had recorded. It was a thrill when about 15 years later I got to meet him and spend time with him birding on the Rez (Navajo and Hopi tribal lands) and hear his stories of his experiences on the reservation from the 1930s. From this initial visit I had a pretty lively 20-year-long correspondence with him. I still have all of his letters in my file cabinet. Sitting here I can think of at least six trips he made up there where we were able to spend time birding. On one hike (October 1991?), I took him and Tom Huels up into my favorite place on

Black Mesa near Kayenta. We went up into the head of an isolated canyon with sheer sandstone walls towering 400 feet above us. Standing in the October shadows in the canyon bottom the winds swirled loose bright golden aspen leaves up into the brilliant sunlight above. Gale said at that time that he thought that was the most beautiful place he had ever seen in Arizona.

Whenever we were in Tucson, we would often stop in to see Gale and Sally. In late February 1990 he and I hiked up into Pima Canyon in the Santa Catalinas and he told me stories about his experiences in the war. Gale was always so welcoming and gracious and kind. In my daughter's house is a copy of *Mother Goose Tales* that Gale gave to me for her when she was born.

Our correspondence faded beginning about 2005, but even so whenever I saw an odd bird on the reservation or saw bighorn sheep or an ancient bighorn sheep petroglyph I always thought of Gale and how fun it would be to pass these things along to him. I have sought ever since meeting Gale to model my behavior on his...not only his integrity, graciousness, even-nature, and kindness but also his keen big-picture birding perspectives and his naturalist's record keeping. He left the world a better place than he found it. He is one of the most cherished treasures I have had in my life.

By R. Roy Johnson

GALE MONSON: PIONEER ARIZONA ORNITHOLOGIST AND HIS ROLE IN ESTABLISHING ORNITHOLOGY AS A SCIENCE IN ARIZONA

Gale W. Monson was an Arizona ornithological pioneer. He came to southern Arizona after graduating from North Dakota State University in 1934 with a degree in biology. He had been preceded by Allan R. Phillips, who also came to southern Arizona from New York in 1931. The two would soon become life-long ornithological associates.

Gale and Allan were far from the first to work on Arizona birds. Arizona is an ornithological magnet. Birds from Mexico spill across the border into southern Arizona and people come to Arizona to see and study them. The state had been visited by a large number of ornithologists, especially, during the late 1800s and very early 1900s. So, ornithologists had been visiting Arizona for almost a century before Allan's and Gale's arrival. Ornithological greats such as Arthur C. Bent and Joseph Grinnell had spent periods of time here and written of their findings.

In the 1870s, Arizona's first "resident ornithologist," Herbert Brown, moved to Tucson. By his death in 1913, Brown had established the Arizona State Museum at the University of Arizona and published at least 18 avian papers (Anderson 1972). However, he was a Tucson newspaper editor and owner and, later, warden of the Yuma territorial prison, not a professional ornithologist. George Breninger, a Phoenix resident, published 16 avian papers (Anderson 1972) and collected birds professionally for various museums during the late 1800s and early 1900s; dying in 1905 from arsenic poison absorbed while preparing museum specimens (Allen 1906, Palmer and others 1954). Charles Vorhies moved to Tucson in 1915 and became a professor at the University of Arizona. Phillips studied ornithology under Vorhies, who published 15 papers on birds while at the University (Anderson 1972), but he was basically an entomologist and most of his publications were on desert rodents (Phillips 1950, Palmer and others 1954). Also, Lyndon Hargrave came to Arizona in 1919 and although publishing almost 30 avian papers, several with Allan Phillips, Lyn was

primarily an archaeologist (Dick and Shroeder 1968). Thus, Allan and Gale were the first “true ornithologists” to establish residency in Arizona after a hiatus of more than 25 years.

Earlier, professional ornithologists had accompanied numerous governmental undertakings, e.g., U.S.-Mexico Boundary surveys, railroad surveys, and military expeditions during the mid to late 1800s (Fischer 2001). A dozen ornithologists that were members of the U.S. Army Medical Corps had been stationed in Arizona (Hume 1978). When not attending wounded soldiers, Elliott Coues, Edgar Mearns, and Charles Bendire had all collected and written about Arizona birds. An increasing number of out of state collectors and ornithologists visited Arizona toward the end of the 1800s and beginning 1900s (Anderson 1972). None of them stayed in Arizona.

I have always been impressed with pioneers. Grandfather ran cattle in the area now holding the Arizona Biltmore. Uncle Bert talked of watching beavers build dams along the Salt River between Phoenix and Granite Reef Dam and Mother was fascinated by the Burrowing Owls at their burrows in what is now mid-Phoenix. Little did I realize that during the 1950s I had been introduced to basically all the resident, living ornithological Arizona pioneers and inducted into a fraternity that was to establish perhaps the most important era of Arizona’s ornithological history. Two years ago my daughter, Elaine Johnson (a fourth generation Arizonan), was promoted to Complex Manager of the SW Arizona National Wildlife Refuge Complex, over-seeing Kofa, Imperial, and Cibola National Wildlife Refuges. On learning of this I paid her the highest compliment I could imagine— “Elaine that’s incredible, that’s the position Gale Monson held when I visited him in Yuma in the mid-1950s.”

I was unaware of Arizona’s rich ornithological history when I first met Gale in Parker on a Phoenix College ornithology class field trip in 1952. Our professor, Abe Margolin, had started the movement that developed into the Maricopa Audubon Society during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Gale, in typical fashion, escorted the class along the Colorado River to show us birds that none of us had seen before. I remember it as clearly as if it were last week.

The following year, in 1953, I met Allan Phillips when, at Margolin’s invitation, he came from Tucson to see what the avian situation was in Phoenix and vicinity, one of the most poorly understood regions in the state, ornithologically. Then, on 15 May 1953, I collected the first Golden Plover for Arizona at a small pond north of Phoenix (with a Crossman .22 air rifle!). Gale was editing the Arizona records for “Audubon Field Notes” and in his inimitable way, made me feel like I had contributed much more to Arizona’s ornithological history than was indeed the case. The following year, Bob Dickerman took me from Phoenix to Tucson to visit Allan at his home at 113 Olive Avenue, an address etched in my memory and in the annals of Arizona ornithological history (Dickerman 1997). I shall never forget that wonderful visit. Allan and Gale were, by this time, close friends and Allan, like Gale, had a wonderful way of making ornithological neophytes feel like they were contributing to the science. Soon, during the mid-1950s, I drove from Phoenix to Yuma to conduct Christmas Bird Counts with Gale, a unique and memorable experience. Finally, in 1959, I met Lyn Hargrave in the bird range at the University of Arizona while working on an M.S. degree under Joe Marshall. The line of the science of ornithology had encircled me. I was hooked.

The years since then have passed quickly. During the late 1950s, I conducted ornithological work in the poorly known Phoenix area, between farming and spending two years in Military Intelligence. I continued to be encouraged by Gale and sent periodic information to him for inclusion in "Audubon Field Notes," as he continued to edit Arizona records. Allan left Tucson in 1957, a year before I entered the University of Arizona, much to my sorrow. I was finishing PhD studies at the University of Kansas in 1964 when "The Birds of Arizona," was published by the two long-time friends Allan Phillips and Gale Monson, with the "new-comer," Joe Marshall completing the trio. Few of us could match the ornithological brilliance of either Allan Phillips or Joe Marshall. Combined with Gale's attention to detail and life-long penchant for detecting and recording birds, as well as recording Arizona records from dozens of observers over the years, one of the most impressive state avifaunal books for the U.S. resulted.

After Lois and I moved to Tucson from Grand Canyon in 1979, Gale and Sally invited us to their home for dinner and ornithological discussions. Much of the conversation centered around the revised state checklist that Gale and Allan were finishing (Monson and Phillips 1981). Shortly after that we were invited to their home again when Allan came to Tucson for a visit—regrettably, the last time I saw him before his death in 1996.

Unlike many of you, I never had the occasion to spend nights camped out in the field with Gale, or take long expeditions to Mexico and other exotic and wonderful places. The closest I came to that was a visit with Gale, his family, and dog "Phoebe," at their home in Virginia in 1968. Gale took me on a tour of the local birds, orchids, and other incredible natural history entities he had discovered during his years in this "new" place. Gale's influence on me as a scientist and ornithologist has been certain and indelible. Just as the pioneer team of Monson and Phillips played a major role in establishing ornithology as a science in Arizona it played a major role in turning a Phoenix farm boy into a scientist.

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By David J. Griffin

“Best wishes to Dave Griffin, who is an excellent birder and a good friend”

That’s what Gale Monson wrote on the title page of my copy of “The Birds of Arizona” – the masterpiece that Gale co-authored with Allan Phillips and Joe Marshall. In 1994, copies of that book were hard to come by and fetched top dollar at used bookstores. At some point I had asked Gale if he knew of anyone who was willing to sell a copy. He did not, and in few words told me, “keep looking, they come up”. It was many months later when I found a copy in Tucson and paid full price (\$78) – at that time the most expensive book I had ever bought. I asked Gale to sign the book for me and I was honored that he would make such a nice comment on my skills and our friendship. I was 30 years old and Gale was 82 years old.

I was a budding young wildlife biologist working on a research project at the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge west of Ajo, Arizona and studying wildlife use of desert water holes. And lucky for me, I was able to spend about 15 to 20 days per month camped out (living) in the Growler Valley – a vast Sonoran Desert valley most of which was designated as Wilderness. I spent day and night conducting surveys and inventories of all vertebrates in the area: birds, amphibians and reptiles, rodents, and other mammals including rabbits and jackrabbits, bats, and large mammals.

Because of my deep interest for the area, the Refuge Manager at Cabeza Prieta NWR granted me access to all the refuge files. So, when I had hours or days off, I sometimes stayed in Ajo and spent late nights reading the “Refuge Narratives” – the annual reports the refuge would submit to Washington, D.C. I was drawn to Gale’s reports in particular because of his descriptions of places, animals, plants, events, and people from the Cabeza Prieta NWR. Place names like Hummingbird Canyon, Paradise Canyon, Chia Canyon, Bean Canyon stuck in my mind and made me wonder what it must have been like for Gale and others to ride horseback to a remote location, explore and examine the flora and fauna and then apply what they deemed a proper moniker for the place.

At some point and quite out of the blue, I received a phone call from Gale, and I remember not being able to say much to him because after all he was a living legend of mine! – Then of all things I was invited over to his home for ice cream with him and his wife Sally. I accepted the invitation and had a lovely evening visiting with them, but it wasn’t until the following week that I learned from a friend, that this was a sign of acceptance and welcoming by Gale and Sally and to be “invited for ice cream” was like getting the golden ticket to Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory!

Sometime around that first meeting, I began to send Gale weekly or monthly reports of bird and other wildlife sightings from Cabeza Prieta. I would get replies that were educational and prompted me to delve into a finer level of detail with my observations such as “you have not explained why the bird you saw was an Indigo bunting and not a Blue grosbeak”, sometimes critical such as “that record should be thrown on the ash-heap” he told me of a Blackburnian warbler I observed and reported from the central Growler Valley, and sometimes he showered my reports with approval and praise such as “that’s the first breeding record for Burrowing owl from the Cabeza Prieta”.

Gale gave me encouragement to remain curious and study as many elements of the natural world as I could, which allowed me to gain first-hand experience with the ecology of and interconnectedness of desert ecosystems. I realized that Gale was a Naturalist and I felt that was what my calling was as well. Gale taught by example both directly with his critiques of my observations and indirectly through my reading of his historic records and reports. At that time, I felt that I was a conduit to a time and place where Gale didn’t visit anymore, yet for which he still had great fondness and compassion. For me, Gale was a conduit to a time and place that didn’t exist anymore. In fact, partly for those reasons in 1997, I chose to reinstate the Sierra Pinta-Cabeza Prieta Christmas Bird Count after it had gone undone for 10 years.

Gale started the count in 1957 and hadn’t participated on it since the 1980s. I wanted to go to a new place on the refuge and experience what Gale might have back in the 1950s or 1980s. I instantly felt connected to the Sierra Pinta and Heart Tank Canyon and continued to operate the count for 5 years. Annually (usually on New Year’s Eve), I was accompanied by friends and family on the 8 mile, nighttime back pack into the wonderful Sierra Pinta. One year my 12-year-old nephew was visiting from Ohio and made the long trek into the base of the mountains. After sleeping under the stars beside Heart Tank Canyon, he rolled up his bedroll in the early morning and while doing so found a tiny obsidian arrowhead right under his sleeping bag! He held it tightly and examined it, and I shared with him that it was special treat because multiple visitors had camped on that very spot for many, many years (perhaps going back to Father Kino?) – I told him that my old friend Gale Monson likely slept on the very spot on more than one occasion. Yet none of those visitors found the arrowhead (or at least none of them took it). I told him that Gale was on that spot 50 years ago. My nephew held that arrowhead in the up-turned palm of his hand, admired it up close to his face, his eyes as big as saucers, and then gently placed it back in the granite sand where he had found it, leaving it for the next adventurer or explorer to discover.

Gale and his work helped open my eyes to the desert and its inhabitants, to wilderness, and to our place in it. I was able to use his records, his influence and the connection I felt that we shared to a place we both equally and intimately knew and loved. In later years after moving to Las Cruces, I made it a point to call Gale a few times each year (especially for his birthday), and whenever I was in Albuquerque I enjoyed visiting for an hour or so and learning how he was spending his twilight years (at some point he had begun re-reading all his favorite books). I’ll miss Gale as the years go by, but his influence and inspiration will always stay with me. I’m happy to have known him and I remain honored to be called his “good friend”.

David J. Griffin is a wildlife biologist and naturalist and lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where he operates his own consulting company. David has studied the flora and fauna of the Sonoran, Mojave, and Chihuahuan Deserts for nearly 20 years and also has work experience in coastal southern California, and Arctic tundra. David has been an active member of the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society where he has been President, since 2008, a position that allows him to educate and expose people to the natural world. He has organized the Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count for 5 years and coordinates about 60 volunteers, making the count one of the largest in the southwest in terms of number of participants. David is returning to graduate school to begin a study of the Gray vireo in southern New Mexico – a species that he and Gale shared a special affinity for, because of its regular occurrence during winter in the Sierra Pinta.

By Troy Corman

Although birding in Arizona since 1980, Gale and I never crossed paths in the field. Actually, he and I never personally met, and I envy all those that shared field adventures with him. I did know of him however from reviewing his many articulate writings and numerous bird reports which bore his name. It was not until summer 1993, the first field season of the Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas, that I contacted Gale. While surveying in early June of that year along the magnificent San Pedro River near Dudleyville, I was fortunate to discover a Streak-backed Oriole pair with the female just initiating nest construction. Since this was the first known nesting activity for this oriole not only for Arizona, but the United States, I knew it was significant. I also knew its rarity status would also attract a lot of local and national attention. Thus, I made the decision to keep this nesting effort fairly quiet to give the orioles the best chance of success. I contacted Gale the following day as I knew he had a keen interest in the species having observed this rare oriole in prior winters a few miles to the south at Cook's Lake. He hesitantly asked if I would not mind him visiting the site himself and at the time I was thrilled that he felt my observation was worthy of his time. Although now thinking about it, he may also simply have felt the need to first confirm that the orioles' identity was correct! He visited the area the morning after I spoke to him, and he sent me a note of his observations. This is where I soon realized how observant and meticulous Gale was in the field and how much I shamefully neglected to record.

We continued to monitor the orioles' breeding activity almost weekly through the summer with he (and others) visiting during the week and I (and others) one morning nearly every weekend until early August. He forwarded me his thorough notes (all clearly typed) every few weeks and strongly encouraged me to prepare a summary article for publication. Never having done this before, I asked that he co-author it with me and I was honored when he agreed. As an endless procrastinator for tasks that I am unsure how to proceed I was slow in initiating the preparation of the article. I eventually received a letter from Gale in early March 1994 noting that since he had not heard from me in a while he assumed I was too busy to get this started, so he took the initiative and prepared a rough draft which he included for my consideration. He encouraged me once again with a quick jab of "time is a wastin'" and asked if there was anything he could do to expedite things. I received yet

another gentle push from him the following month with a handwritten note, “maybe you are like me – you need reminding sometimes. Might we get this off the ground soon?” His persistence paid off and my first published professional article was run in the Notes section of *Western Birds* in 1995.

Through this learning process, I gained so much admiration and respect for Gale that in December 2001 I contacted him in Albuquerque and noted I would be honored once again if he would please consider preparing the Foreword for the Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas. With his extensive knowledge and many decades of experience with the avifauna across the state, combined with his wonderful perspective and eloquent writing skills, I felt he was the only one for the job. I was thrilled when Gale responded that he would accept, but he humbly included that it was “with a proviso that if you do not like it you can feel free to eschew it.” As if that would ever happen!

In a way, I suspect Gale influenced my life more than anyone else that I unfortunately never had the good fortune to personally meet. He was a true inspiration...

Troy Corman - President, Arizona Field Ornithologists

By Tom Gatz

I first met Gale Monson after a presentation he gave to the Maricopa Audubon Society not long after I arrived in Arizona in the spring of 1981 from North Dakota, Gale’s birthplace and where he first began to study birds. I knew of him, of course, from his book *The Birds of Arizona*. This was the very first book I read, from cover to cover, after arriving in Phoenix during my first few nights at my temporary lodging in a sketchy motel room on East Van Buren Street. I borrowed the copy from the Environmental Division of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the agency I worked for at the time. I was hired, along with several other biologists, to help evaluate and mitigate the environmental impacts from the massive CAP water-development project. At the Audubon meeting, Gale signed my copy of the then new 1981 edition of his book, *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Arizona*. I still have my tattered copy of his ‘orange book’. I often came across his name in the ornithological literature of Arizona. I noted that it was Gale who collected the first authenticated European Starling specimen for Arizona in Yuma County in November of 1946 and, four months later, saw a flock of “about 40” European Starlings from a moving Santa Fe passenger railway train in Navajo County.

Our paths crossed at infrequent intervals over the years. Marty Jakle, Rich Glinski, Gale and I co-authored the 1985 *Western Birds* publication documenting the first nesting records of the White-tailed Kite in Arizona.

In 1984, Barb Larson and I were traveling by ourselves for three weeks in East Africa in a rented jeep. While staying at a lodge on Mount Kenya, we encountered a tour group of American birders on the roof of the lodge getting a better view of the treetop bird species. Barb noted that the group of birders scurried back and forth on the flat roof like so many Sanderlings on the beach as each exotic bird name was called out. Someone shouted, “Green Pigeon!” but I could not locate it in the

dense, green foliage. Behind me, an older gentleman wearing a safari-style pith helmet said in a soft voice "Take a look, I have it in my scope." After seeing the pigeon, I took another look at the man. A glance at the barrel of his spotting-scope confirmed my identification. Embossed in raised letters on a piece of plastic tape adhered to the scope was the name 'Gale Monson'. Always in awe of him, I think I fumbled for words and said something lame like "Dr. Monson, I presume?" Several days later we met up again with his birding party at the Lake Baringo lodge. It was Barb's 35th birthday and I had written ahead and asked for a birthday cake with her name on it. Due to a mix up in communication, and much to Barb's chagrin, on the cake it said, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY THOMAS GATZ". Barb shared 'her' cake with Gale and the other birders. They all wished her a happy birthday, despite my name being on the cake.

An invitation to his home in Tucson for an evening slide show (perhaps the Africa trip?) during an Audubon convention in town at the time was sadly cancelled after Gale and Sally's home was burglarized. In written correspondence in 1988, Gale encouraged me to continue surveys to explore my speculation about the possibility of Boreal Owls hiding somewhere in the high elevations of Arizona and went so far as to tell me he made room for my rambling notes on this elusive species in the precious little space left in his burgeoning files. We never found any.

To mitigate for wetland habitat lost when the new dam at Lake Pleasant was constructed, the Bureau of Reclamation acquired and protected Cook's Lake, one of Gale's regular stomping grounds. One morning at Cook's lake I was imitating the call of the Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. After a few minutes, I heard some rustling in the trees. Who emerged from the trees but Gale Monson. Neither of us admitted that we had likely both mistaken one another for pygmy-owls and, perhaps a little embarrassed, we instead diverted the conversation to other bird sightings of the morning.

I think the last time I saw Gale was at the Phoenix Zoo in 1998 during the authors' book signing for *The Raptors of Arizona*. I had recently transferred back to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Gale's former agency. He had impressively authored six chapters in the raptor book. My modest contribution was only one. The last time I saw Gale in the field was when we bumped into him on the way back from the Mule Shoe Ranch when Barb and I stopped to search for a reported White-rumped Sandpiper at Wilcox Playa. None of us was successful in finding the sandpiper that day but I remember being happy to see Gale again.