

## **In Memoriam: Robin M. Carter, 1945–2008**

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**Dennis M. Forsythe**

*Department of Biology, The Citadel, 171 Moultrie St.,  
Charleston, SC 29409*



Robin Carter, spring 2008

On November 1, 2008, Robin Carter died peacefully in his home in Columbia, SC after a battle with kidney cancer. His death leaves a major emptiness in the birding community of the Carolinas because of his vast knowledge of birds and bird-finding, and his enthusiasm for sharing this knowledge with others. I think nothing demonstrates Robin's personality more than a short review he did of Bill Evans's sound cassette of nocturnal thrush calls (*Chat* 54(2):31–32). In this review, Robin shows his enthusiasm for new information about birds, especially bird vocalizations. This interest in bird vocalizations led to his later passion for sound recording. The review also shows his interest in sharing this information with others, an interest that he also showed by leading field trips. And the review shows his sense of humor and congeniality, traits which made him such an ideal field companion.

Robin was born November 15, 1945 in Miami Beach, FL. He spent his childhood in Virginia and later in Ohio, where he graduated from Euclid High School in 1963. He graduated from Harvard College in 1967 and received a master's degree in anthropology in 1969 from Duke University and a doctorate in anthropology in 1974, also from Duke University. He served in the United States Army during the Vietnam era.

Carter's wife, Caroline Eastman, is credited with encouraging Robin to start birding by suggesting they go on an Audubon field trip in Massachusetts. She said "he found the woodcocks enchanting". This field trip started his lifelong passion for birds.

Robin first became acquainted with the Carolina Bird Club while he was at Duke University. He became more active when he and Caroline moved to Columbia, SC in 1985, attending meetings, leading field trips, being chair of the SC Bird Records Committee, vice-president and finally president of the Carolina Bird Club (1989–1991).

Robin loved birding big days and held the record for several states, including Florida and South Carolina; he also won the out-of-state trophy in the first Great Texas Birding Classic. Robin had the intellectual ability to visualize and plan these routes in detail, a trait I attributed to his facility with languages and that he spent most of his working career as a computer systems analyst and programmer. I think that Robin was happiest when he was scouting for a big day. And he was especially pleased when his scouting paid off, such as the occasion when at 2 AM on a calm morning in late April on a hilltop in Chester Co. we actually heard the staked-out Barn Owl call and the Spring Peeper-like flight calls of Swainson's Thrushes flying overhead as a bonus. Robin also loved Christmas Bird Counts, and he initiated or compiled several including the Columbia, Congaree National Park, and, most recently, the Pinewood counts. Robin loved county birding and was, I believe, the first person to see 100 species in each of South Carolina's 46 counties. At the time of his death he was also working on seeing 150 species in each county (see <http://www.countybirds-sc.com/>). Actually, Robin just loved being out looking at birds, and I think one of his favorite expressions was something like "if you want to see birds you have to get out and look for them".

All of the above experiences gave Robin a unique perspective on birds in South Carolina, which he used to write the annual Spring and Fall Migration Day Count Summaries for *The Chat* (1993–1999). From 2001 through 2008 he wrote the South Carolina Region Christmas Bird Count summaries for *American Birds*. Robin's birding experiences in South Carolina led to his publishing *Finding Birds in South Carolina*, an exquisite birding guide to birding areas in all 46 counties. Although it is long out-of-print, Caroline Eastman hopes to reprint it with minor changes as a book-on-demand. Robin was working on a new bird-finding guide to be published as a book-on-demand. He envisioned the book to take two years and the final product to have about 250 sites and to run to about 500 pages. Robin did some of these site descriptions in 2005–2007 and they are published on the Carolina Bird

Club website (see <http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/sites/SC/>). His untimely death robbed us of what would have been an exceptional bird-finding guide.

Robin was a passionate sound recordist who could often be found in the early morning recording bird songs in a quiet natural area. His bird recordings from the Congaree National Park and the Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve are beautiful and of professional quality. Robin had a special relationship with the Congaree National Park, leading walks there and doing research. One of the products of this relationship was an annotated checklist of the birds of Congaree National Park, which Robin published in *The Chat* 69(1):1–28, 2005.

Besides the Carolina Bird Club, Robin was a member and officer in the Columbia Audubon Society and the Friends of the Congaree National Park. He was a founder of the Santee Birding and Nature Festival. He led field trips to all parts of South Carolina including the Warblers before Work sponsored by the Columbia Audubon Society and the Dawn Chorus walks at the Congaree National Park. And he was always willing to cheerfully share his knowledge with others, visiting birders and locals alike.

Robin Carter's life exemplified the Wisdom of Buddha: "Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle..." which was read at his memorial service December 28, 2008 at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Columbia, SC. Robin Carter is survived by his wife of 40 years, Caroline Merriam Eastman of Columbia, SC; his sisters, Patty Senter of Beaufort, NC and Janice Evans of Donnelsville, OH; and his brother John of Oneonta, NY.

## **Selected Ornithological Publications of Robin M. Carter**

### **Books:**

Carter, Robin M. 1993. *Finding Birds in South Carolina*. Univ. South Carolina Press, Columbia.

### **Articles:**

Carter, R. 1999. Birding Interstate-95 through central South Carolina. *Birding* 31(4):346–357.

Carter, R. M. 2005. An annotated checklist of the birds of Congaree National Park. *Chat* 69(1):1–28.

Carter, R., L. Glover and T. Kalbach. 1990. Warbling Vireo at Santee NWR, South Carolina. *Chat* 54(2):41.

Carter, R. M. and C. M. Eastman. 1998. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper observed in Orangeburg County, South Carolina. The first sight record for South Carolina. *Chat* 62(1):38–40.

Carter, R. and C. M. Eastman. 1998. White-winged Crossbill observed in Richland County, South Carolina: First record for South Carolina. *Chat* 62(3):157–158.

**Book Reviews:**

- Carter, R. 1990. *Review of* Nocturnal flight calls of migrating thrushes by Bill Evans. Sound cassette. Chat 54(2):31–32.
- Carter, R. M. 2003. *Review of* Annotated checklist of Georgia birds by Giff Beaton, Paul W. Sykes Jr. and John W. Parrish, Jr., Occ. Pub. No. 14, Ga. Ornith. Soc. Chat 67(3):123–124.

**Summary Articles:**

- Carter, Robin M. 1993. 1992 North American Migration Day Count in South Carolina. Chat 57(1):1–6.
- Carter, R. M. 1994. 1993 North American Migration Day Count in North Carolina. Chat 58(2):38–44.
- Carter, R. M. 1994. 1993 North American Migration Day Count in South Carolina. Chat 58(2):44–52.
- Carter, R. M. 1995. 1994 North American Migration Day Count in North Carolina. Chat 59(2):47–56.
- Carter, R. M. 1995. 1994 North American Migration Day Count in South Carolina. Chat 59(2):56–67.
- Carter, R. M. 1996. 1995 North American Migration Count in South Carolina. Chat 60(2):44–58.
- Carter, R. M. 1996. Fall 1995 North American Migration Count in South Carolina. Chat 60(4):129–136.
- Carter, R. M. 1998. 1997 Spring North American Migration Count in South Carolina. Chat 62(2):75–99.
- Carter, R. M. 1999. Fall 1997 North American Migration Count in South Carolina. Chat 63(1):1–15.
- Carter, R. M. 1999. Spring 1998 North American Migration Count in South Carolina. Chat 63(3):123–138.
- Carter, R. M. 1999. Fall 1998 North American Migration Count in South Carolina. Chat 63(4):167–178.
- Carter, R. 2001. South Carolina regional summary *in* The 101st Christmas Bird Count, 2000–2001. *American Birds* 55:621–622.
- Carter, R. 2002. South Carolina regional summary *in* The 102nd Christmas Bird Count, 2001–2002. *American Birds* 56:55–56.
- Carter, R. 2003. South Carolina regional summary *in* The 103rd Christmas Bird Count 2002–2003, *American Birds* 57:67–68.
- Carter, R. 2004. South Carolina regional summary *in* The 104th Christmas Bird Count 2003–2004, *American Birds* 58:69–70.
- Carter, R. 2005. South Carolina regional summary *in* The 105th Christmas Bird Count 2004–2005, *American Birds* 59:66–67.
- Carter, R. 2006. South Carolina regional summary *in* The 106th Christmas Bird Count 2005–2006, *American Birds* 60:67–68.
- Carter, R. 2007. South Carolina regional summary *in* The 107th Christmas Bird Count 2006–2007, *American Birds* 61:65–66.
- Carter, R. 2008. South Carolina regional summary *in* The 108th Christmas Bird Count 2007–2008, *American Birds* 62:65–66.