

## A Tribute to Rudolph Frank Stocek, 1937–2018

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Rudolph (Rudy) Frank Stocek, aged 81, “the eagle man” of New Brunswick (Figure 1), passed away on 2 December 2018 at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital, Fredericton, New Brunswick following a stroke. Rudy was born 5 June 1937 in Woodside, New York, just south of the Bronx, even then one of the most densely populated regions of the United States. However, summers at his grandparent’s farm in Millhurst, New Jersey, left Rudy with a deep love of the outdoors and a fascination with the natural history of the trees, fish, birds, and other wildlife that populated the surrounding waterways and woodlands.

The north woods beckoned, and Rudy set off to the University of Maine at Orono, graduating in 1959 with a B.Sc. in Wildlife Management and a minor in Forestry. During his undergraduate summers he worked for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Game, undertaking stream and lake surveys, tagging fish, and reading fish scales. Athletic and active, Rudy played football and boxed in university. His athleticism would serve him well as both a field biologist and an instructor in wildlife management.

With a solid, practical, introduction to fisheries management during his summers, it probably seemed natural to pursue fisheries science at the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph, Ontario, then affiliated with the University of Toronto. Rudy completed his M.Sc. in 1962 under the supervision of Dr. Hugh R. McCrimmon, a committed fish culturist, now remembered for his volume on carp in Canada (McCrimmon 1968). Although Rudy later became best known for his work on raptors, his interest in freshwater fish never left him. He designed and taught the first ichthyology course offered at the University of New Brunswick, and he reported the addition of Muskellunge (*Esox masquinoy*) to the Saint John River system. Even as he approached 70,

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FIGURE 1. Rudy Frank Stocek, 1937–2018. Photograph taken as part of a composite for the 1997 Maritime Forest Ranger School graduating class. Photo: J. Cummings.

he documented the occurrence of Fat Head Minnow (*Pimephales promelas*) in New Brunswick.

Brief stints as a wildlife biologist with the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (1960–1961), and as Manager of the Tinicum Wildlife Preserve, Philadelphia (1961–1965), followed his M.Sc. In 1965 Rudy entered a Ph.D. program at the University of Western Ontario to study growth and development in young Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*). However, his marriage in 1960 (to Arlene, *nee* Wellhauser), and the two children that followed (Rudy Jr. born 1963, Lehanne born 1964), made a 1968 job opportunity in New Brunswick simply

too good to pass up. Rudy and family moved east to the Maritimes, where Rudy took a position as an Instructor and Fish and Wildlife Biologist with the Maritime Forest Ranger School (MFRS; since 2003 the Maritime College of Forest Technology). Opened in 1946 as a co-operative venture of the New Brunswick–Nova Scotia governments and the forest industry, at its establishment the role of the MFRS was to re-train and integrate returning World War II veterans. However, by the time Rudy arrived in New Brunswick, MFRS was catering to students from wide and varied backgrounds.

By 1973, Rudy's ability to inspire students interested in pursuing careers that required a knowledge of fish and wildlife biology had become evident. From then until his retirement in 2002, Rudy designed, directed, and with other instructors, delivered, the MFRS wildlife technology program as his "day job" to hundreds of young men and women intent on becoming forest rangers, wildlife protection officers, fish and wildlife technicians, park rangers, and wardens. But for one with Rudy's energy and curiosity, teaching alone was not enough. As an independent fish and wildlife biologist, he also accepted contracts from various federal and provincial government departments and private environmental consulting firms to investigate a variety of wildlife-related issues in the Maritimes. A 1982 contract from the New Brunswick Environmental Assessment Branch that identified and assessed more than 90 environmentally sensitive areas in southern New Brunswick was an important precursor to current work by government and land trusts now intent on setting aside habitat in New Brunswick for conservation purposes. In the broader context, and in a province dominated by industrial forestry, Rudy's research and teaching can be seen as part of a rising tide of concern for North American wildlife and the environment that became evident in the 1970s. Until 1968, New Brunswick was one of the heaviest DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) users in North America, a pesticide identified as a major cause of raptor declines across the continent and one that appears to have had impacts on aquatic ecosystems in the province that are still evident (Kurek *et al.* 2019).

With the establishment of the *New Brunswick Endangered Species Act* in 1976 (superseded by the *New Brunswick Species at Risk Act* in 2012) a short list of species was accorded protection. Although Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) was assigned regionally endangered status, there were limited data to work from.

There are two sources of Bald Eagles occupying New Brunswick. A resident population breeds in the province (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus washingtonien-*

*sis*), while immature birds fledged in the southeastern United States (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus leucocephalus*) disperse northward into New Brunswick in the late summer. In the early 1970s the impact of pesticide use in the United States was evident in New Brunswick, with a reduced number of southern birds available to disperse northward. Although legendary New Brunswick wildlife biologist Bruce Wright (1912–1975) had identified the Saint John River estuary as critical summer habitat for Bald Eagles fledged south of the province (Wright 1953), historically the species was never a common breeding bird in New Brunswick. A mere 12–15 pairs nested in the province by the early 1970s.

Accordingly, Rudy was contracted by the New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources to undertake regular Bald Eagle surveys in New Brunswick. This was not Rudy's first foray into raptor research. In 1973 Rudy had been engaged by the Canadian Wildlife Service to assess the status and reproductive success of Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) and Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), along with Bald Eagle, across the Maritimes. Rudy would continue annual New Brunswick Bald Eagle surveys for the next 25 years. When funds for aerial surveys became difficult to secure, undeterred, Rudy was able to take advantage of members of the Fredericton Flying Club and the 422nd Tactical Helicopter Squadron out of Canadian Forces Base Gagetown. In addition to determining numbers of breeding pairs in New Brunswick, Rudy also collected information on distribution, nesting success, habitat requirements, and winter feeding patterns and developed management guidelines for individual Bald Eagle nesting sites (Figure 2).

With a growing interest in the problems of raptor conservation in North America, Rudy soon found himself presenting his findings, both for Bald Eagles and Ospreys, at meetings of raptor specialists across North America. As an experienced educator and an engaging speaker, Rudy also lectured widely on Bald Eagle in the Maritimes to regional audiences. For the media, he became the go-to-guy for expert opinion on a bird with a high public profile, and huge significance to the Indigenous community. Rudy went on to write the Bald Eagle account for the iconic federal government Hinterland Who's Who series (Stocek 1992) and in 2006 summarized his decades of research on the bird in a book that ultimately received an independent publishers book award.

While best known for his work on raptors, Bald Eagles in particular, Rudy also found time to work and publish on other Maritime wildlife, including Common Loon (*Gavia immer*), the elusive Cougar (*Felis concolor*), and Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bi-*



**FIGURE 2.** Rudy banding a Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nestling in southwestern New Brunswick, circa 1978. Photo: unknown.

color). A useful and well-received field guide to New Brunswick trees and shrubs in winter helped fulfil his commitment to teaching, but was also made

available to a wider general audience (Figure 3). A mainstay of provincial government committees dealing with species of conservation concern, in 1995 Rudy received the Career Achievement Award of the Atlantic Society of Fish and Wildlife Biologists and in 2010 an Award of Professional Excellence from the University of Maine Wildlife Program. Outgoing and gregarious, Rudy somehow still found time to play tuba and accordion in five local bands, stay active as a judge and organizer for the New Brunswick and Canadian gymnastics communities (including judging at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal), and help manage the local curling club!

Today, as the biodiversity crisis deepens, there is a growing chorus calling for the revitalization of natural history (Schmidly 2005; Nature News 2014; Tewksbury *et al.* 2014). In the best possible way, Rudy was an “old school” wildlife biologist who never left natural history behind, even as he upped his game after graduate school with courses in computer programming, teaching and administration, and media communications. A first-rate field naturalist, Rudy could identify trees and shrubs, and knew his fish, his birds, and his mammals. But his second love, after Arlene, his wife of 58 years, was the Bald Eagle. Although recent research has documented precipitous declines in numbers of birds of many species in North America (Rosenberg *et al.* 2019), Rudy had the satisfaction of watching New Brunswick’s Bald Eagle populations, both migratory and resident, recover and rise dramatically, and know that his work played a role in this. By the time the 1986–1990



**FIGURE 3.** Rudy with a Maritime Forest Ranger School dendrology class in 2000, two years before his retirement. His 1991 winter field guide to trees and shrubs continues to be used in wildlife and forestry programs. Photo: Maritime School of Forest Technology.

Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas had been completed, 40 pairs of Bald Eagles were confirmed nesting in New Brunswick (Erskine 1992), and numbers have continued to rise. An astounding 92 pairs of Bald Eagles nested in New Brunswick during the second atlas period (2006–2010; Stewart *et al.* 2015). Bald Eagle populations in New Brunswick are now recognized as secure. There have been few success stories for North American wildlife since Europeans arrived on the continent over 400 years ago, but the recovery of the Bald Eagle is one of them. That recovery is testament to the vision and the hard work of many, Rudy among them.

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