

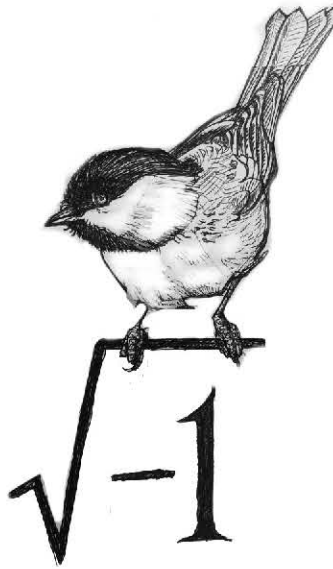
## A Memorial Tribute to Gerald R. Rising, Senior: January 15, 1927–December 9, 2022

By Wayne K. Gall, Ph.D.

**I**t was a poignant moment as I presented this memorial tribute at Tiff Nature Preserve on January 23, 2023—the occasion of Gerry Rising’s “Celebration of Life.” For it was at Tiff, nearly 40 years earlier, that I met my dear friend, Gerry Rising. He was birding, and I was tasked with giving birders (and other visitors) a positive experience as the Museum’s first administrator/naturalist of Tiff, from 1983 through 1987.

In a textbook example of cognitive dissonance, I was simultaneously gratified and saddened when Gerry emailed me this past August 4 and, in his usual gentlemanly manner wrote, “...with no right to ask, I would like you to consider writing something about me when I die.” To that email he attached his most recent curriculum vita and natural history background. My response that day was as follows: “... yes, I would be honored to write a memorial tribute to you, although I hate to think about the circumstance that would cause me to do that.” No doubt Gerry was feeling the drumbeat of his own mortality. . . and, well, there we were on January 23, 2023.

Before continuing, I must relate that Gerry and I had many interests in common. We both loved outdoor experiences of all kinds, such as hiking, backpacking, wilderness canoeing, birding, nature study . . . sharing with others whatever knowledge we had gleaned in our respective existences . . . and we had a disdain for politicians whose politics did not align with our own. Gerry smiled regularly, he laughed easily, and had a considerable sense of humor. As an example, we were both huge fans of “The Far Side” cartoon series by Gary Larson. Gerry devoted 11 of his “Nature Watch” columns in 1995 to “The Far Side.” Gerry compiled representative responses to his on-line survey of scientists from around the world who he had asked to identify their favorite cartoons from the series. Closer to home, it was Gerry’s original idea to assemble selected cartoons from “The Far Side” into a visual presentation, which inspired me to do the same. Thanks to Gerry’s creativity, I derived immense pleasure from presenting “The Far Side of Nature” and a spinoff I created, “The Far Side of Rela-



Top, a drawing of Gerry Rising and, bottom, of his twin passions—birds and math—by Christy Domino, the artist whose work graced Gerry’s columns in *Nature Preserves*.

tionships,” as PowerPoint programs. If the audience laughter-meter is any indication, I do believe hundreds of persons in our respective audiences enjoyed them as well!

Gerry’s sense of humor had one deficiency, however: he had no use for The Three Stooges! When I told him of my guilty pleasure of owning the complete DVD collection of The Three Stooges’ 190 short films produced by Columbia Pictures from 1934 through 1959, he would give me that sideways glance, and mutter in a disgusted tone, “The Three Stooges!” Implicitly, he was imparting the message, why the hell would you waste time watching The Three Stooges when you could be writing books like *Program Your Calculator* or *Statistics by Example* in four volumes? Yes, Gerry sacrificed binge-watching The Three Stooges to write those actual books!

I will endeavor to relate to you a sense of Gerry the person, including his background and training, his professional accomplishments, and the enormous breadth of his contributions to the community in Western New York and beyond. To this I will add my personal experiences with Gerry over the past 40 years.

**G**erry was born January 15, 1927, in Rochester, New York. Thus, he would have turned 96 this past January 15, 2023. Gerry had one sibling—his brother, Vernon, five years older—and Gerry referred to him simply as Vern. Gerry’s “Nature Watch” column in *The Buffalo News* dated January 20, 1997, was entitled, “A Brother.” In that column, Gerry wrote that Vern was very fond of turtles, and that when Vern was a boy, he always had one as a pet. Having just turned 70 years of age five days before that 1997 column was published, Gerry related a highlight of that milestone birthday:

“One of the nicest events of that day was receiving his [Vern’s] thoughtful note of salutations. However, in it he wrote: ‘The day you arrived was a day of sorrow with the demise of my turtle, Magellan, who had crawled under the kitchen stove.’”

Gerry then went on to explain the influence that Vern had



upon him:

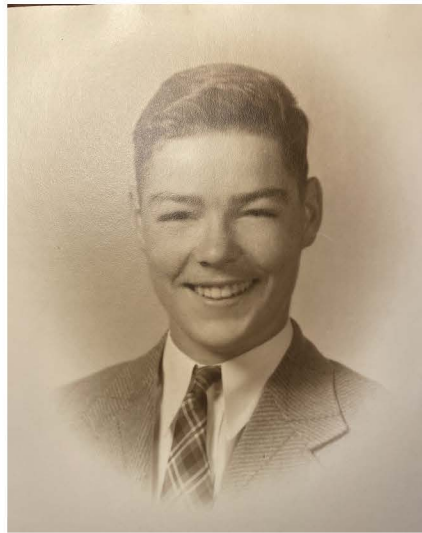
“My own interest in nature derived from my brother’s, but it has never equaled his intensity. Five years younger, I begged him to join his hikes, to look at his insect and wildflower collections, to have one of his pets. I followed his progress through the Boy Scout ranks until he earned his Eagle badge. But I have only recently begun to understand his approach to these activities. I have too often treated nature study as a challenge: learning more and more about birds, trees, flowers, insects, and so on and on. I now realize that my brother never approached nature that way; instead, he simply enjoys whatever comes to pass.

It doesn't matter that it is the dozenth ladybug he has seen that day. He still gives it his full attention. Only recently have I come to see that what I used to think was boring can be more interesting and satisfying than my own frantic dashing about.

It has taken seven decades to learn that lesson from my brother, but I think that I have finally got it—well, almost.”

Raised in the Rochester suburb of Brighton, Gerry attended the highly-ranked Brighton Public Schools. Known in family circles for his considerable intelligence—a family member once commented that Gerry was ‘Mensa-plus,’ in reference to the oldest high-IQ society—he graduated from high school in three years. In 1944, he was accepted into the V-12 program in the US Navy, completing three years of college in two years. He then fulfilled his active-duty obligation to the Navy in 1946 and 1947 as communication officer and assistant navigator in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, at the rank of Lieutenant. Gerry then returned to the University of Rochester where he completed a bachelor’s degree in English in 1948 and a master’s degree in education in 1951. During his college years, Gerry was editor of the student newspaper, and, according to his son, Gerry, Junior, this is where he “got the writing bug.”

From 1948 to 1960, Gerry was a mathematics teacher and department chair at New York State high schools in Brighton, Greece, Johnson City, and Warsaw. He also



Gerry Rising, probably as a high school student, circa early 1940s. Photo courtesy of Gerry Rising, Junior.



Gerry Rising at his desk, possibly a yearbook photo, during the period he was a high school math teacher, 1948-1960. Photo courtesy of Gerry Rising, Junior.



Gerry Rising, left, with daughter Susan and son Gerry, Junior, circa 1963. Photo courtesy of Susan Kelch via Dave O'Donnell.

coached football during at least some of this time. In addition, at the end of this 12-year period, Gerry was a lecturer at the University of Rochester from 1958 to 1960. He then transitioned to the Norwalk, Connecticut, public schools, where he was mathematics K-12 coordinator from 1960 through 1964. Somehow, he again found time for college teaching as a lecturer at New York University from 1960 to 1961 and at the University of Connecticut in 1963. A multi-tasker par excellence, he also completed a Ph.D. in mathematics education at New York University in 1965.

From 1964 to 1966, Gerry served as assistant director of the Minnesota School Mathematics and Science Teaching Center and as a research associate in the Mathematics Department at the University of Minnesota.

In 1966, Gerry’s career led him to the State University of New York at Buffalo, Department of Learning and Instruction. During his tenure at UB, Gerry received three significant awards: the SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence (1981); the UB Distinguished Teaching Professor (1986); and the SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor (1986). Gerry became an *emeritus* professor in October 1992. Gerry’s crowning academic achievement was as co-founder and co-director of the UB Gifted Math Program with Professor *Emerita* Betty Krist in 1979. Thousands of high school students have been the beneficiary of this innovative program, enhancing their skills in mathematics in preparation for college study and enabling them to earn as many as 22 college credit-hours over the six-year program.

In reference to Gerry’s three awards enumerated above, Betty Krist commented, “SUNY does not present those awards simply for showing-up.” In addition, Gerry was elected to the New York State Mathematics Teachers Hall of Fame (2014) and received the Science Teachers Association of New York State (Western Section) Service Award (also in 2014).

Regarding his mathematics-related publications, Gerry’s natural history vita references two popular books, 13 textbooks, over 90 articles, and 200 reviews and abstracts. Gerry contributed articles to *New York State Science Teachers Journal*. Betty Krist also advised that another award worth mentioning is the certificate of appreciation Gerry received from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics as lead author and member of the writing team for *Principles*



and *Standards for School Mathematics* (1989). According to Betty, this set of three books is still influencing curricula, evaluation, and professional development of mathematics teaching and learning in grades pre-K to 12, *worldwide*. His publication record and presentations at state, regional, and national meetings of math educators indicate that Gerry did indeed have a productive and impactful academic career.

Outside of his academic work, Gerry's favorite pastime was birding. This activity engrossed him since the age of 10, when he accompanied his older brother on a bird hike, at a time when Vern was a Boy Scout working on his bird study merit badge. Gerry's regular birding partner since the early-to-mid-1980s was Mike Galas. Over the last 40 years, Gerry and Mike missed very few of the Buffalo Ornithological Society (BOS)'s April, May, and October bird counts and participated in multiple local Christmas counts, including a few where I had the pleasure of joining them. In fact, one of the hallmarks of Gerry was his kindness and consideration to others in ornithological pursuits; he welcomed new people to join them if they expressed an interest, no matter if their expertise was as a beginning birder or not. Dick Collins joined Gerry and Mike in those early years (plus Dean DiTomasso one year) in winning five consecutive Little Iddybidy Birdathons before these counts were discontinued.

Gerry and Mike also went out on innumerable Big Day and Big Year birding outings. Mike Galas estimates that probably three-quarters of his life-bird sightings were made in the company of Gerry. The last birding trip Gerry took was this past November 15, when Mike drove him to the Lewiston docks, where the partners observed a limpkin—a tropical marsh bird usually seen in the US in Florida—a first for New York State and a fitting end to Gerry's remarkable 85 years as a birder.

Another regular birding companion to Gerry was Chris Hollister. Chris advised me that between 2003 and 2022, he and Gerry shared 474 eBird checklists. Since not all of their birding trips are recorded in eBird, the 474 joint trips represent a conservative measure of many happy years of birding together.

Gerry became an associate member of the BOS in 1968 and an active member in 1988. Gerry's contributions to the BOS and the wider ornithological community were considerable.

Besides serving on the BOS Council from 1994 to 1995 and 2000 to 2002, Gerry wrote "The Month" column from 1989 to 2013 in the BOS's monthly newsletter, *The Prothonotary*. Gerry also systematically compiled BOS annual count records for birds of western New York and adjacent Ontario that BOS had gathered from the 1920s to 1999. In addition, Gerry assisted in the analysis of first spring arrival dates of 93 species of migrants from the BOS's database covering the period from 1967 to 2008. This latter analysis was the basis for the 2011 paper he co-authored with Robert DeLeon and Emma DeLeon in *The Condor*, Volume 113, Issue 4: 915-923, "Influence of Climate Change on Avian Migrants' First Arrival Dates." This article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1525/cond.2011.100223>



Gerry Rising (right) and Mike Galas (left) birding at Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, May 24, 2022. Photo by Mark Nichter.



Gerry Rising speaking at "Rally to Save Times Beach Nature Preserve," Paul MacClennan Overlook, Times Beach, on September 27, 2014. Photo by Jay Burney.



Chris Hollister (L) and Gerry Rising (R) at a Toronto Blue Jays "home" game, Sahlen Field, Buffalo, July 1, 2021. Photo by Chris Hollister.

Jay Burney, executive director of the Pollinator Conservation Association and international chair for Birds on the Niagara, shared with me that Gerry worked behind the scenes with the late Robert Andrie in conducting bird surveys and compiling avian records at Times Beach as well as along the Niagara River corridor. Jay chaired the group whose work resulted in the designation of the Niagara River Corridor Globally Significant Important Bird Area (IBA). Jay worked with Bob and Gerry, who prepared the proposal for that first international IBA for the Niagara River corridor. This team achieved double success: the proposal for the Niagara River IBA was accepted in 1995, and Times Beach officially was designated a nature preserve in 2002—and it was the background work by Bob Andrie and Gerry that helped land the arguments for Jay's group.

Before coming to Buffalo, Gerry was president of the Genesee Ornithological Society in Rochester. On the state level, he served as treasurer and later a board member of the New York State Ornithological Society, and he was editor of its state journal, *The Kingbird*. In

1956, Gerry was the founder of the New York State January Waterfowl Census. Gerry contributed 21 species accounts to *Bull's Birds of New York State* (1998) and was sub-regional compiler for *American Birds* from 1991 to 1993 and regional compiler for *The Kingbird* during the same timespan. He also participated in data-gathering for *The Second Breeding Bird Atlas of New York State*, censusing nine atlas blocks from 2001 through 2006.



Gerry was a volunteer in the Entomology Laboratory at the Buffalo Museum of Science from 1994 to 2003, including the period when I was curator of entomology, 1994 through 2001. During this period, I fondly recall Gerry attending a New York Natural History Conference at the New York State Museum in Albany with the late Ernst Both, former president and CEO of the Buffalo Museum of Science, and me. I also introduced Gerry to his first Allegheny Nature Pilgrimage in Alle-

gheny State Park during this time. After I accepted the position as western regional entomologist for the New York State Department of Health in 2001, Gerry audited the graduate course I taught in 2005 in the School of Public Health at UB, "Arthropods of Public Health Importance."

Never one to stand still, even in his early 90s, Gerry partnered with retired Canisius College professor of animal behavior Michael Noonan to produce a series of video interviews with outstanding birders of the area about local birds and birdwatching, called *Birds on the Niagara Frontier*. Completed in 2020, the video interviews are posted at: [www.birdsontheniagarafrontier.org](http://www.birdsontheniagarafrontier.org). The series is designed to promote interest in birding and wildlife conservation in western New York and southern Ontario. The 3:30 video of Gerry at Tiffit Nature Preserve introducing this project can be accessed at <https://birdsontheniagarafrontier.org/home/introduction/>. The Fall 2020 issue of *Learn Magazine* produced by the University at Buffalo's Graduate School of Education promotes the *Birds on the Niagara Frontier* video series. It also provides a window on Gerry's educational philosophy, which is shared below and which can be viewed at: <https://ed.buffalo.edu/magazine/issues/fall-2020/birding-rising.html>:

"My mind turns more to science than it does to other areas because of my mathematics. Like any educator, my general concern is with the betterment of society. That's what we do. A lot of my friends just go bird watching. They keep lists . . . I keep those lists, too. My interest goes beyond that in trying to share it with others."

Gerry also shared his wealth of knowledge and experience on the Boards of the Buffalo Audubon Society (BAS), Bergen Swamp Preservation Society, Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge (FINWR), Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences (1999 to 2003), the Niagara Frontier Botanical Society (NFBS), and Williamsville Glen Park

(1995 to 2001).



Buffalo Astronomical Association annual meeting and dinner, Buffalo Museum of Science, March 14, 2009. L to R: Wayne Gall; Gerry Rising; Cliff Stoll, invited speaker; Ernst Both, BAA honoree; and Peter Dow. Photo by Carl Milazzo.

Gerry served on the board of the BAS for two consecutive, three-year terms, 2004 to 2007 and 2007 to 2010, including the BAS's centennial year of 2009. Gerry's contribution to the BAS's centennial effort was to update the narrative history (a chronology of BAS annual highlights) in the booklet *Buffalo Audubon Society 1909-2009: A Centennial History*. Gerry

also contributed 15 articles to the BAS's bimonthly newsletter, *Audubon Outlook*, from March-April 2016 to July-August 2018.

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In addition to serving two, three-year terms on the board of the NFBS (1995 to 1998 and 2003 to 2005), he contributed the article "Lone Voices in the Wilderness" to the quarterly magazine of the NFBS, *Clintonia*, Volume 36, Issue 4 (December 2021).

Gerry supplemented his board service to the FINWR from 2000 through 2012 and 2018 through 2022 by regularly contributing articles to *The Overlook*, the quarterly newsletter of FINWR, before it was discontinued in summer 2021. Fourteen of his contributed articles can be accessed at <https://finwr.org/author/grising/>

As an outdoorsman, Gerry's accomplishments were astounding. An avid hiker, he completed the Finger Lakes Trail from the New York-Pennsylvania line in Allegany State Park to the Catskill Mountains, and the Bruce Trail along the Niagara Escarpment from Queenston to Tobermory, Ontario. He



Gerry Rising canoeing, probably in the Adirondacks, circa 1951. Photo courtesy of Gerry Rising, Junior.

joined the exclusive ranks of "the Adirondack 46ers" by climbing all 46 Adirondack peaks above 4,000 feet elevation. Gerry circumnavigated all the Great Lakes on scooter excursions—solo—mostly sleeping nights in a hammock strung between trees. For two examples, he reprised the Lake Erie and Lake Huron excursions in his "Nature Watch" columns of September 5, 2004, and September 18, 2005, respectively.

Gerry traveled the entire length of the Erie Canal by foot, on



cross-country skis, in canoe, and on moped, as recounted in his "Nature Watch" column of November 19, 2001. Gerry followed the length of the Hudson River on moped from near its source in the Adirondacks to the Rip Van Winkle Bridge near Catskill, New York, which he reprised in his "Nature Watch" column of June 3, 2002. For 30 consecutive summers (until 1998), Gerry canoed the Boundary Waters Wilderness in northern Minnesota with old friends Bob Bugenstein, Earl Colburn, and Wally Neal. Shortly after recreating that annual adventure many years later with Bob Bugenstein; Bob's daughter, Anne; and Gerry's son, Gerry, Junior, he recalled these canoeing adventures in his "Nature Watch" column of July 17, 2005.

Then, to top off his bewildering list of post-retirement adventures, in 2006, at the age of 79, Gerry went downhill-skiing at the Breckenridge Ski Resort in the Colorado Rockies. For the record, Gerry fell on his first run and broke his hip. But let the record show that he did downhill ski about one-third of an alpine ski-run just west of the Continental Divide at age 79.

My outdoor adventures with Gerry were all memorable.

In summer 1995, we spent three days backpacking a section of the Black Forest Trail near Slate Run Creek in Lycoming County, north-central PA. Besides Gerry, participants included the late Dick Christensen and three of his grandchildren; a friend of the granddaughters; and my oldest son, Jeffrey. Naturalist highlights included my first view of a timber rattlesnake in the wild, found by Dick's grandchildren. Gerry immortalized this hike in his talk, "Two Trips," that he presented at the Buffalo Audubon Society's annual banquet on May 1, 1996. The text of that talk is available at

<http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~insrisg/nature/olio/twotrips>

In summer 1996, we spent three days backpacking a section of the Susquehannock Trail between Ole Bull State Park and the Cherry Springs Fire Tower in Potter County, north-central PA. Besides Gerry, the trip included the late Dick Christensen and a different combination of three of his grandchildren; Dick's son, Peter; and my oldest son, Jeffrey. Naturalist highlights included my first observation of a black bear in the wild, first encountered by Jeff while getting water for dinner at a spring.

On May 12 through 16, 2004, we paddled on a five-day-long wilderness canoe trip (Gerry, me, our mutual friend Dave Chaves who organized it, and five others) in Killarney Pro-

vincial Park south of Sudbury, Ontario, near Georgian Bay and Manitoulin Island. A naturalist highlight was climbing the Killarney Ridge of the white quartzite La Cloche Range. Gerry climbed the most difficult part to the top of the first ridge, where we had spectacular views of the lakes we had just paddled and of Georgian Bay. I regretted I didn't try harder to talk him into joining us for the final ascent to the upper ridge because there we had a memorable fly-over of warblers, including eight species in one tree. In a recent text, Dave Chaves commented: "He [Gerry] was 77 when we went to Killarney. But could out paddle anyone, except probably Robert [Young]. He taught me how to be a better paddler." Our after-trip lunch at the former Champlain Restaurant near French River was the stuff of legend—between Gerry's ditty, the tale of Willie Lee Robinson and Archibold Assholebroke, and the waiter's antics, I could barely eat because my stomach hurt so much from laughing! If only an audio recording had been made of those shenanigans! Gerry reprised this trip in his "Nature Watch" column of May 30, 2004, "Killarney Provincial Park."

From May 3 through 6, 2007, we took a four-day wilder-



Wilderness canoe trip to Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario, May 3, 2007. Gerry Rising is fifth from right, behind David Chaves, who organized the trip; Wayne Gall is second from right. Photo courtesy of David Chaves.

ness canoe trip to Parkside Bay via Smoke and Ragged Lakes (Gerry, me, Dave Chaves who organized it, and eight others) in Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario, several hours north and east of Toronto. We affectionately referred to this as the "old-guys trip," as four members were well over 70, with Gerry

being the senior member at 80. During this trip, Gerry taught me how to recognize

the call of the northern saw-whet owl. Gerry mentioned this trip in a related "Nature Watch" column of September 2, 2007, "Despite Bug Bites, Wilderness Touches Teen-age Souls."

The late naturalist and environmental educator David Bigelow wrote the weekly nature column, "Naturally," in *The Buffalo News* from 1981 until his passing in December 1990. Since I presented the eulogy at David's memorial service at the Buffalo Museum of Science in late 1990, I feel like I have just closed a loop connecting two of my cherished, departed naturalist friends and writers. Jay Burney recounted to me that after David Bigelow's passing, the late Paul MacClennan, award-winning reporter and environmental columnist for *The Buffalo News*, called Jay and asked for a recommendation of someone to replace David: Gerry Rising was the one person that Jay had in mind. Undaunted by Bigelow's considerable reputation as both field naturalist and columnist, Gerry picked up the



torch as the newest stringer at *The Buffalo News* and renamed the column “Nature Watch.”

Gerry’s first column, “Hummingbirds,” was published on April 8, 1991. Gerry subsequently contributed an astounding 1,280 weekly columns between that debut and his final column, “The Nature of Matter,” that was published in *The Buffalo News* on September 27, 2015. Forging a new identity as a respected nature writer—an identity that was immensely fulfilling to him—Gerry developed an enormous following among his readers over those 25 years. Never mind that he had to develop a new topic 52 weeks a year for 25 years. With grace and unbridled commitment, Gerry also attended to the associated correspondence each week, faithfully responding to a who-could-possibly-count number of letters and email commentary on his column.

As if writing a weekly nature column were not enough, during four of his 25 years as author of “Nature Watch” in *The Buffalo News*, Gerry was also the “Bookmarks” columnist for *ArtVoice of Buffalo* from 1999 through 2002.

In response to requests from his readers that his columns be made available in book form, Gerry published Book One and Book Two of *The Nature Watch Collection*, in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Both compilations were complemented by the photographs of superb Canadian nature photographer Harold Stiver and others. Each book compiled 52 columns from his first two years, covering the period from April 8, 1991, to May 24, 1993. It is unfortunate that Gerry was not able to continue publishing all of his subsequent columns in book form. He did, however, publish two additional compilations of 100 columns each that focused on birds in 2016 and 2018. Many of his post-May-1993 columns are currently available at his personal web site at UB,

<http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~insrisg/nature/>. Note that this digital archive of *Nature Watch* columns is incomplete because his columns from September 2006 through November 2011 apparently were lost from that web site.

In his various nature writings and bios, Gerry always took pains to point out to his audience that he was trained in math education and was not a professional naturalist or biologist. This position reflected two important qualities about Gerry: first, his humility, and, second, his high ethical standards and intellectual honesty; he did not want to purport himself to be something he was not. But Gerry’s “perpetual caveat,” as I call it, also understates his actual

knowledge base that had grown exponentially as a result of



Gerry Rising looking out over Lake Ontario at Golden Hill State Park during a BOS Ontario Plains Field Trip led by Willie D’Anna, March 26, 2022.  
Photo by Karen Lee Lewis.

his self-directed, voracious reading, his research, and taking the initiative to seek out specialists in various branches of the sciences and natural history for information. Gerry certainly had the innate ability to be a self-directed learner. In addition, Gerry’s insatiable desire to learn was one of his hallmarks as a lifelong-learner.

An example of Gerry expressing his “perpetual caveat” was his introduction to Book Two of *The Nature Watch Collection* (2018), which reads as follows:

“It is important that I remind readers again that natural history is an avocation and not a

vocation for me. I spent my professional life as a mathematics teacher and have returned to a life-long hobby of bird watching in my dotage. When the opportunity arose to take over the newspaper’s column in 1992 [*sic*] I asked the then editor of *The Buffalo News*, Murray Light, if I couldn’t restrict my writing to birds. His answer was straightforward – ‘No.’ I have come to thank him for that response as it has forced me to extend my interests in many directions. . .

Fortunately, I have found the professional scientists to whom I have turned regularly for assistance to be forthcoming far beyond what their duties should require and an outsider should expect. I hope that I have assigned the credit they deserve in those columns to which they contributed their expertise.”

As a consequence of being a volunteer in my former entomology lab at the Buffalo Museum of Science, Gerry accompanied me on several field excursions. At least three of them resulted in specific “Nature Watch” columns, as follows.

“Winter Insects,” a column dated February 21, 1994, reprinted our trek through Deer Lick Nature Sanctuary near Gowanda in northern Cattaraugus County. The snow was knee- to waist-deep on the day of our trip, January 12, 1994; air temperature was 0 to 2°C; and we documented 18 species of insects and spiders active on the snow surface. An associated hilarious story is worth revisiting. We were accompanied by two other volunteers in my lab, the late Joe Thill and the late Nora Lindell. On our way to Deer Lick, Joe Thill regaled us with stories from “the old days” of the BOS. One involved “John Doe,” a prominent leader of both the BOS and Buffalo Audubon Society, who also was in a leadership role with the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences.



As Joe Thill recounted it, John Doe was leading a well-subscribed BOS field trip. He was notorious for his booming voice, which resulted from hearing loss. Besides Joe Thill, that field trip included, among many others, another former leader of the BOS, who was allegedly involved in an extra-marital affair at that time. As Doe, a straight-laced traditionalist, had just caught wind of this situation, he spontaneously bellowed out in the presence of all the field trip participants, “You’re not going Hollywood on us, are you?” Gerry, Nora, and I were laughing so hard from Joe’s inimitable account that we were just about rolling on the floorboards of the museum van from laughter. Through the subsequent years, every time we repeated that story, Gerry and I would roar just like we first heard it!

“Tiger Beetles,” a column dated September 21, 1998, reprised our trip to the rugged and wild Zoar Valley between Erie and Cattaraugus counties to document rare tiger beetles per a contract I had from the New York Natural Heritage Program. Because of the meandering nature of Cattaraugus Creek between canyon walls, we had to wade across the creek, which can be very dangerous under high-flow conditions. Although the creek was just slightly swollen after a recent rain, we felt we could manage a crossing. About midway across, in water up to our chest, it was hard to maintain footing on the slippery bottom in the current, and Gerry went down. Fortunately, he quickly regained his footing, but not before he lost his eyeglasses when he briefly submerged. At least he grabbed his ballcap before it sailed away! On April 13, 2019, Gerry gifted me a 1976 book from his personal library—*Legion of Night: The Underwing Moths* by Theodore D. Sargent—a book for which I had been searching for many years. Gerry inscribed the gifted book as follows: “For my friend Wayne Gall. Thanks for nearly drowning me in Cattaraugus Creek in Zoar Valley. I could no longer read this book as I lost my glasses in that episode—but I did rescue my 10-cent hat!”

“Crayfish,” a column dated November 27, 2000, reprised our trip to a marshy ditch on the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station where Gerry was enthralled when I excavated a rare and sizable species of burrowing crayfish. This was a continuation of a long-term project that began in 1980, when I documented the occurrence of the so-called “devil crayfish,” *Cambarus diogenes*, for the first time in New York State at the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge in Genesee County.

Gerry was downhearted after the 25-year run of his weekly “Nature Watch” column was discontinued by *The Buffalo News* in 2015, a victim of a much wider downsizing at the newspaper. Consequently, his friends Jay Burney and Karen Lee Lewis organized “A Toast to Gerry Rising” as a pep rally for him at Big Ditch Brewing Company on East Huron

Street in downtown Buffalo. I was among the dozens of members of the unofficial Gerry Rising Fan Club who drowned their sorrows with him on the night of November 19, 2015. After coming to grips with the reality that his immensely fulfilling 25-year journalistic enterprise had indeed been involuntarily terminated, he rebounded with a vengeance and found new outlets for his writing. This included writing and publishing three books: *Birds and Birdwatchers: 100 Brief Essays* (2016; W.R. Parks); *Bird-er’s Break: 100 Brief Essays* (2018; W.R. Parks); and *About Mathematics*, a college course book that aims to give humanities students a better perspective on math (2020; with James Matthews, Eileen Schoaff, and Judith Matthews; Linus Books).

In 2015, during an introspective moment while birding at the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, Gerry, and his birding companions Sue Barth, Chris Hollister, and Scott Meier, posed the following question: “What can we do to share with others the enrichment birding has given our lives?” (*Audubon Outlook*, March-April 2017). Focusing on their desire to motivate young people to explore the out-of-doors, the fellow birders hatched the idea of challenging children to get outside and identify ten different species of birds (and ten trees, ten wildflowers, ten mammals, etc.) by age 10—and the *Ten by Ten* project was born. With a generous grant from the BOS, they published a 34-page booklet in 2016, *Ten by Ten Birds*. After observing 10 different birds, young people can register their list at [www.10x10Species.com](http://www.10x10Species.com) and then receive a badge and diploma recognizing their achievement.



Gerry was honored by NSSWNY with its 2015 Environmental Stewardship Award. Above, Gerry accepts the award from NSSWNY Director Raymond Vaughan at the 2015 NSSWNY annual meeting and banquet.

Gerry had been a member of the Nature Sanctuary Society of Western New York (NSSWNY) since 2012. Between August 2016 and August 2022, Gerry contributed 25 articles to *Nature Preserves*, the quarterly newsletter of NSSWNY. While his contributions were weighted toward birds, Gerry covered a diversity of topics such as: hunters as conservationists; mammal hibernators; bioluminescence; coyotes; insect stings; ferns; weasel family members; daddy-longlegs; plants to avoid; and goldenrods. The back-story regarding Gerry’s article “Mantis,” which appeared in the April 2020

issue of *Nature Preserves*, is revealing. While planning that issue, Jackie Swift, president of NSSWNY, called to ask me to write a scientifically oriented article on praying mantids to complement the more popular article on mantids that Gerry was submitting. After Jackie assuaged my concerns that my seemingly redundant contribution would not get Gerry’s nose out of joint, I agreed, and the two articles were published back-to-back.

When the April 2020 issue of *Nature Preserves* arrived at



our house, I suggested to my dear wife Susan that she might like to read Gerry's and my articles on praying mantids. She proceeded to take the issue upstairs for bedtime reading. Susan was fully engaged by Gerry's article that centered on the science activity conducted by the students in his Aunt Jane's elementary school class: rearing moths in the classroom from cocoons collected outdoors by the students. But Aunt Jane ended up incurring the wrath of the school administration when her classroom and the adjacent area of the school were overrun by hundreds of tiny mantids that had hatched from a foamy mantid egg case that had been mistaken for a moth cocoon, a classic rookie-entomologist mistake! Then Susan read my article, "Some Insights on Mantids." Before she got past the diagnostic differences between the European and Chinese mantid, she was fast asleep! I rest my case regarding Gerry's talent as an engaging and effective writer . . . and you can come to your own conclusion about the impact of my own writing!

NSSWNY bestowed its 2015 Stewardship Award upon Gerry at its annual meeting and dinner on May 21 of that year. Providing further insight into the humility and good humor of this kind man, Gerry contributed the following poem on this occasion:

A stringer named Rising is sure no ideal  
Assigning him this award should be up for appeal  
His journalistic skills are weak  
He can't even identify a leek  
At bird calls at best he can squeak  
He can't tell a skink from a Sikh  
He recently fell in the creek  
In summary he's simply a geek  
Who certainly doesn't belong in this clique  
But count on him to show up for a meal

Gerry was also the recipient of number of other environmental awards: the Buffalo Audubon Society Sheldon Merritt Distinguished Service Award, 2010; the Paul MacClennan Environmental Citizen of the Year Award (for WNY), 2008; and the Founder of the New York State January Waterfowl Census, 1956, an activity that won a Wehle Conservation Award in 1958.

The aforementioned Robert Andrle was an esteemed western New York ornithologist and former cura-



Gerry Rising at Goat Island, Niagara Falls State Park, during the BOS May Count, May 19, 2019. Photo by Karen Lee Lewis.

tor of vertebrate zoology at the Buffalo Museum of Science. My last joint project with Gerry was to write a memorial tribute to Bob at the behest of an editor for the American Ornithological Society (AOS). Gerry and I met with Bob's son, Chris Andrle, to gather background information, and we both did some additional research. Gerry wrote the first draft, to which I added some material. The resulting article, "In Memoriam, Robert F. Andrle, 1927-2017," was published in 2018 in *The Auk/Ornithological Advances*, Volume 135, pp. 1185-86, a refereed journal of the AOS. Note that Gerry did the heavy lift with the first draft and took care of correspondence with the journal editor but then listed me as the first author when he submitted the final manuscript . . . just one of many examples of Gerry's generosity to his younger friend.

In 2015, Gerry began writing the monthly column "Wild WNY" in *Buffalo Spree Magazine*. In the Fall of 2016, soon after I started a position as entomologist/identifier for the US Depart-

ment of Agriculture, I unwittingly became the subject of one of his columns in *Spree*. Gerry called me and said he wanted to interview me in my lab on the Peace Bridge Plaza for an upcoming issue whose theme was "Local Heroes." Consistent with his trademark, overly generous spirit, Gerry wrote a two-page piece about me that was published in the January 2017 issue of *Spree*. Flattering to the point of embarrassment, and leaving me with a case of impostor syndrome, Gerry's article was accompanied by several photos taken at the Peace Bridge by *Spree*'s staff photographer at the time, kc kratt, with whom I was acquainted from my days on the staff of the Buffalo Museum of Science. That article can be accessed online at [https://www.buffalospree.com/features/local-heroes-wayne-gall/article\\_cd5c3a8d-cd1b-5ce2-9a34-dadece2d2018.html](https://www.buffalospree.com/features/local-heroes-wayne-gall/article_cd5c3a8d-cd1b-5ce2-9a34-dadece2d2018.html)

Fast forward six years. At the beginning of the January 2023, issue of *Spree*, Executive Editor Sabrina Kahwaty focused her "Letter from the Editor" on Gerry:

"It is with great sadness that I share that in December, we lost our longtime nature writer, Gerry Rising. Gerry was many things—an accomplished birdwatcher, a fierce environmentalist, a caring husband and father, and an all-around good human being. Though I did not have the pleasure of knowing him for long, I always felt fortunate to learn



from him through his writing, which never failed to extol the beauties of Western New York, remind us to appreciate what is around us and not judge books by their covers, and encourage us to help the other species with whom we share the planet.

Gerry's contributions to *Spree* will be greatly missed, but not nearly as much as his contributions to the lives of those who knew and loved him, whether through in-person interaction or through the pages of *Spree*. This issue, which features his final column ["Dickybirds in Winter"], is dedicated to him.

As we head into a new year, let's honor Gerry by appreciating all that wild Western New York has to offer, fighting for what we believe in, and helping whomever we can, whenever we can."



Gerry Rising with his wife of 53 years, Doris. Photo by Dave O'Donnell.

It is an understatement to say that Gerry Rising's life and career enriched the lives of thousands of his students and his readers, and those who were fortunate enough to be counted among his friends. Gerry Rising, a gifted man with many talents; a mathematics educator who was a SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor; co-founder of the University at Buffalo Gifted Math Program; "Nature Watch" columnist in *The Buffalo News* for 25 years; contributor to an array of nature organizations in western New York; beloved husband of Doris, the love of his life; adored father of Gerry, Junior, and Susan; proud grandfather of four and great-grandfather of six; outstanding writer, birder, outdoorsman, and environmentalist; a humble man, a warm and caring person, and cherished friend to many.

I would like to close with a quotable quote from Gerry's good friend Dave O'Donnell that appeared at the end of Gerry's extended obituary published on Christmas Day, 2022, in *The Buffalo News*: "Gerry was a man who died while living." To this I should add parenthetically—even if his life didn't leave room for *The Three Stooges*!



Gerry Rising (left) with Dave O'Donnell (right) of the Eastern Monarch Butterfly Farm, circa 2014. Photo courtesy of Dave O'Donnell.

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—Wayne K. Gall, Ph.D.  
February 1, 2023