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IN MEMORIAM: THEODORE A. PARKER III, 1953–1993

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We face the impossible task of summarizing in a few pages the brilliant life of our friend, Ted Parker. Those who knew Ted will understand our dilemma. For those who did not, we share some reminiscences of a charismatic and remarkable biologist, one who in our opinion was the most gifted field ornithologist of the 20th century.

Ted was born into a nurturing family in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on 1 April 1953. One of his earliest memories was of his grandmother taking him to Lancaster's North Museum when he was six years old. Ted immersed himself in natural history and decided at an early age that he wanted to become a naturalist. Birds, reptiles, amphibians, and butterflies of the Lancaster area were all subjected to his penetrating focus, and he spoke fondly of the times he spent on field outings with his younger brother, Blanford. An example of Ted's modus operandi during his middle-school years was his approach to shell collecting. Not content with beachcombing or buying shells from commercial outlets, he spent hours at local fish markets dissecting fish intestines in search of rare deep sea mollusks. Ted was a devoted conservationist from his childhood days, and as a senior in high school he conducted an environmental impact statement for the Lancaster Waterworks. By his own account, he was bored with the educational curriculum, and his predilection for birds came to the forefront as a teenager. His reputation as a "birding phenom" was born during this period.

During the last semester of his senior year in high school, Ted embarked on an attempt to break a bird-listing record, the number of species seen in the United States and Canada in one calendar year, that had stood since the 1950s. With the help of Harold Morrin and other friends he criss-crossed the United States several times in the spring and summer of 1971. During the fall he enrolled in the University of Arizona, strategically chosen for its proximity to good birding localities. Ted smashed the listing record, but wryly recounted that he was forced to drop every course, except golf, during his first two semesters because of his chronic birding. Although his start in college was inauspicious, Ted's birding exploits earned him national recognition among birdwatchers and mention in the *Reader's Digest*. He rapidly became an authority on Arizona birds and within two years assumed the editorship for the southwest region of *American Birds*. Ted majored in biology but later switched to anthropology to avoid organic chemistry and physics. In later years, he often joked that superfluous college course requirements impeded his pursuit of worthwhile knowledge. All too often, extraordinarily gifted but unconventional students become lost in academic gristmills. Fortunately, some of Ted's professors at Arizona encouraged Ted to channel his prodigious birding talent into mainstream ornithology (e.g., with H. R. Pulliam, 1979, Fortschr. Zool. 25:137–147).

Ted made his first trip to Mexico and the Neotropics during his second semester at Arizona. In a sense he never returned. Birding with Ted in Mexico was not for the faintheartedness, and sleep was accommodated only after exhaustion had a firm grip. After birding all day and then catching the evening chorus of nightjars and owls, it was back in the car for an all-night drive, dodging animals on the road, with the radio blaring rock-and-roll. The dawn chorus heralded that a new locality had been reached. These extended trips resulted in significant discoveries from Jalisco to Chiapas and some of his first contributions to the scientific literature (1976, Amer. Birds 30:779–782).

During his stint at Arizona, when Ted was not planning his next trip to Mexico, he was devouring literature on the Neotropics. Serious students of any discipline would have been awe-

FIG. 1. Ted examining one of his favorite groups, the cotingids, at LSU in September 1990. He wrote a number of the species accounts in Snow's *The Cotingas* (1982). Courtesy of *The Advocate*. Photo by Stephan Savoia.

struck by the amount of time he spent studying and his degree of retention. Dorm furniture and bed were buried by books and papers, and his room became the focal point for naturalists and birdwatchers. Nightly discourses on birds, cacti, or any of a hundred other natural history topics, were sprinkled with liberal politics.

In spring 1974, George Lowery phoned his former student, Steve Russell, to see if there were any promising students at Arizona interested in helping Louisiana State University (LSU) survey the birds of Peru. Russell knew just the person. Ted's acceptance of LSU's offer was immediate and unqualified, even when told that he would have to cut off his shoulder-length hair to meet Lowery's genteel standards. Unfortunately, Lowery, who died in January 1978, did not live long enough to appreciate fully how fortuitous he was in landing Ted. During that initial trip, Ted spent nearly eight months in Peru, traveling the length and breadth of the country collecting bird specimens. By the end of the expedition, Ted had acquired Huánuco-accented Spanish from his Peruvian field companion, Reyes Rivera, and a keen insight into local customs that would serve him well during the remainder of his life. Ted's passion for taping bird vocalizations blossomed on the 1974 expedition. Afterwards, he was seldom seen in the field without a bulky reel-to-reel tape recorder. Not content with exhausting whirlwind trips and anecdotal observations of rare birds, he also began studying avian communities in single localities for months at a time.

Another maturing event was his marriage to Susan Allen in 1976. However, much to the chagrin of his benefactors, Ted's extended field expeditions interfered with university course work, delaying his graduation until 1977. That he finished at all is a testament to the efforts of Susan, as well as to the encouragement of his friends, especially John O'Neill, then curator of birds at LSU.

Almost immediately after they were married, Ted and Susan departed for a seven-month expedition to Peru. At Explorer's Inn, the future Tambopata Reserved Zone, Ted fine-tuned what was to be one of his most valuable contributions to Neotropical ornithology—the avifaunal site inventory. Until recently, inventories had been largely based on the cumulative record of museum specimens, captured and released birds, and sight records. In the old museum tradition, thorough

FIG. 2. Ted (in center) at El Triunfo, Chiapas, Mexico in April 1973. Results from this trip included the first description of the chick of the Horned Guan (*Oreophasis derbianus*) (1976, Amer. Birds 30:779–782). Photo by Mark B. Robbins.

inventories in species-rich Amazonian sites required thousands of man hours and years to complete. Ted focused on vocalizations. With the use of tape playback, he methodically tracked down almost every avian sound in the rain forest, and more importantly, remembered everything he had heard. Ted demonstrated to his skeptical colleagues at LSU that inventories as he conducted them were an order of magnitude more efficient than those based on traditional methods. In hindsight, we view the "Parker inventory" as a methodological revolution. Although identifying Neotropical birds by voice has a long history, no one had done it as well or applied it as effectively as Ted. By the mid-1980s, he was so proficient that he could inventory 80–90% of any local avifauna from Mexico to southeastern Brazil in a few mornings. By the time of his death he had deposited an astonishing 15,000+ recordings in the Library of Natural Sounds (LNS) at Cornell University. Although Ted championed the use of sound recordings in inventory work (1991, Auk 108:443–444), he continued to collect specimens until the end of his life. Over his 19 years association with LSU, he added over 3,000 specimens to the collection.

Ted's long absences in the field created strains in his marriage and soon he and Susan parted. After the divorce, LSU and Baton Rouge would be his home, at least spiritually, for the remainder of his life.

From the mid-1970s through the 1980s Ted's primary source of income came from leading bird tours, mainly for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. This gave him the unprecedented opportunity to study bird communities in literally hundreds of locations in the Neotropics. From 1974 through 1993, Ted averaged six months annually in the field. In part through the success of his tours, Ted rapidly achieved the reputation as the foremost authority on the identification and distribution of Neotropical birds. His Peruvian tours quickly gained fame, as over 700 species were routinely recorded. But the number of species recorded was secondary to the enthusiasm and appreciation of the Neotropical avifauna that Ted conveyed to his tour participants. Ted was the consummate tour leader—he combined unsurpassed birding skills, an audiophilic memory, and museum background with a disarming lack of ego. Under the guise of a tour co-leader, MBR witnessed first hand the chemistry between Ted and participants during a West Indian tour in 1988. Most participants, many of whom had booked several previous tours with him, worshipped Ted. His charming personality coupled with his unrivaled knowledge endeared him to a vast community, ranging from the general public to the most intractable of all groups, politicians and the military. Kenn Kaufman (1993, Amer. Birds 47:349–351) effectively related one

of Ted's greatest assets, that of conveying information to people without offending them; he made them feel as if they were part of the inner circle.

Ted labored on and off for 15 years on the species accounts for *Birds of Peru*. Given the enormity of the task (1700 + species), and the fact that he spent much of the year in the field obtaining additional data, his colleagues teased Ted that he wouldn't finish the project until he quit field work, which of course everyone knew would never happen. Nevertheless, he was surprisingly productive during his brief stays in Baton Rouge. Between 1977 and 1990, he authored 37 technical papers, 2 audiocassettes, and 1 annotated check-list. This was no easy task for him because attending to his voluminous correspondence and "decompressing" between field trips often required weeks. He would often lose himself for hours playing and watching basketball as well as studying specimens and literature on Neotropical birds. It was a common and predictable event, from his college days up to his last years, to find him sweating profusely in black high-top Converse basketball shoes, with a white towel wrapped around his neck, watching a basketball game after he had just spent a couple of hours playing on the court. His obsession for basketball was second only to his love of birds, and he never missed an LSU game when he was in Baton Rouge. At home he was frequently found reposing on the couch editing his tape-recordings and filling out LNS data forms while watching basketball. One minute he would be shouting "Did you see that play!", and in the next instant he would point out some barely audible vocalization in the background of a recording.

In 1980, Ted met Carol Walton, and in 1985 they were married. Ted's insatiable thirst for field work continued, and his ambivalence toward domestic activities caused their marriage to suffer the same fate as his first. With every passing year, more demands were made of Ted's time, but he made sure that he was with his family at Christmas, and he made every effort to make it back to Lancaster during the sweet-corn harvest. His appreciation for good food was well known.

Ted's presence set LSU apart from other Neotropical programs. He was a beacon for prospective graduate students from around the country even though his official connection with LSU was only as a research associate. Ted's comprehensive knowledge gave him a unique view of the links between a species' vocalizations, foraging behavior, habitat preference and its biogeography and systemic relationships. His accomplishments there drew further attention, when he, John O'Neill, and the LSU program were the focus of Don Stap's book, *A Parrot Without a Name: the Search for the Last Unknown Birds on Earth*. Stap devoted several pages to how Ted discovered a new species of flycatcher by first hearing its song. Ted's contributions to the LSU program were recognized with a posthumous honorary Ph.D.

We are among the legions that acknowledge picking his brain. One only needs to peruse the Neotropical literature for the past two decades to get a feel for how generous he was. It would be difficult to find a serious student of Neotropical ornithology who did not incorporate some of Ted's knowledge in their work. Jon Fjeldså and Niels Krabbe (1990, *Birds of the High Andes*) perhaps said it best: "In particular we thank Theodore A. Parker III for an enormous amount of life history data. As he is by far the greatest capacity on the life histories of Neotropical birds there ever was, his contribution to our knowledge of Neotropical birds can not be stressed strongly enough."

Regardless of his audience, Ted was not timid in conveying the urgency needed to conserve the world's fauna. Brent Bailey, of Conservational International, recounted an unforgettable meeting that CI's Bolivian representative, Guillermo Rioja, and Ted had with the Vice President of Bolivia. At the end of one of Ted's classic conservation diatribes, which Rioja was certain would result in them being asked to leave, the Bolivian official leaned forward at the table and said, "It is people like you that have made your country great." Murray Gell-Mann, the Nobel laureate physicist and avid birdwatcher, was exposed to Ted's haranges during joint field work in South America, and, like so many others before him, was deeply impressed by Ted's field skills. Gell-Mann was also a director of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and he helped encourage the MacArthur Foundation to fund Ted's idea of a Rapid Assessment Program (RAP), through Conservation International. The core of the RAP team was formed from a handful of eminent biologists, each of whom brought years of experience in the tropics: Ted, botanists Alwyn Gentry and Robin Foster, and mammalogist Louise Emmons. The premise of the RAP program was to assess quickly, usually in a few weeks, the diversity and uniqueness of an area, and then to transmit the results, via a rapidly published report, to conservationists, biologists, administrators, and politicians. As Ted argued, the RAP protocol was an effective way to obtain sufficient data for guiding conservation priorities in the tropics, where land use changes can occur with frightening rapidity. Nevertheless, he and his RAP colleagues were well aware of the importance, both to science and to conservation, of the more classical, long-term

surveys. Ted was instrumental in persuading the MacArthur Foundation to fund some traditional faunal inventories.

Ted's successes and recognition in conservation soothed some of the bitterness that he had felt about being snubbed by some mainstream ornithologists, who in spite of their academic credentials held but a fraction of Ted's knowledge about Neotropical birds. Ted was always amused by, and often galled, by the cadre of "experts" who spent little time in the field. He mellowed a bit by his late-30s, knowing that the "arm-chair" biologists would eventually be swept away by the tidal wave of new information and ideas generated by field people like himself.

Ted was well aware of the extraordinary risks that he took by working in remote areas. Upon recounting his many close calls, ranging from dodging animals and vehicles on Mexican roads to having his and John O'Neill's boat full of specimens sunk by Aguarunas, to being chased by a stone-throwing mob in Peru, even the most seasoned field person would shake their heads. However, Ted had no aspiration of becoming a martyr, and the thing that he feared most about doing field work was having to rely on small planes to get him to many otherwise inaccessible sites. His fear was well-founded, because on at least two prior occasions, once while flying through a severe thunderstorm in the eastern Peruvian Andes and the other during a landing at an abandoned airfield in Bolivia, he was nearly killed.

On 3 August 1993, Ted, Al Gentry, Jaqueline Goerck, one of Ecuador's leading conservationists, Eduardo Aspiazu, and two Ecuadorian biologists, Alfredo Luna and Carmen Bonifaz, left Guayaquil in a small plane on a routine mission to survey the rapidly diminishing forest in southwestern Ecuador. No flight path had been filed, navigational errors were made, and in the late afternoon the plane crashed into a remote mountain cloaked in a cloud bank. The pilot and Eduardo died shortly after impact, and Al passed away during the night. The following morning, Jaqueline, suffering a broken ankle and spinal injuries, and Carmen struggled down the forested mountain side and brought help that afternoon. By then, Ted had died, and Alfredo barely survived. In all likelihood, the knowledge that ebbed away over those few hours will require decades to recover, if ever.

At the time of his death, Ted was probably the happiest he had been during his professional career, as a result of the success of RAP, the recent and imminent publication of several other long-term projects, and his engagement to Jaqueline Goerck. In the months before his death, Ted talked about spending less time in the field, settling down, and having children. One can only speculate what Ted would have accomplished if he had lived. It is certain that his role in the conservation of tropical biotas would have continued to accelerate, and his storehouse of knowledge would have come to fruition through his publications and collaboration with others. Such monumental tasks as finishing *Birds of Peru* will be left to his colleagues, with the impossible burden of attempting to reach the expectations generated by Ted's involvement.

Envious of the amount of time Ted spent in the field, we vicariously lived his adventures and recounted fond memories of distant camps and forest trails. Many of us took for granted that we could ride his train for years to come. In an interview less than a year before his death, Ted related that he wanted the following words from a Robert Frost poem carved on his tombstone: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by." Ted steadfastly took the less traveled road and we were fortunate to have been his friends and colleagues along the way.

Susan Allen Lohr, Harold Morrin, John O'Neill, and Thomas Schulenberg helped illuminate reminiscences of an extraordinary individual.