

Final Flight

In Memoriam: Miles Timothy Myres
(1931-2009)

by Martin K. McNicholl*

Note: The following revised and expanded account is reprinted with permission of Alan H. Brush, Memorials Editor, *The Auk*, from an article published by McNicholl in 2011¹.



Figure 2. Tim Myres in Calgary, AB, early 1970s. He was one of the pioneers to encourage amateur participation in scientific research. *Photo by R. Wayne Nelson.*

Miles Timothy (Tim) Myres (Figure 2), Elective Member of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU), died of cancer on 20 January 2009 [not 22 January as stated in Halladay²] at age 77 on Jersey in the British Channel Islands. Tim was born in London, England, on 16 May 1931 to a scholarly family. Both his father and grandfather were archeological historians. He attributed his interest in nature, and especially in birds, to "bird nesting" in the Oxfordshire countryside with his mother. An observation, at age 5, of newly hatched Common Moorhen chicks was among those that stimulated this interest. He owned a field guide

by age 7 and was receiving pamphlets from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds by age 8. He began a bird journal by age 11, when he was already writing conservation-themed articles. While an undergraduate at Winchester College, Cambridge University, he already held several positions in natural history societies and participated in local "ringing" (banding). He spent 1953-1954 analyzing 9,000 records of the nests of three species of thrush submitted to a nest-records scheme in England.

In 1954, he moved to the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver, where he conducted research on social displays of goldeneyes (Figure 3) and sea-ducks, obtaining a Master of Arts³ in 1957 and completing a Ph.D. dissertation in 1959⁴. His research was conducted primarily from his car in Vancouver's Stanley Park, but included studies of eiders along the Arctic coast of Alaska (Figure 4). Anthony J. (Tony) Erskine (pers. comm. on 3 February 2012) mentioned to me that his Bufflehead thesis study was suggested by Tim when they were both at UBC from 1957 to 1959 and that Tim even made his own 1955-1957 Bufflehead nest data available to Tony.

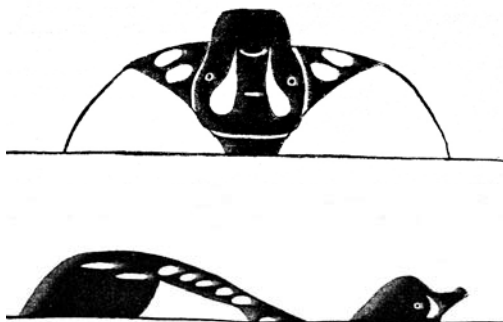
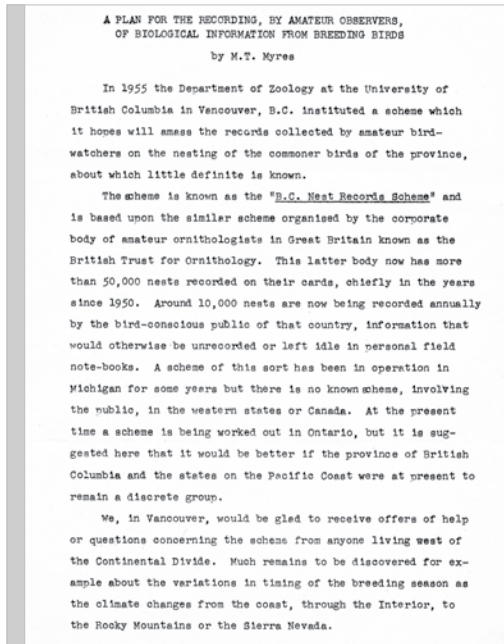


Figure 3. Over 1,000 feet of 16 mm film on the non-social and social behaviour of goldeneyes was analyzed and later transferred into hundreds of drawings for Tim's M.A. thesis. In this sequence, an aggressive drake Barrow's Goldeneye shows a close-up view of the prominent face crescents and "mask" and later, in a less aggressive posture, still shows the white on the flanks. *Drawings by M. Timothy Myres.*



Figure 4. Tim's graduate research on the behaviour of diving ducks at the University of British Columbia between 1954 and 1960 took him to the Arctic coast, where he studied Common Eider. *Photo by R. Wayne Campbell.*



Tim's experience with the nest-records scheme in Great Britain led him and Miklos M.D.F. Udvardy to start the British Columbia Nest Records Scheme (BCNRS) in 1955⁵. This project, which recently published an annual report on its 56th year⁶ (Figure 5), provided the bulk of the nesting data used in the four-volume *The Birds of British Columbia* series^{7,8,9,10}. As the BCNRS included cards from Alaska to California, its name was changed to Pacific Nest Records Scheme from 1960 for a while, but reverted back to BCNRS when separate state schemes were established. Tony Erskine also attributes Tim with introducing him to the concept of nest records schemes, thereby stimulating Tony to initiate the Maritimes Nest Records Scheme in 1960. It also stimulated similar nest-record schemes in the Prairie Provinces, Ontario, and several U.S. states. In 1958, Tim organized another long-term

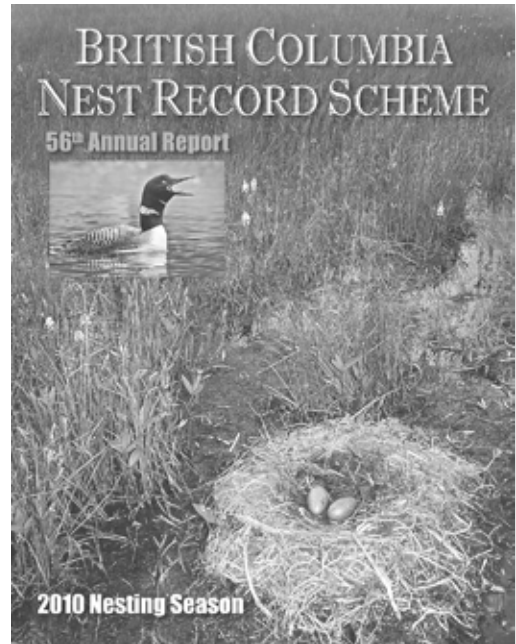


Figure 5. The British Columbia Nest Record Scheme (BCNRS) was initiated in 1955 by graduate student Tim Myres, with initial support from Professor Dr. Miklos D.F. Udvardy, while in the Department of Zoology at the University of British Columbia. Today, BCNRS is still a volunteer-sponsored program. During its 57 years of operation, BCNRS has grown from 26 participants recording 64 species and 899 breeding records in 1955 to 272 participants recording 239 species and 25,404 breeding records in 2010. The first annual report was eight pages long (left) whereas the 56th report has grown to 104 pages.

(1958-1983) voluntary effort to count seabirds around an ocean weather station (“Papa”), 1,280 km west of Vancouver Island, that produced considerable data from a part of the “open seas” not normally sampled consistently or frequently¹¹ (Figure 6). He also produced a comprehensive review of the spread and increase of European Starlings in British Columbia¹². This monographic study also stimulated further research by Tony Erskine and others on nesting by that introduced species in other parts of North America.

After earning his Ph.D., Tim became a member of a team assembled by David Lack at the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology at Oxford to conduct pioneering research on the use of radar to study bird movements.

Tim spent a winter at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and then joined the staff at the Calgary campus of the University of Alberta in 1963. He remained there through the university’s rise to full status as the University of Calgary (1966) and until he retired in 1987. He taught courses there on introductory zoology, principles of wildlife management, and

ornithology. His move coincided with the beginning of research by the Canadian Wildlife Service and the National Research Council of Canada on using radar to reduce bird hazards to aircraft¹³, and he applied some of his experience in England to research in Alberta and other parts of western Canada¹⁴.

On moving to Calgary, Tim soon became involved in the Calgary Bird Club, serving as president (1965-1967) and as editor of its bulletin (1964-1967). He encouraged the members to broaden their role in data gathering, advocated conservation, and helped to transform the club into the Calgary Field Naturalists’ Society. He was involved in conservation activities at a time when most academic researchers were discouraged from diverting much of their time from basic research to conservation. With Tom Sadler he published a decade (1961-1970) of bird observations in Alberta¹⁵, which they hoped would encourage more naturalists to report their observations. His thorough knowledge of his extensive library, occupying two large, locked rooms in the basement of his Calgary house, aided him in addressing both academic and conservation topics. On moving to Calgary, he also



Figure 6. Data from observations of pelagic birds off the west coast of Vancouver Island, BC, showed that Sooty Shearwater was the most abundant species of shearwater in spring and autumn. *Photo by R. Wayne Campbell.*



Figure 7. Professor Tim Myres (seated) with some of his graduate students, from left to right, R. Wayne Nelson, Morley Riske, and Chip Weseloh. *Photo by Alora L. Nelson, Calgary, AB, mid-1970s.*

soon began efforts to expand the university's library, as exemplified by his request in *Blue Jay* 22:49, 1964 for donations of back copies to the library. Wayne Nelson (personal communication 11 August 2010) recalled how significantly helpful his "amazing retention" of his vast, diverse, often obscure literature was to his students, especially when compiled into large bibliographies.

Tim directed much of his energy to organizing a province-wide naturalists' organization to promote all types of nature study and to use research-based efforts to conserve the province's natural features. These efforts culminated in the founding of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN; now Nature Alberta). His input was such that Thomas S. Sadler's characterization of him as FAN's "founding father" is very appropriate. Tim served as the first president of FAN and edited its first three newsletters in 1970²⁻¹⁶. He and his student D. V. (Chip) Weseloh also promoted the founding of the Alberta Ornithological Records Committee under FAN before such committees were common in Canada, and he served as a committee member from 1973 to 1974. While President of FAN, he also participated in discussions with naturalists

across Canada to transform the Ontario-based Canadian Audubon Society into a more truly national Canadian Nature Federation [now Nature Canada], founded in 1972. He served as one of its first National directors from 1972 to 1974.

Believing that government ornithological research was focused too much on birds "that were edible," Tim encouraged students to study other groups, such as grebes, shearwaters, falcons, shorebirds, gulls, and grassland passerines. Emphasis was on behavioural and ecological aspects of their life histories, including the effects of at least some human activities on each study species. His graduate students (Juan R. Guzman, Moray J. Lewis, R. Wayne Nelson, Robin A. Owens, Morley E. Riske and Chip Weseloh; Figure 7) have held significant research and teaching positions in colleges, a provincial museum, and the Canadian Wildlife Service, and have served the scientific community in many ways. His students have held positions in academia, government, environmental consulting firms, and conservation and habitat-restoration organizations.

Tim's interest in seabirds brought him to the organizational meeting of the Pacific Seabird Group,

and he served on its first council (1973-1974). He was also a member of the editorial board of *Western Birds* (1974-1986), served for several years as editor of the newsletter and special publications of the Canadian Society of Fisheries and Wildlife Biologists, helped draft an early version of the bylaws and constitution of the Alberta Falconry Association, and chaired the Canadian Section of the International Council for Bird Conservation [now Birdlife International](1973-1976). Tim contributed behavioural sections to several species accounts in *Handbook of North American Birds*, volume 3 (1976) and his behavioural studies were cited significantly in Paul A. Johnsgard's volume on waterfowl behaviour. Many of his publications in newsletters and local and international journals concerned behaviour, conservation, distribution, and ecology. He also contributed biographies and wrote on other historical aspects of natural history. He became an Elective Member of the AOU in 1985 and was awarded the 11th Loran L. Goulden Award for outstanding contributions to natural history in Alberta in 1986¹⁸.

Tim retired in 1987 and moved to Jersey with his wife Patricia and stepdaughter Shauna Robinson. He participated there in archaeological and historical research while continuing to be involved in local conservation issues. Patricia and Shauna now live in North Vancouver, BC.

Acknowledgements

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