



Milton Webster Weller

May 23, 1929 - December 19, 2017

On December 19, 2017 Milton W. Weller left this earth to study a new wetlands area under God's keeping. He was born in St. Louis, MO May 23, 1929 to parents John & Lillian Weller. He is survived by his wife and best friend of 70 years, Doris Weller, his son Mitchel W. Weller and his sister Delsea Holzschuh. Milt began his higher education at Washington University in St. Louis, MO and earned his Ph.D at University of Missouri in Columbia, MO. He went on to teach and serve as Department Heads at Iowa State University, the University of Minnesota and Texas A&M in College Station TX where he was the Kleberg Chair in Wildlife Ecology then retired in 1994 after 12 years. Pioneering an effort to understand the linkages that exist between wetlands birds and their habitats , he compiled an impressive list of publications over four decades, including such classic books as The Island Waterfowl and Freshwater Marshes, and Ecology and Wildlife Management, which are used throughout the country in wetlands courses at the college level. While teaching and doing ongoing research Milt served on the National Board of Directors for the Audubon Society from 1986-1991. In 1997 he was awarded the prestigious Aldo Leopold Memorial Award, the highest honor bestowed by the Wildlife Society. Milt was always thankful for his former students and colleagues that remained in contact and honored him regularly at special gatherings. From the family we appreciate all of you. A Tribute gift in the name of Milton W. Weller can be made by calling The Nature Conservancy at 703-841-5300. Please request that your kind donation be specific to wetlands projects. Tribute gifts can also be made on-line at nature.org however you will not be able to request that the donation goes to wetlands. Any donation to to the Nature Conservancy is appreciated as this was one of Milt's favorite organizations.

Comments



“ It's odd how important aspects of a relationship can sometimes be captured in mere minutes, or even flashes, of time. Even today, I recall vividly my first meeting with Milt Weller. It was in the middle of the winter of 1978-79.

I had traveled to see Milt, who was then at the University of Minnesota, about the possibility of doing graduate work under his guidance. The wind chill on the day of my scheduled meeting was somewhere around -30 degrees! As I approached his office, I was having thoughts such as, "Who am I to be meeting with Milt Weller?", and "Do I really belong here?" No doubt I was visibly shivering from the frigid cold, but also, I think, due to my nervous tension about meeting this well-known icon of waterfowl research and conservation. However, in only a few minutes, Milt had allayed my fears with his easy, reassuring way. In just that short length of time, I realized that I had found a professor to serve as my major adviser and mentor, one with whom I would feel comfortable to work for. I left his office that day knowing that I had a future at the University of Minnesota.

Another moment in time with Milt that remains locked forever in my memory occurred in the summer of 1979. Milt had traveled to the prairies of North Dakota to check on my progress during the first season of my graduate research project. Upon his arrival in Jamestown, I met Milt at the airport, and we drove to my apartment for a quick meal before heading into the field. My wife, Chris, and I were sitting with Milt at the kitchen table, as we enjoyed a home-cooked meal of fried chicken. Well, we noticed that Milt was eating his chicken rather slowly and very carefully, Milt was turning each piece of chicken over and over, examining it minutely, as if it was not cooked to his liking. We asked Milt if something was wrong with the chicken, and he replied, "Oh, no, not at all! I'm reviewing my avian anatomy." Well, in that instant, I knew that I was in for an intense learning experience with Milt Weller as my adviser and that I would become trained to focus as never before!!

A very fond memory I have from my days at the University of Minnesota is the periodic evening gatherings, hosted by Milt and Doris at their home, for Milt's graduate students. These were meant to foster grad student communication on shared research issues and questions, but they also served to enhance camaraderie among fellow students. I always enjoyed these cozy get-togethers in such a homey setting. These evening gatherings also always ended with one of Doris's superb desserts! That was always a very welcome treat for struggling grad students.

These are but a few of the memorable waypoints in time that stand out since my relationship with Milt began more than 35 years ago, on that distant winter day in the late 1970s. Milt led me through a highly rewarding period of intellectual growth while serving as my adviser and mentor at the University of Minnesota. Later, in the 1980s and early 1990s, Milt served as my advocate and as my colleague, friend, and cooperator, as we worked together on collaborative research projects for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Milt became more and more my friend and confidant while he and Doris resided in Corpus Christi after his retirement. We were able to meet regularly for lunch then, often lamenting the proliferation of institutional barriers which came to burden federal

wildlife scientists after the mid-1990s.

I am fortunate to have known Milt as my adviser, friend, and confidant over these many years. Milt assisted me in so many ways, as he has selflessly aided his other graduate students, as well. In addition to that, though, Milt Weller was truly a good and decent man. No man can leave a better legacy than this.

Marc Woodin - June 22, 2018 at 03:14 PM



“ Milton Weller took me on as his advisee during my freshmen year at Iowa State University (1965). Seldom do teachers show any interest in freshmen but Dr. Weller guided me through the next two years at ISU. I remember him once telling me that I should be careful about publishing natural history notes in Iowa Bird Life as some day they might reflect poorly on my standing as a scientist. I deeply respected him, as did the other undergraduates in the wildlife program. He was a remarkable teacher and always a gentleman of the highest order. Rick Knight (Colorado State University)

Rick Knight - April 19, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ My heartfelt sympathies to Doris and Mitchel in this difficult time. Great sadness for all, of course, but also a time for me to reflect on my good fortune to have had Dr. Weller as a teacher, mentor, and role model throughout my 45+ years in academia. (I still find it difficult to refer to him as Milt.) I first met him shortly after I graduated from high school in 1961. My parents drove me to Ames from New Jersey for the summer welcome to ISU week for incoming freshman. I was enthralled by just being on a university campus and meeting such a wonderful person, an opinion reinforced by my Mother's high praise for the kind professor that welcomed us to campus. Another clear memory is walking through a forest on a class field trip, probably in the spring of 1962. We heard blue jay calls and watched them moving slowly through the forest. Dr. Weller noted that they were probably searching for eggs or young nestlings. As always, his words were a lesson about the birds, what they were doing and why. I commented, Unfortunately, they will probably find some. Dr. Weller's quiet response was, And if they didn't we would be knee deep in birds. I have used the same words in conversation with my students many times. Our casual conversation on that walk through the forest was an early lesson in ecology. Those lessons continued through my four years at Ames, including two summers of field work at Elk Creek and in the Ruthven area wetlands. Muskrats at Elk Creek were the focus of my research but my primary duties were to serve as a field assistant to the waterfowl ecology graduate students. How lucky I was! In the field and in the classroom at Ames, I learned about species and the ecological communities/ecosystems that sustain them. Other lessons from Dr. Weller: Use scientific methods and observe and document natural history. Understand the theories that help us to make sense of what we are seeing. Recognize the diversity of disciplines that are integral to extraction of principles. And learn the names of the people whose contributions have provided the foundations of current knowledge. Our paths crossed at various times over the years, most recently in the 1990s when I served with him on committees for the South Florida Water Management District. We were reviewing the Kissimmee River Restoration program. What a treat to spend days with him again in the field and in conversation about wetland restoration! My thoughts in the last few weeks have gone to the Dan Fogelberg song titled The Leader of the Band. Milton W. Weller was the leader of a band of waterfowl biologists, wetland scientists, and ecologists. The music of his teachings continues to be played by scores of first and second generation Weller students. He was a first class mentor and scholar, always a kind and gentle soul.

Jim Karr - January 21, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ In Memory of Milt Weller My sincere condolences to Doris and Mitch on the passing of your husband and father. I and many others join you in mourning his passing. Dr. Weller was an exceptional educator, advisor, and friend to those of us who were fortunate enough to spend time with him during and after years spent in graduate school. His passion for wetlands and water birds and exceptional capabilities as an educator attracted me and many others to work under his direction while he taught at Iowa State University, University of Minnesota, and Texas A & M University. I was fortunate to have had him for my graduate advisor in 1960s while he at ISU. Aside from his passion for wetlands and waterfowl which we shared, I will always remember him for making graduate school a unique and exceptional learning experience. He was and continues to be exceptionally admired by students who worked under his direction because we came away with very positive memories from the time we shared with him, and his efforts in helping us attain our goals. Milt accomplished this and much more through generously giving of his time and knowledge to his many students. He would purposely set the bar high to help ensure his students recognize and take advantage of their capabilities. While he was easy to communicate with, he commanded respect and expected serious thought being given to the subject under discussion. There was never a doubt that he had our best interests at heart. These traits along with the knowledge and wisdom we gained from having worked with him, and the bond that came from our shared passion for marsh wildlife and wetlands, have left us with a deep sense of loss. At the same time, we celebrate having been able to share time with this special individual and his unique talents that have made this planet a better place to live through his many efforts on behalf of wildlife and wetland conservation.

Gary - January 19, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ I was sorry to hear of the loss of Dr. Weller. He had a profound influence on my life and my career. He was such a humble, kind person that just exuded wisdom. He was such an incredible example for me and so many young students (and faculty). I am forever grateful for his guidance, insights, and friendship. Doris and Mitch, Sharon and I are sincerely sorry for your loss.

Sammy King - January 12, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ As I close in on 80 years of age, I can speak with some authority about the role of others in shaping, and influencing your life. If your lucky, there will be four or five people that have profoundly enhanced your life, making you a better person, inspiring, and motivating you in positive ways. Milt is on my short list. He is in my professional pedigree under pinning every accomplishment. He has touched the lives of millions of people through the museum that I led for 25 years. Looking back on those amazing, and formative summers at Elk Creek, and Dewey's Pasture, I am reminded of what a privilege it was to work with Milt and his students.

DeVere Burt - January 11, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ Shortly after starting graduate school at Texas A&M in the early 1980s, I remember reading one of Milt's articles that he wrote in the 1950s from research conducted at the Delta Waterfowl Research Station. His writing style not only articulated the science, but the clarity and simplicity of his prose was beautifulalmost poetic. I was only an adjunct graduate student under Milt at Texas A&M. Yet, he gave me the full complement of the time and expertise afforded his full-time graduate students. I was so lucky to have come under his tutelage. He took of his time for almost weekly meetings: let's discuss. One of many kindnesses that sticks with me was, to help me meet my deadline, he reviewed my dissertation over a weekend. My fortune to have come to know Dr. Milt Weller has had a strong impact on my career. I could not thank him enough.

Bill Tietje - January 09, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ I would not have accomplished what I did with my career had it not been for Milt's kindness and knowledge. I owe my entire career to him. Thanks ever so much to Doris for her assistance as well - you were a part of the team too.

Rich Crawford - January 08, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ Milt graciously took me on as an "orphan" graduate student after my major professor moved out of state. He was very patient with me, a city slicker unused to the great outdoors, until I learned enough to conduct field research. The ecological, professional, and life lessons he taught helped me in many ways throughout my various work experiences, from writing and editing to acquisition and management of natural areas. Doris and Mitch, thank you for caring for him so well and for so long. I hope you will be comforted by hearing from the many people whose lives were enriched by knowing him.

Kay Brennan - January 08, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ Milt's philosophies and teachings live on in the many he influenced and then in turn in the next generation following. It is a life to be celebrated.

Hallett - January 03, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ My sympathies to your family. Dr. Weller was instrumental in starting my career as a young, work study intern at TAMU. I was, and still am, extremely honored to be a part of his group in even a minor way. He also provided an opportunity of a lifetime for me to work with his graduate students on the North Slope of Alaska that cemented my path as a wildlife biologist. His professionalism, knowledge, kindness and wry smile are remembered fondly.

Lindy Garner - January 02, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ Our most sincere condolences from the Brock family. What a blessing to have your parents for such a long time, may God give you the peace your heart needs during this time.

Greg Brock - January 01, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ Mitch, sorry for your loss

Denny Steffler - January 01, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ What a great man. I, too, benefited from his wise words and sage advice while a student at Delta - helpful and not at all condescending. His nest trap has allowed me to catch Red-breasted Mergansers for over 30 years. At conferences Milt and Doris were great company. Thanks Bill for the great photos.

Rodger Titman - December 31, 2017 at 12:00 AM



“ I extend my sincere sympathy to wife Doris and son Mitchel as you grieve the passing of your beloved husband and father. Dr. Milt Weller was my mentor, teacher, and role model for nearly 50 years. I treasure the seasons spent afield with Milt and the inspiration and guidance he provided during my years as his student at Iowa State University, and later as a collaborator on many avian and wetland projects in Alaska. My memories of our time together in Antarctica, Dewey's Pasture in northwest Iowa, and in Alaska on the North Slope are lasting and will always remind me of this wonderful man who meant so much to me and so many others. Doris and Mitchel and family, I wish you peace and comfort as we all remember the kind and generous man we loved and admired. With affection and sympathy,

Dirk Derksen - December 27, 2017 at 12:00 AM



“ Thank you Sammy for sharing news of Dr. Weller, and thanks to you, Leigh, Dave, and others composing tributes for Milt. Milt's and Leigh's paper in Living Bird (1973) on the hemi-marsh concept was the inspiration for my dissertation research at Delta (Kaminski and Prince 1981, JWM). Fondly, I remember Milt visiting Delta in 1977 and going afield with me to inspect my study area and project. I was proud and privileged to show him the area and listen to his wisdom regarding ecology of hemi-marshes and other wetlands. Milt had ecological systems understanding before advances of systems science in ecology, and he was a genteel gentleman and mentor. Those of us who read his works and were honored to know him always will remember his contributions to wildlife students and the profession. We also remember Doris, who frequently accompanied Milt in their many travels to visit students and venues in North America. Hail to the HEMI-MARSH and Milt who conceived its name. Rick Kaminski

Rick Kaminski - December 27, 2017 at 12:00 AM



“ Our sincere condolences to his wife of many years and to his son & daughter-in-law.

Fred - December 23, 2017 at 12:00 AM