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Ruthie Stearns

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### Remembering Elaine Bachel 1946-2021

By Ruthie Stearns

Elaine Bachel was born June 6, 1946, in Itasca County, Minnesota, and passed away May 22, 2021, in Lincoln. She lived in Minnesota until she was ten, and it was there that she developed her love of the outdoors, especially birds. When her father passed away, Elaine, her sister and her mother moved to Omaha to live with her grandmother. She graduated from Omaha South High School and then attended college in Omaha, graduating as a registered nurse in 1968. She worked for many years for Lincoln ENT physician Dr. Charles Barton. It was in working for him and traveling to clinics around the state that she learned to pilot an airplane. She said Dr. Barton told her if something happened to him, she needed to know how to fly. Also, she worked about two years for the state of Nebraska at the Department of Health and Human Services.



Elaine Bachel with Great Horned Owl in 2010. Photo courtesy of Dina Barta, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Conservation Officer.

In 1986, Elaine began volunteering for Raptor Recovery Nebraska (now Raptor Conservation Alliance), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing care and support to injured and orphaned raptors. She always had owls and other raptors in the basement of her home, both rescues to be released and those that stayed with her. In her career as a raptor conservator, she cared for at least 500 owls.

I knew of Elaine because she was a friend of a friend. But our birding friendship began one day in 2010, when she called and asked if I wanted to go birding. I was eager to go birding with her, but it was January, so I asked her what birds you can see in Nebraska in January. Elaine just laughed. We drove around Platte River and Schramm State Parks, but ended up at Jack Sinn WMA, and I saw my first Rough-legged Hawk, along with a Merlin, a Northern Harrier and a Horned Lark. Other notables that day were titmice at Schramm and an American Kestrel at Platte River. Over the next weeks, she would call again, and she took me all over southeast Nebraska that late winter and early spring. Then she invited me along for a week of birding in Ohio, where for five amazing days we birded a boardwalk at Magee Marsh, finding warblers of all kinds, including several firsts for me: Prothonotary, Golden-winged, and Mourning, among others.

Over these years, there isn't a bird in Nebraska or a gravel road or a tucked away birding area that doesn't bring an Elaine story to my mind. We went everywhere. She showed me the birds, and how to find the birds and where they would be. I can't say enough what this gift of birding has meant to me. It's what I always wanted to do, my whole life, and she gave that to me.