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6-2022

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Remembering Lanny Randolph

By William Flack

Nebraska's birding community suffered a great loss on June 17, 2022, with the death of Lanny Randolph, an enthusiastic birder and a good friend to all of us.

Lanny was born on July 18, 1951. After graduating from Kearney High School, he joined the Navy and served until 1973. He then returned to Kearney and worked a variety of jobs while attending Kearney State College, where he majored in English and was involved in theater.

In 1983, Kearney State expanded its library, and Lanny took a temporary job helping move books. One of his fellow temps was Robin Harding, and their meeting marked the beginning of a partnership that lasted almost four decades, to the end of Lanny's life.

Lanny might've taken up birding in high school, where his track coach was George Brown, an avid birder who later served as president of the NOU. Unfortunately, he'd missed that opportunity, and later came to regret that he hadn't been birding when the Navy sent him to South Carolina and to the Mediterranean.



However, Robin was a birder. She pointed out birds to him on their fishing trips together, and he decided that he'd really like to see a Great Horned Owl. The two made several trips to Fort Kearny before he got a good look at one, and he was hooked. He and Robin became involved with the NOU, and Lanny eventually served as vice-president and then as president of the organization.

Through Mark Brogie, Lanny and Robin learned about a new angle on birding: county listing. They took it up enthusiastically, and spent many a weekend working a county with their field cards and target lists and heavily-annotated county maps.

At all too young an age, Lanny was beset by health problems, culminating with the diagnosis of a blood cancer. Despite his worsening condition, he was determined to keep birding, and, with Robin's unfailing support, he was able to do so.

On May 13, 2021, Lanny and Robin met Paul Dunbar, Steve Morris, and Bill Flack at Liberty Cove Recreation Area. The quintet spent several hours birding by the lake, adding a Sora to their Webster County lists. They then made their way to a picnic shelter, where Paul married Lanny and Robin, with Steve and Bill as witnesses.

Lanny's health continued to decline, but he resolutely continued birding. In May 2022, he was able to attend the NOU meeting in Gering, and to see many of his longtime friends for the first time since the COVID pandemic. But a month later, on June 17, he was taken from us.

Lanny's no longer physically present among us. But for those of us who knew him, he'll always be there in our memories, an invisible presence on every NOU field trip and an almost-audible companion as we go out in pursuit of county birds. We'll all miss him greatly, but we were enriched by knowing him.