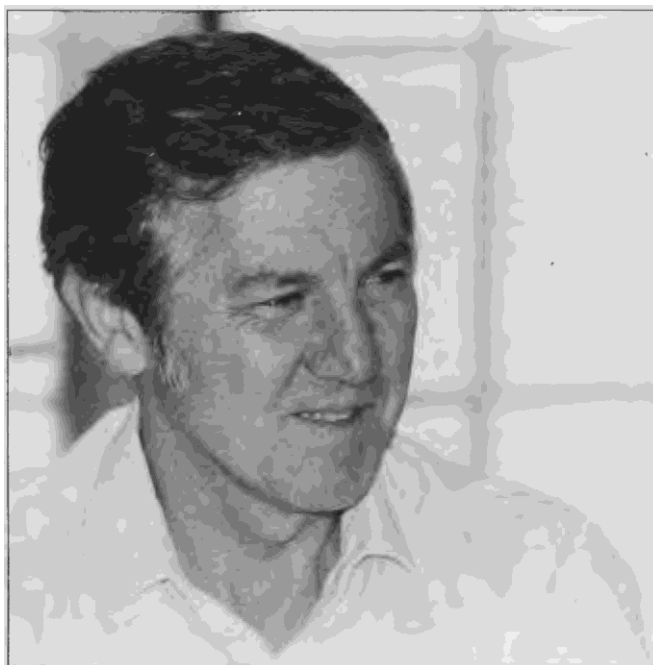


The Bird Man

Massachusetts Audubon's conservation director Jim Baird was born in Scotland, moved at age three with his family to New England, and grew up in Jamaica Plain, a working-class neighborhood of Boston where the predominant local wildlife consisted of pigeons, starlings, and sparrows. In spite of the limited ecosystem, a nearby park and the natural history programs and field trips of the Children's Museum in Jamaica Plain sparked in Baird an early fascination with the natural world and he went on to become one of the foremost birdwatchers in New England. Now, not unlike the organization he has served for nearly 25 years, Jim Baird has gradually expanded his work to include entire ecosystems.

Before coming to the Society in 1961, Baird directed the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Rhode Island, where he initiated an extensive bird-banding program to generate accurate data on Atlantic Coast bird migration. He was an integral part of the rapid transformation of Massachusetts Audubon in the late 1950s and early 1960s from a somewhat sleepy bird club into an activist environmental organization, a change he attributes largely to two catalytic events: the acquisition of Drumlin Farm, and the hiring of a new executive vice president, Allen H. Morgan, who had very strong ideas about what role the Society should take regarding environmental preservation.

One of the first causes of the new Massachusetts Audubon tackled was DDT, which at the time was dismissed in much the same way that acid rain is downplayed by some today. "But," says Baird, "we were right about DDT and we're right



Jim Baird

about acid rain. Eventually that's going to become clear."

Baird appears to have thrived on the variety of tasks that his job has allowed him to take under his wing: everything from publishing scientific papers on bird behavior, to overseeing a maintenance crew, to handling animal welfare policy.

"Cluttered" would fairly describe his present office, with its masses of stacked papers on his desk, antique bird books heaped on the floor, and dozens of mysterious, thin, rectangular, enormous objects wrapped in brown paper. He explains that, despite the disarray, these are in fact treasures: a sampling of the approximately 170 original Audubon prints and other art that Massachusetts Audubon has acquired over the years, some unexpectedly found in the attics of houses on donated property, some via gifts. The Audubon prints are temporarily stored in Baird's office during the flurry of ac-

tivity surrounding the bicentennial of John James Audubon's birthday.

Baird pulls out a delicate rendering of a pair of red-necked grebes in a double elephant folio edition. Much as he appreciates Audubon's art close-at-hand, he says he'll be thankful for the day when the Society completes another of Baird's projects, a proper storage facility for these prints and the other accumulated pieces of art: miniature wood carvings, sculptures, and oil paintings and watercolors by prominent American artists. Eventually he hopes this collection will be exhibited in a Massachusetts Audubon natural history art museum, noting that as soon as the storage facility is ready the Society will be "very interested" in obtaining more high-quality natural history art. "It gives us yet another avenue for reaching people with our conservation message," he says.

Another of Baird's pet projects is the tour program,

now in its fifteenth year with tours scheduled to visit France, Peru, Australia, Kenya, and Iceland in 1985 and, in January 1986, Antarctica. Baird has led trips all over the world. (He can't even say where he'll be headed this year—"I tend to fill in where I'm needed.") He explains that, in addition to the enjoyment they give, the rationale behind the tours is "to expand people's consciousness about worldwide problems in the environment."

Baird is also overseeing Massachusetts Audubon's new assistance program to the Audubon Society of the tiny Central American country of Belize. This sister organization has been given the task of managing that country's national parks and, if things go well, more parklands may be designated. "A good proportion of our New England birds spend their winters in Central America," he points out, "and if they don't have any habitat to go to because it's all been turned into cattle ranches, then that's going to adversely affect them."

Baird's eclectic tastes are also evident in his private life: he is co-owner with his wife, Carol, of an antique business and is something of an authority on American art. He and his wife are presently restoring a house in Petersham built in 1740.

Though this low-profile jack-of-all-trades has seen many changes in the Massachusetts Audubon Society, he still feels its most important message "is to show that birds don't exist by themselves, they exist in a context of an ecosystem, a world around them."

Gale Warner

Gale Warner is a freelance writer with an interest in peace issues.