

LETTERS

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PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON GARY BORTOLOTTI'S LINKS WITH SPAIN

Gary R. Bortolotti was an extraordinary researcher and a man with a golden heart, whose collaborations were actively sought by all those fortunate researchers who happened to meet him for more than ten minutes. During his life, he established many fruitful collaborations with dozens of non-Canadian scientists worldwide, in U.S.A., Scotland, Argentina, Brazil, Israel, Gibraltar, and many other places. But his links with Spain were particularly important, to the point that about a third of his papers were coauthored with Spanish colleagues.

Gary (*Gaary*, with an open “a”, for many of us, the Spaniards) was very influential for a whole generation of Spanish ecologists. In the last 15 yr of his life he visited Spain at least once a year to meet colleagues, and every trip meant a rosary of necessarily short visits to his many friend-collaborators in the north (Pyrenees), central regions (Madrid, Ciudad Real, Extremadura) and the south (Seville and Granada). In return, no fewer than ten young Spanish biologists (early career researchers, as we call them nowadays) visited his lab, obtaining training and advice that frequently shaped their subsequent research. Over the years, these regular visits allowed him to acquire a vast knowledge of the Spanish culture and geography, a fine taste for the best local wines and tapas, and a passion for the observation and photography of the Spanish wildlife. If anyone wonders, after so many years Gary did not precisely master the Spanish language, a minor problem that, if anything, only affected his self-esteem, not his tremendous ability to communicate with just about anyone: his flamboyant manners and expressive body language were usually sufficient. As an example: Gary was proved unable to correctly pronounce “quebrantahuesos” (Bearded Vulture) despite this being one of his favorite and most photographed Spanish birds, but he would not hesitate to name it nonverbally (often stressing the species' unique look and food habits, large size, and social behavior) to the great joy of all of us, including him.

Gary was a true friend (and best friend) for many of us and, despite the distance, the time lag, and an ocean, he

became a significant part of our lives. Even though he described himself at times as a “grumpy Canadian” (“*we Canadians complain about everything*”), his Mediterranean background shone through easily, expressed in a very outgoing personality, an enormous capacity to connect with others in ways that would have felt “invasive” for those with a more northerly background, an enormous enjoyment of life and people, a love of words and talking (and listening), and an unrestrained capacity of expressing what he felt (both positive and negative). That is probably one of the reasons why he was so comfortable and at ease in Spain (in addition to the wildlife and the weather, obviously!), as this environment allowed him to fully express parts of his personality and interests.

It is only fair to say that our Canadian friend deserved an unofficial adoption certificate in Sevilla, a warm, friendly, centuries-old city showing an admixture of cultures brought over by ancient empires. Seville and the Doñana Biological Station probably were Gary's second Alma Mater scientifically and culturally speaking. In his punctual yearly visits to Doñana, novel ideas ranging from the small to the grand were always discussed and tested, with a breadth of knowledge that in later years even included aspects of human evolution. In fact, at the time of his untimely death, Gary was working on a paper on Neanderthal ornamentation, which was published posthumously and caused a media sensation, as superior mental abilities were inferred for those extinct peoples from the use of bird feathers of particular sizes and colors.

Gary, our English-speaking Canadian Amigo, is memorialized in Doñana National Park with a ceramic tile on the patio of the Doñana Palace depicting his beloved American Kestrel. Gary will hover as a kestrel inside our hearts for the remainder of our lives. —**Beatriz Arroyo (e-mail address: beatriz.arroyo@uclm.es), Instituto de Investigación en Recursos Cinegéticos (IREC) (CSIC-UCLM-JCCM), Ciudad Real, Spain; Juan José Negro and Julio Blas, Doñana Biological Station CSIC, c/Americo Vespucio s/n, 41092 Sevilla, Spain.**



Gary Bortolotti holding a Lesser Kestrel during one his many research trips to Spain. (Photo by Julio Blas.)