

A "Father's Day" Bucks County Birder Profile

Gerry Dewaghe

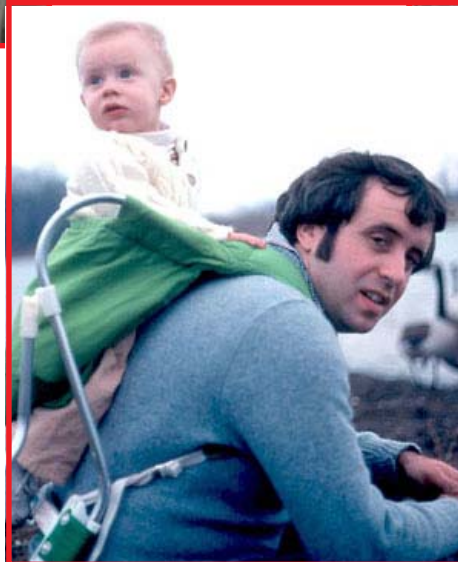
by: François Dewaghe



François Dewaghe



Gerry Dewaghe



François and Gerry Dewaghe circa 1979

Place of birth: Le Havre, France

Age: 58

Resides: Langhorne PA

Life list: ABA List 721; world list approximately 1,800

Property list: Unsure, somewhere around 70-75. Some better birds of note: Evening Grosbeak, Common Redpoll, Common Nighthawk, Wilson's Snipe, Wild Turkey, Bicknell's Thrush (he still hasn't positively decided on this one).

Favorite field guide: Dad has more field guides than anyone I know. He actually collects them, especially old ones. He does not really use them as 'field guides' though. He studies them at home and uses them as references, but almost never has a field guide with him when out birding, especially when he really needs one.

Favorite bird: Shorebirds. Dad can sit and dig through flocks of shorebirds all day long. EVEN IN THE FALL!!!

Magazines he reads regularly: *Birding, Audubon, Outdoor Photographer*

Best birding locations he has visited: This is a tough one. Dad has visited so many different places all over the US and the rest of the world, it is hard to really choose one. Attu has incredible birding, but if he had to

pick a favorite in the US it would be a tie between Texas and Arizona. Over the years, he has always jumped at chances to go to the southwest. Whether it is the variety of species, the beauty of the habitat, or the ever-present chance for Mexican vagrants, Dad has always loved birding in Texas and Arizona. In the world, it would have to be France (partly because of the food).

What has birding taught him? To be patient. HAH!

Person who most influenced your passion for birds: This would have to be his wife, (my mother) Christine Dewaghe. The little known fact is that Chris was the first Dewaghe to pick up a pair of binoculars. As a young couple, the two of them used to go to the woods to go hiking and fishing. One day, Chris saw a bird that looked like nothing she had ever seen. After consulting some books, she figured out it was a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Dad got her a pair of binoculars to encourage her new-found interest in birds. Eventually, the interest became mutual (and a 2nd pair of bins was required). Since then, Mom has been an (almost) ever-present birding companion to Dad. I'd also like to think I've kept my father's birding ability and knowledge on its toes.

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Dad had an early fascination with birds as a boy in France after bringing home an injured Puffin and nursing it back to health in the bathtub. This fascination would blossom into a birding obsession in the early 70s after picking up the habit from my mother. I'm sure that neither he nor my mother had any clue that a Yellow-billed Cuckoo would lead him on to places like Attu, the Ruby Mountains, the Carmargue, or the high Andes in search of more birds.

Bucks County Audubon Society was the next step for my father. He and my mother joined and made many new friends with the same interest in birds. Under the tutelage of one of these birders, Hart Rufe, he learned more and more about birds and, also, birding trips.

Dad started leading trips for BCAS soon after. At first, there were small weekend trips to places like Cape May, Chincoteague, Brigantine. After becoming the Field Trip Chairman for BCAS when Hart stepped down, these trips expanded outward to Texas, Colorado, Canada, New England, and France, to name a few. Dad grew to be highly admired by his peers as a birding trip leader. His trips were known for getting great birds and especially for great looks at the birds. His devout following of participants grew so large that some people would even drop off their checks for the trip at our front door instead of sending them through the mail, just to make sure that they had their place. It no longer mattered where the trip was going, just as long as my Dad was leading the trip. "Where are we going this year, Dad?" became a common question.

When not leading trips, Mom, Dad, and I would go on our own trips all over the country. My father's knowledge of birds always astounded me. He always seemed to know where the bird was that we were looking for and always knew it as soon as he found it. He was like a walking field guide. We still joke that he has a "special" scope that always has the bird in it as soon as he sets it up. I can't tell you how many times I have heard the phrase "I have ze bird!" Ever modest about his skill, he usually says that people re-



Black-billed Cuckoo
Pocono Mountains
Photo by Gerry Dewaghe



Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Pocono Mountains
Photo by Gerry Dewaghe

member him because of his accent. It's really his personable nature and expertise that stay in other birders' memories. Although, when you hear him yell out things like "Yellow-bellied Sapsucker!" with his accent, it is hard to forget. His skill was also put to the test while competing on the BCAS Questar team in the World Series of Birding and in Bucks County Birdathons.

On the conservation side, Dad has always been eager to help out. I have fond memories of building Bluebird boxes as a child in the garage with my father and helping set them up and check on them in Tyler State Park. He participates in the Christmas Bird Count and North American Migratory Bird Count every year. More recently, he has been helping out the State Park Service by observing a new Bald Eagle nest at a location he found. He also spent many hours volunteering for Bucks County Audubon.

Photographing birds is also one of Dad's passions. He has photographed over 75 percent of the birds he has seen, many of which are fantastic pictures. Two years ago, he switched to digital equipment. This switch seems to have reinvigorated his interest. Since then he has photographed (well) over 200 species of birds. He has also started specific photo projects. On his website, <http://www.pbase.com/gdewaghe>, he has been compiling pictures of the Eastern Warblers, as well as year-long compilations of the birds of Core Creek Park and Tyler State Park. His more recent purchase of "Bertha" or, as he calls it, "Suzie" (a 500mm Canon lens), has produced pictures that look like they belong on the covers of some of the magazines he reads.

With retirement coming soon, plans for more and more birding are being made. Dad is headed to one of his dream locals, Peru, this August. He and Mom plan to buy a big RV and travel throughout the US photographing birds. Australia and New Zealand are still on the horizon, as well as more of the tropics. After that, who knows?

In my years of birding, I have met and birded with many of the "big" names of birding. As big as they are, I list my father above them. I'd rather be birding with him and Mom than anyone else in this world. Some kids play catch with their Dads, some go fishing; my father and I, we go BIRDING! And I wouldn't have it any other way.

