

Bert Filemyr Honored with the DEVOC Award

Art McMorris

At DVOC's annual banquet on Nov. 21, 2013 President Art McMorris elicited a murmur of surprise when he announced, after the customary awards had been presented, that there was one more award to be given. He then called Bert Filemyr up to the podium and presented him with DVOC's highest honor, the DEVOC Award. Bert became only the eleventh person to be so honored in our club's history.

Bert was taken completely by surprise, and so were many banqueters, because many years had elapsed since the last time this highly prestigious award had been conferred. The award was created in 1958 to honor Julian Potter and presented to a select few since then. It had last been presented 17 years previously, in 1996, and there was an earlier gap of 27 years between dates of presentation. The 11 recipients of the award to date are:

Julian Potter (1958)
Henry Underdown (1960)
Norman McDonald (1963)
Phillips B. Street (1990)
George Reynard (1990)
Alan Brady (1990)
James K. Meritt (1990)
Bob Sehl (1992)
Frank and Barbara Haas (1996)
Bert Filemyr (2013)

Because little about the award had made it into the club's written records, the award, for all its prominence in the club's heritage, had become more a matter of oral tradition rather than written history. In Julian Potter's obituary, Norman McDonald recounted a surprise dinner given in Potter's honor in 1958, five years before his death, in which he was "certified... as the first and only designated 'DEVOC,' one who has devoted a long and useful life to

the sport and science of bird study" (McDonald, 1963). Alan Brady's photographs of the event were printed as the frontispiece of the 1958 issue of *Cassinia*, but without any mention of the DEVOC Award (Brady, 1958). The only other published reference to the award appears to be in Phillips B. Street's history of DVOC's first 100 years. Street wrote that "What was intended to be the club's most prestigious award is a certificate depicting a queer-looking caricature of a bird drawn by Joseph Devlin and naming the recipient a DEVOC — one who has devoted a long and useful life to the sport and science of bird study as a member of the club. This honor has only been bestowed by council three times — to Julian Potter in 1958, Henry Underdown in 1960 and Norman McDonald in 1963." (Street, 1988–89) At the 1958 event, Julian Potter was presented with a plaque and a painting by Conrad



Photo: Paul Curtis

A surprised Bert Filemyr holds his DEVOC award certificate.

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Roland. The certificate with the caricature of a bird was introduced in the 1960s and has become a quirky but revered part of the award.

Bert's DEVOC certificate reads:

This certifies that Bert Filemyr has qualified as a DEVOC. An occasional honor to that member of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club who, by his outstanding contributions to ornithology, has best exemplified the spirit of the Founders & upheld the prestige which they established for the Club.

In attempting to learn more about the history of the award prior to the nomination and election of Bert, I spoke with all three living recipients of the DEVOC award: Alan Brady, who received it in 1990 (and sadly passed away a few months after I spoke with him), and Frank and Barb Haas, who received it in 1996, and with several long-time members of DVOC. None of them recalled any written history of the award or the criteria for receiving it, other than that it was for “doing things for the club” — an understatement, considering the outstanding contributions each recipient had made to the club over many years. (Alan Brady, in characteristic humor, added, “You also had to be good-looking.”) All three recipients said that they received it as a complete surprise, at the annual DVOC banquet.

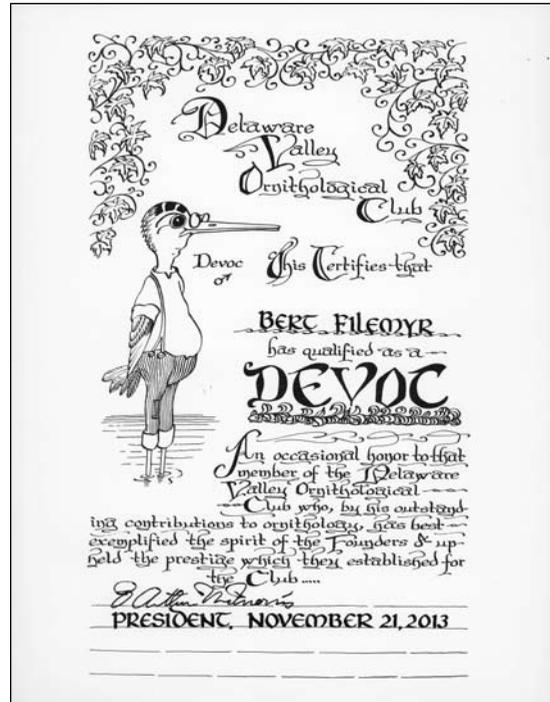
Bert was cited for a list of special contributions to the club that is much too long to recount here. It included his role as Treasurer, Webmaster, frequent

Literature Cited

- Brady, A. (1958). *Cassinia* 43: facing page 3.
McDonald, N. (1963). Julian K. Potter. *Cassinia* 47: 33-36.
Street, P. B. (1988-89). A History of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, The First One Hundred Years. *Cassinia* 63: 2-35.

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DEVOC Award certificate presented to Bert Filemyr on November 21, 2013.

speaker at club meetings, unofficial photographer of record, active service on many committees, and role as innovator and sage; his knowledge and skill in all aspects of birding; his mentorship and support of birders of all ages and levels of expertise; and his scholarship and contributions to the history of ornithology in general and DVOC in particular.