

Alan Brady 1920–2014

The DVOC lost one of the outstanding members in its history in the passing of Alan Brady on January 21, 2014 at the age of 93. Alan joined the DVOC in 1952, and during his 62 years of membership, garnered all the honors the club could bestow. He was made an Honorary Member in 1986, and received the DEVOC Award in 1990. He also won the Julian Potter (twice) and Witmer Stone awards. He served two three-year terms on Council, and the club established its endowment fund during his presidency (1964–65). Alan was the club's photographer extraordinaire, and 12 of his photos (plus one illustration) graced the covers of *Cassinia* over the years, in addition to numerous others in the interiors. He was later a founding – and very active – member of the Bucks County Birders group.

Alan Brady was born in Philadelphia to Edna (née Underdown) and Charles Brady on March 26, 1920. He attended Germantown Academy (Class of 1938), where he was very involved in student activities and was already gaining notice as a photographer. He earned letters in soccer and track (“one of the fastest of the cinder path team”), and also managed to acquire the nicknames “Pasty-face” and “Beanie.”

After graduation, Alan earned an aircraft mechanic's license from the Rising Sun School of Aeronautics in Philadelphia, and went to work for Pan American Airways in Manchester, New Hampshire. He was drafted into the Navy during World War II, where he serviced Martin PBM Mariner seaplanes for four years. After the war, he married Elizabeth Hill. They lived in Wycombe, Bucks County, PA, and celebrated 60 years together before she passed away in 2006. In 1949, Alan opened The Cameracraft Shop in Newtown, PA, and ran the business for 50 years.

Like many DVOC members of his era, Alan's introduction to birding came via his involvement in Boy Scouts. The Wissahickon woods were in Alan's backyard, and he birded them as a teenager with his good friend Tibbie Stevenson. Alan's uncle, Henry Underdown, was the DVOC treasurer for 32 years, and Henry's son, Eliot Underdown, worked briefly in the ornithology departments of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and Field Museum of Chicago before his untimely and early death in 1932. Alan participated in his first Cape May Christmas Bird Count in 1936, covering the Hidden Valley Ranch area with Norm McDonald and Dale Twining. Alan saw a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*; then called “Pigeon Hawk”) that day, but when he told count compiler Witmer Stone about it, Stone replied, “Alan, we don't see Pigeon Hawks on the Christmas Bird Count” – and, according to Alan, “that was the end of that.”

Alan was on the team that won the second World Series of Birding in 1985. In addition to his active birding in the Delaware Valley, he traveled the world



in pursuit of his passion. He made dozens of trips to Central and South America, and visited Antarctica, Turkey, Ukraine, Iceland, Scotland, Spain, the Aleutian Islands, and Japan. Alan also had a strong interest in DVOC history; among other things, he spearheaded efforts to acquire the Alexander Wilson statuette – a replica of an original by Alexander Milne Calder – that is today displayed outside the Academy of Natural Sciences library, and he photographed several large scrolls containing the results of the club's earliest May Runs, when they were being discarded during an archival purgation at the Academy.

Alan began taking pelagic trips off of New Jersey in 1967, eventually leading approximately 350 trips over the years. Brian Patteson, the current doyen of East Coast pelagic birders, said Alan “was definitely a pioneer seabirder” and, as the first to get quality shots of pelagic birds at sea, was “the dean of seabird photographers at the time.” English-born birding author Richard Crossley recalls that Alan’s reputation as a seabird expert extended to Britain before Richard first visited Cape May in 1985. One of Alan’s favorite birding trips was his month-long pelagic jaunt in 1998 aboard the *MS Explorer* that began in the Canary Islands and continued south to many islands in the South Atlantic. His early 1990s observations, on two occasions, of a massive offshore migratory movement of Blackpoll Warblers (*Setophaga striata*) provided some of the earliest evidence of the species’ extraordinary fall migration route, recently confirmed in a study using geolocators (DeLuca et al. 2015, *Biology Letters* 11: 20141045). In 2009, Alan published *Atlantic Seabird Photo Journal*, a distillation of the knowledge acquired in his decades of pelagic birding. He dedicated the book to his wife, who had recently passed away, referring to her as “my all-time loving anchor.”

Alan owned a cabin in Windsor, NH, built with some of his Navy buddies in 1949, that he visited frequently. In approximately 1960, Alan was alerted by another DVOC legend, Ernie Choate, to a house for

sale on Pearl Avenue in Cape May Point, and Alan quickly purchased it. Visiting DVOC members and other birders were welcome to stay at the house, and over the years hundreds of them availed themselves of that kind hospitality.

Alan suffered a stroke in November 2013, and passed away two months later. He is survived by his children Susan Hunter, Sally Brady, and David Brady, grandchildren Aimée and James Brady, and great-grandchildren Connor and Kylie Brady. Sally commissioned a stone bench in memory of Alan that graces a woodlot at the Bucks County Audubon Society headquarters; additionally, the Society has established the Alan Brady Youth Birding Legacy Fund, which is used to encourage young people in the study of ornithology and conservation.

In his last years, I would often find Alan sitting on the second floor deck of his Cape May Point home (“Brady’s Hawk Watch”), enjoying the warblers and butterflies flitting amongst the Japanese Pines he planted, and catching glimpses of raptors soaring overhead. It was a privilege to spend time with him then, still fascinated as he was, in the evening of his life, by the pulsing, vibrant natural world around him. Those of us who knew Alan – one of the all-time “characters” in a club with a rich history of them – and who enjoyed (and were sometimes victims of) his deadpan, impish humor realize that we have lost an irreplaceable member who was a great friend to many, performed numerous labors on behalf of the club, and did outstanding and lasting work as an ornithologist.

The author thanks Sally Brady, Susan Brady Hunter, Jane Henderson, Elaine Ryan, Brian Patteson, and Richard Crossley for information and reminiscences about Alan.

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