



*Roger Long Peterson*  
a life lived 'for the birds'

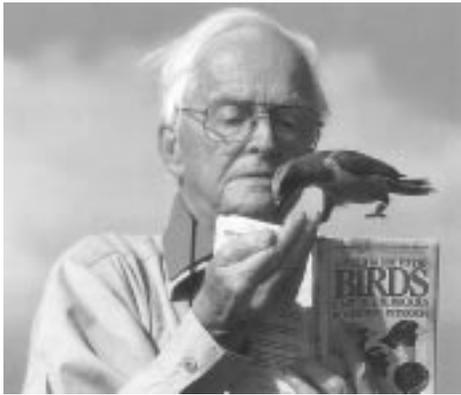
*by Emily LeDuc*



Courtesy of NASA

One cannot speak of environmental advocacy without acknowledging the lifelong contribution of Roger Tory Peterson. Author, artist, and bird enthusiast, Peterson was a central force in gaining the popularity of observing nature. His main emphasis was bird watching, and his first field guide, published in 1934, was enormously popular. It outlined simple and practical strategies for observing and identifying birds, and included hundreds of drawings, depicting birds, to facilitate easy and accurate identification.

Perched Barn Owls



*Photo courtesy of Roger Tory Peterson Institute Special Collections, Jamestown, NY. Seymour Lewin, photographer*

Peterson was born in Jamestown, New York, and as a young

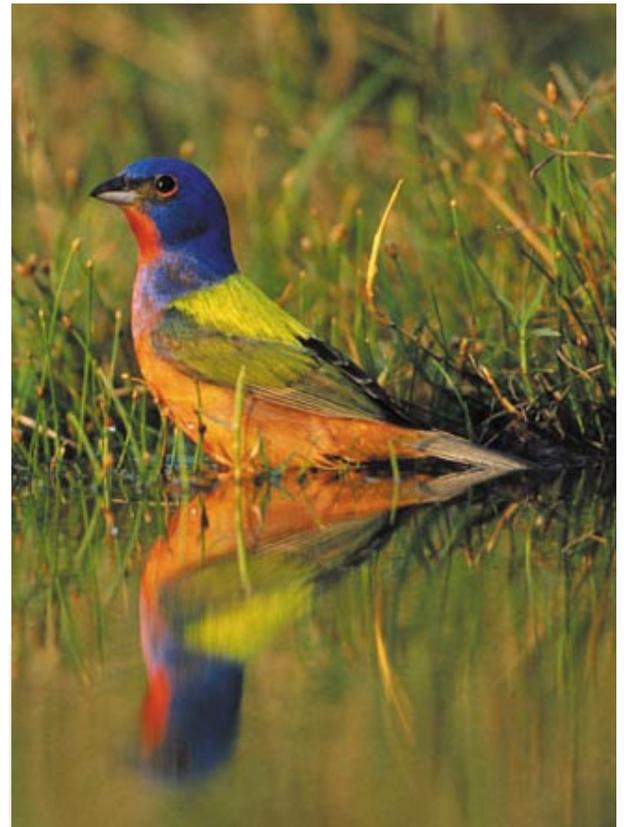
boy joined a Junior Audubon Club. It was his experiences with the club that sparked his interest in birding. He was not merely interested in observing, but was tenacious about identifying all the species he saw, and began making sketches. It was these sketches that began his journey toward becoming an artist.

Peterson attended The Art Students League and the National Academy of Design, and later became an instructor of Art and Science at the Rivers School in Brookline, Massachusetts. It was in this position that he inspired students to share in his joy of bird watching.

In 1934, Peterson published the groundbreaking “A Field Guide to the Birds.” The 2000 copies of Peterson’s first edition sold out in one week, and launched his international career as author and illustrator of more than 30 publications. His work heightened the public’s interest in wildlife and helped make bird watching a national pastime. The five editions that followed over the last 68 years have remained wildly successful, launching a series of field guides ranging from fishes to mushrooms that remain the most popular in history.

Peterson spent his life updating and editing his series of field guides, lecturing for the National Audubon Society, developing education programs, and advocating the protection of the natural world. Dr. Peterson went on to earn 23 honorary degrees and was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his role in modern environmental awareness.

Peterson and his wife frequently birdwatched at Great Island in Connecticut, where, in 1972, the use of DDT was prohibited. After years of observations and research there, Peterson noticed a



## Painted Bunting

One of the most unique and dramatically colored birds seen in the United States, the Painted Bunting is a member of the Fringillidae family, which includes other types of buntings, grosbeaks, cardinals, and finches, to name a few. The male is brightly colored, as pictured above, while the female is a less dramatic yellow-green with dark wings and tail.

A long-distance migrant, Painted Buntings are commonly seen in the Southern United States with occasional sightings in the North. They prefer dense thickets and shrubs and reside in cup shaped nests constructed from grass, leaves, and other plant material. Buntings forage for food on the ground and in low vegetation looking mostly for seeds, and occasionally, insects. They are commonly seen in central southern States, north to central Missouri.

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*“In this century, no one has done more to promote interest in living creatures than Roger Tory Peterson, the inventor of the modern field guide.”*

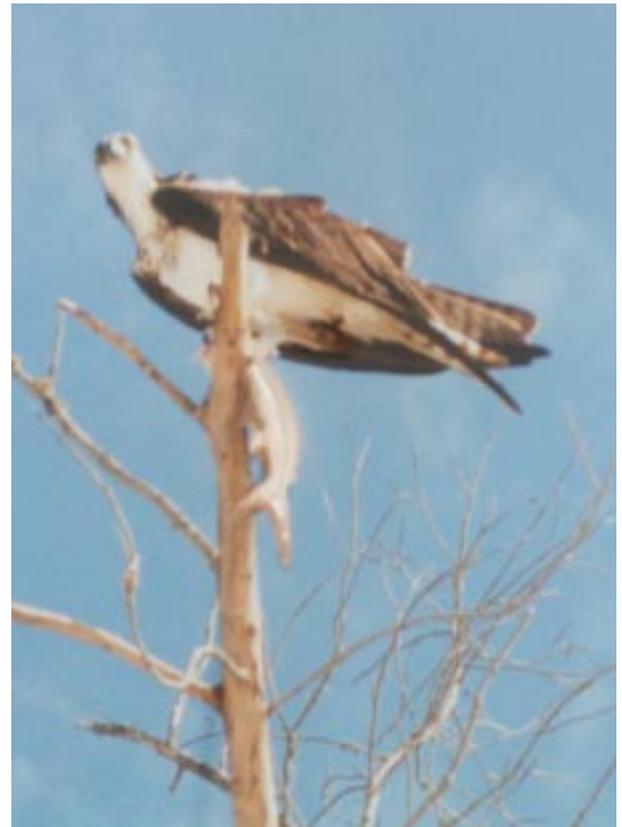
– Paul Erlich, Ecologist

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marked decline in the Osprey population, and began working to help recover the population. Peterson built nesting sites, and inspired others to take up conservation efforts for the species. By the mid-70’s, the Osprey were on the rebound, and today they continue to prosper there thanks to the continued efforts of conservation enthusiasts inspired by Dr. Peterson’s work. After his death in 1996 at the age of 87, the state of Connecticut honored Dr. Peterson by naming the Great Island wildlife refuge after him.

The Roger Tory Peterson Wildlife Area is a 588-acre parcel located at the mouth of the Connecticut River. Its tidal brackish (mixture of salt and freshwater) marsh is home to numerous varieties of plant life and animal species including osprey, sora, king rails, blue-winged teal, gadwall, willets, American bittern, American black duck, and other coastal species. The Wildlife Area provides a state boat launch accessing the lower Connecticut River and Long Island Sound. A handicapped accessible wildlife viewing platform overlooking the marsh, river, and sound is also located at the boat launch area.

During the dedication ceremony, Department of Environmental Programs Deputy Commissioner, Jane K. Stahl, expressed “Connecticut is particularly grateful to Dr. Peterson for his lifetime of work devoted to environmental awareness. Although he was nationally and internationally recognized, his influence was felt most here in Connecticut and at Great Island where the osprey have returned and other species thrive as well. For that we are thankful and we dedicate this area to him.”



## Osprey

The Osprey is a fish hunting bird of prey that possesses long curved talons and toes that are covered in short spines, or spicules, that allow the Osprey to hold on to its slippery catch. Fish constitute nearly its entire diet. The bird’s plumage is dense and oily, enabling it to actually plunge feet first into the water, rather than snatching fish from the surface, as the Eagle and other birds of prey are known to do. Ospreys build sizeable nests out of large branches and other material near water sources, such as swamps or lakes.



## Shorebirds

### Atlantic Puffin

A chunky sea bird often called the 'sea parrot' or 'clown of the ocean.' While flying, the Puffin appears stubby, short, and thick-headed. Puffins are master swimmers, and were at one time thought to be a cross between a bird and a fish. In flight, the Puffin can reach speeds of 55 mph, and can swim under water for up to a minute. Puffins winter at sea, north to the ice-line, and occasionally south to Massachusetts and Maryland.



*Lynnda Schnack*

### Royal Tern

A large tern with deeply forked, 3-4 inch tail, and large orange bill. Found nearly exclusively near salt water, the Royal Tern uses its keen eyes to see under the water from above and dives straight down to catch its prey. Primarily eats fish and shrimp and is commonly seen on sandy beaches and shorelines. Nests in ground hollows holding two spotted eggs.



### Roseate Spoonbill

A large, bright pink, wading bird with red eyes and legs. Standing over two feet tall, the Spoonbill is of the most striking birds in North America. Its long flat spoonlike bill is swept rapidly from side-to-side when feeding. The Spoonbill glides between strokes with neck extended in flight. Range restricted to south Florida.

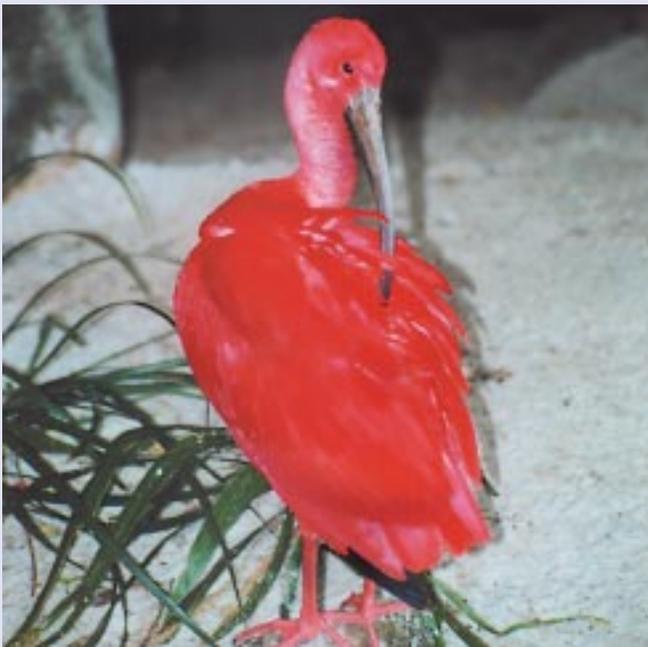
Dr. Peterson's widow, Virginia, later added,

“Watching the decline of osprey populations on Great Island, as well as other species in the 50's and 60's, Roger sounded the alarm on the devastating effects of DDT on bird populations. Whole colonies of fish-eating birds were disappearing from the Connecticut River. Ever since DDT was banned in 1972, the ospreys and other species have recovered and are now flourishing and healthy. Great Island meant so much to Roger. Honoring him here is rejoicing in his life. He would be pleased.”

Peterson Field Guides are available from book vendors on GSA Schedule 76, Publications Media. For more information, please contact:

Lloyd Brown  
(212) 264-0943  
lloyd.brown@gsa.gov

Sources for 'Roger Tory Peterson - A Life Lived for the Birds': Roger Tory Peterson Institute; Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection; Houghton Mifflin Books - Peterson Online; Roger Tory Peterson - A Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies.



Brett Schnack

### Scarlet Ibis

Once on the edge of extinction, the Scarlet Ibis population was reared back to life by its cousin the White Ibis. Conservation efforts for these beauties focused on placing Scarlet Ibis eggs in the nests of White Ibises, where they were hatched and reared to adulthood. Scarlet Ibis are accidentals in U.S. Gulf States with their range extending south to Chile.



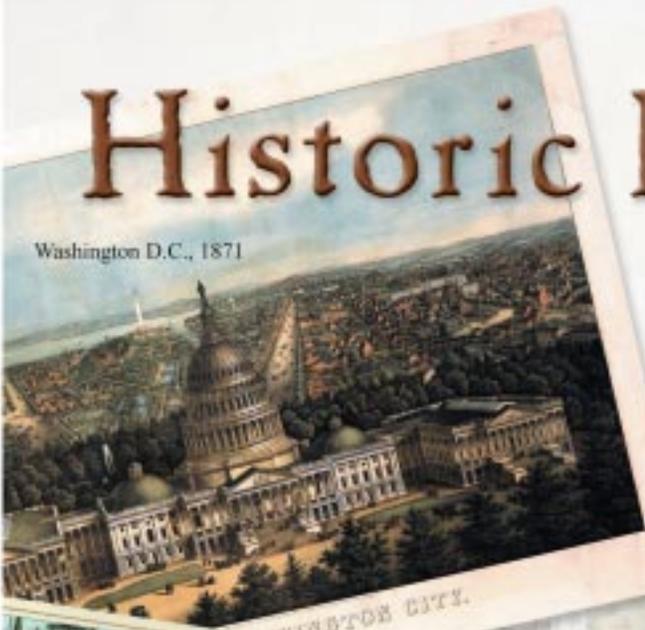
### American Goldfinch

A dramatically bright yellow and black finch that swoops deeply while in flight. Females are less brilliant with olive-yellow coloring. In winter, males revert to olive-yellow, similar to females. Light canary-like song, alternates twittering and melodious singing, rather incessant at times. Resides in thickets and prairies, on thistles eating seeds, or in pine groves. Common backyard bird. Often captured on film perched on thistle plants beautifully contrasted against the purple flower.

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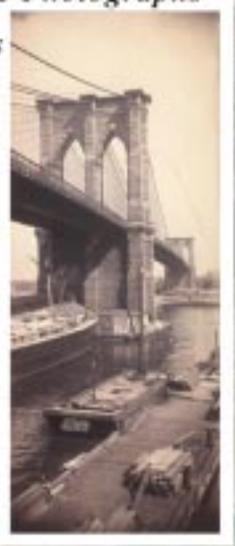
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