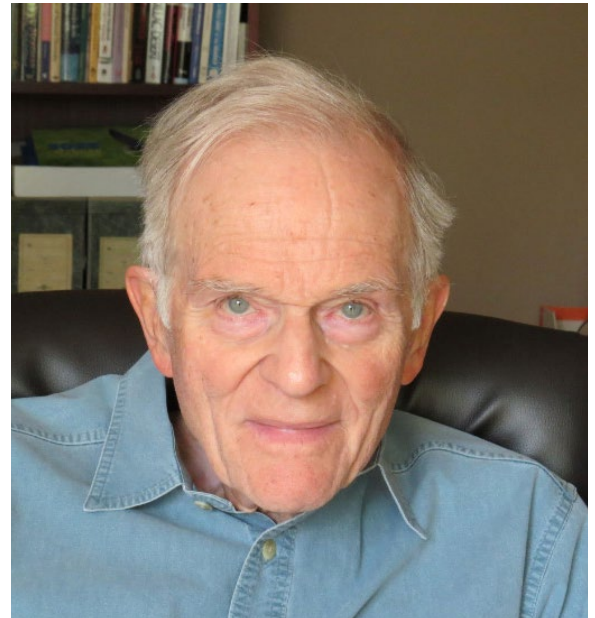


In Memoriam
WALTER THURBER
(20 November 1942–21 December 2023)

BY JOHN WESER AND DOUG JENNESS

Walter Thurber, a lifelong birder and longtime member of the Arizona Field Ornithologists, passed away at 81, after a long and full life. He started studying birds when he was 13 and was in the field watching and counting birds to the end of his life. Walter was a caring, kind, and sincere person whose passion for birding was contagious. He tried to connect everyone to birding and to bird conservation.

Walter was born in Brooklyn but spent most of his youth in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He earned a degree in sociology at Moravian College and a master's degree in urban planning at Columbia University. He was an urban planner in Allentown and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Manchester, New Hampshire; and Toledo, Ohio, before moving to Arizona where he worked at the state's Department of Water Resources. According to his wife Frances, many of his planning achievements concerned environmental issues.



Walter Thurber, 19 September 2021. Photo by Frances Thurber

Parents of 2 children, Andrew and Amy, Walter and Frances lived in Arizona for 33 years. They were members of the Maricopa Audubon Society before helping found the Desert Rivers Audubon Society. Frances, who served as treasurer of the Desert Rivers group for many years, notes that they looked for and became active in Audubon societies in all 5 states where they lived.

Walter, who had experience helping with the Pennsylvania breeding bird atlas, was one of the top volunteers in the 1990s for the *Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas*, surveying over 20 priority blocks, each about 26 km². Soon after the AZFO was formed in 2005, Walter and Frances became active members, regularly attending its annual meetings and participating in its activities, including field expeditions. Between 2013 and 2016 Walter was the south-central regional compiler for Arizona seasonal reports, which were posted on the AZFO website. He served on AZFO's board of directors for 4 years between 2014 and 2018. He also was the editor of *AZFO News*, a quarterly newsletter AZFO published for several years, and a contributor to *Arizona Birds*. He was the compiler for the Carefree Christmas Bird Count for 20 years, and for many years coordinated the schedule for CBCs statewide.

Among many other activities, Walter was the executive director of the Monocacy Creek Conservation Association in Pennsylvania, research partner and the principal investigator for ornithology with the Parsons Field Institute at the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, and helped establish an Important Bird Area in Carefree, working with Arizona Audubon and the Desert Foothills Land Trust.

Frances said that in the 2 years Walter battled cancer, he managed to go birding 27 times with family and friends within the birding community. As someone who, for many years, made a point of documenting birds in underbirded areas, Walter submitted eBird reports for these areas that included data for each month of the year. Although Walter was not in the best of health, he also actively participated in the AZFO's eBird Gaps Project. AZFO has selected 5 areas where there are few or no reports in any season or the absence of reports for particular seasons. Walter and John's favorite location to help fill in the gaps was the Cactus Forest area in Pinal County. Walter was passionate about filling in these gaps and would have continued to do so if not for his health issues.

The family requests that memorial gifts be made to Hospice of the Valley, 1510 E. Flower St., Phoenix, AZ 85014 or to Mountain View Presbyterian Church, 8050 E. Mountain View Rd., Scottsdale, AZ 85258.



Walter Thurber, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, 4 November 2014. Photo by Frances Thurber