

MY MEMORIES OF DR. ROBERT E. JENKINS

Bryn Tracy

Apex, North Carolina

As we age and become more mature, we reach that point in life where we fear receiving that dreaded telephone call or e-mail informing us that someone we love, a dear friend, or a colleague has passed. Upon receiving such a message, memories come flooding back of the brief time you spent with that person. I received such an e-mail several weeks ago informing me of the passing of Dr. Robert (Bob) E. Jenkins (February 9, 1940–July 12, 2023), Professor Emeritus at Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia.

I knew Bob only during the last quarter of his life. I first met Bob sometime during the early 2000s when he was making frequent visits to the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences to study specimens of *Moxostoma* with Dr. Wayne C. Starnes. At that time, I had begun investigating the distribution of introduced sucker species in the Yadkin River basin in North Carolina, which ultimately led me to learning everything I could about Edward Drinker Cope (1840–1897) and his contributions to North Carolina ichthyology. I had so many questions to ask Bob and he was always unselfish in sharing his knowledge of the freshwater fishes of North Carolina and Virginia and the history of southeastern ichthyology. More often than not, I would quit asking questions and just sit back and listen to Bob impart his ichthyological knowledge and his storied life experiences. He was such a great story teller, and his remembrances of events that happened decades previously were as sharp as if the event had happened just yesterday. When he would answer one of my countless e-mails, he would never reply back with a short sentence or two but would write quite a few paragraphs in much detail.

Several times I visited Bob at his home—I don't think I ever saw his office on campus—to talk about Cope (Bob was a self-proclaimed "Copephile"), an atlas of North Carolina fishes that was being compiled, an undescribed species of *Cyprinella* that Bob had worked on decades earlier but still had an interest in its formal description, or just to see how he was doing. Bob's modest house was spotless, his office/library in his refurbished basement was meticulously organized where he kept his life's work on the fishes of Virginia and *Moxostoma* suckers; everything organized by manilla folders and 3x5 cards in his ever-so-neat hand writing. For lunch or dinner, we always went to Mac and Bob's, one of his favorite restaurants, where he enjoyed a well-made margarita and literally everybody knew his name and knew he was the "fish" guy. In 2018 I visited Bob and, rather than talking about the atlas, Bob thought it was time bet-

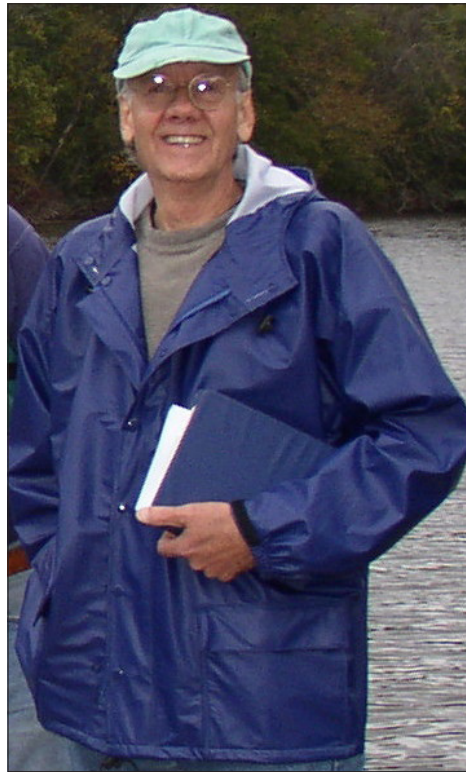
ter spent driving that afternoon to visit the Yellow Sulphur Spring Hotel near Christiansburg, Virginia, a place that Cope had visited in the 1860s. Along the way, I attentively listened as Bob conversed about Cope's and Jordan's (David Starr Jordan, 1851–1931) surveys of southwestern Virginia in the late 1800s.

I was fortunate to accompany Bob in the field in North Carolina several times looking for an undescribed species of *Moxostoma*, known as "Carolina" Redhorse, in the lower Yadkin River and Cape Fear River basins, or an introduced population of Roanoke Hog Sucker *Hypentelium roanokense* in the upper Yadkin basin, or Robust Redhorse *Moxostoma robustum* and Black Redhorse *M. duquesnei* in the upper Broad River basin. On such occasions, Bob would show up a little bit behind schedule driving his vehicle with the *Salmo* license plate with two of his favorite bands—the Grateful Dead or Pink Floyd—blaring from the speakers. Bob was an avid fan of these two bands, and we even went to a Dark Star Orchestra concert in Raleigh in the mid-2000s where Bob danced the night away on the floor with the rest of the swirling Dead Heads.

On one very memorable occasion, Bob came to our rescue when a hiking companion of mine hurt his knee near Dragon's Tooth on the Appalachian Trail (AT), northwest of Salem. I hitched a ride into Salem where I then walked to Bob's house in the rain, surprising him as he answered the front door. Bob graciously drove me back to the trailhead where we picked up my brother and our friend and then drove us more than 50 miles to where we had earlier that week parked our car near Peaks of Otter. Bob's AT shuttle service that day was more than 100 miles, free-of-charge!

Although I knew Bob for only a short time during his life, he was a dear friend and a mentor. Luckily, we were able to publish two papers together:

- Tracy, B.H. and R.E. Jenkins. 2021. Professor Edward Drinker Cope's travels through North Carolina, August–December 1869: Insights from the transcriptions and annotations of letters to his father and his contributions to North Carolina Ichthyology. Southeastern Fishes Council Proceedings No. 61. 65pp; and
- Tracy, B.H., R.E. Jenkins, and W.C. Starnes. 2013. History of fish investigations in the Yadkin Pee Dee River drainage of North Carolina and Virginia with an analy-





Bob preserves what might be the type specimen of *Moxostoma* sp. “Carolina” Redhorse, Little River (Yadkin River basin).

sis of nonindigenous species and invasion dynamics of three species of suckers (Catostomidae). *Journal of the North Carolina Academy of Science*. 129:82–106.

Regretfully looking back, we all wish we had spent more time with our friends, colleagues, and loved ones. But when I think of



Bob preserving another specimen of *Moxostoma* sp. “Carolina” Redhorse, Deep River (Cape Fear River basin).

Bob, I will always remember him as: “One more specimen, one more seine haul, let’s boat and backpack electrofish just a little longer and a little farther;” or as Dead Heads would sing: “a little bit further than you gone before.” With Bob, “what a long, strange trip it’s been.”

REMEMBERING ROBERT E. JENKINS

Konrad Schmidt

St. Paul, Minnesota

I never met Bob, but we got to know each other well through countless emails and phone conversations. Our first introduction was definitely awkward. I had provided an image of a Greater Redhorse for a Chippewa National Forest report on sensitive species found there. Bob would always find anything and everything about redhorses, and he had a copy of this report. He called to introduce himself and went straight to the point: “I’m not trying to be a smart ass, but the image on the cover of the report is actually a River Redhorse.” I was very much aware of Bob’s reputation as “the” expert on suckers and especially redhorses. Of course, I was taken aback by his remark but knew I had to hear him out. On the defensive, I told him another biologist and I counted the scale rows around the caudal peduncle and we both got 16 scales, and that separated the redhorse on the cover of the report from other Minnesota red-finned redhorse species. He agreed this is what is written in keys, but other subtle characters he learned from examining many specimens for his research clearly made this fish a River Redhorse. His nail in the coffin that convinced

me was that two percent of the specimens he examined had 16 scale rows. This was the first of many times I found that fish keys are not infallible. I was in awe of Bob’s identification skills—ininitely superior to us mere mortals—and from then on, I referred to him as the god of redhorses. Bob later assisted me in correcting the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources’ (MDNR) State Record Fish files. This time the species that Bob determined was misidentified, again by photos alone, was actually a Greater Redhorse that was initially identified as a Shorthead Redhorse by MDNR biologists. I and others were suspicious because, at almost 14 pounds, it was nearly twice the size of the world record. A two-pound Shorthead is a trophy in Minnesota! After that, Bob also “dethroned” two earlier record-holders before getting to the true state record Shorthead. Bob’s expertise with fishes was unmatched, but he was always dismayed that others could not see what he saw in specimens. He possessed a unique gift and filled an important niche as a one-of-a-kind information resource. Thank you, Bob!

NANFA members can help make a great organization and its publication even better.

Contact the editors with ideas for articles you’d like to write and to suggest authors or topics you want to read. • Mention AC to people who have interesting things to write about. • Submit your photos and artwork. • Suggest items for Riffles. • **Tell us what you want to see in these pages.**