



Lawrence H. Walkinshaw:
**BIRD MAN
OF THE WORLD**
1904-1993

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It is entirely possible that no one in the world knows more about sandhill cranes than Lawrence H. Walkinshaw. After all, he has been studying these birds for 61 years. Now, at 87 years of age, he is still observing cranes and recording his findings. He spent last winter in Florida and located 10 crane nests while there. When he drove back to his home south of Holt in the spring, the first bird he saw in Michigan after crossing the Indiana state line on I-69 was a sandhill crane. It was as though the sandhills were welcoming an old friend back to where their acquaintance began so many years ago.

Dr. Walkinshaw is a remarkable man. He built an international reputation as a biological researcher and author while maintaining a full-time practice of dentistry in Battle Creek. His first book, *The Sandhill Crane*, published in 1949 by the Cranbrook Institute of Science, was the result of 18 years of research on all the subspecies of sandhills. His travels conducting field studies on cranes took him to several states, including Alaska, as well as Canada and Cuba (not to mention the Isle of Pines – now the Isle of Youth – off the coast of Cuba). Altogether, he traveled 70,725 miles, 1,921 of them on foot. Later he was to travel many thousands of additional miles studying all the cranes of the world.

Lawrence Harvey Walkinshaw was born in Calhoun County in 1904 and grew up on a farm in Pennfield and Convis townships eight miles northeast of Battle Creek. He attended Bellevue High School in nearby Eaton County and Olivet College in the same county before transferring to the University of Michigan, where he completed his undergraduate work and earned his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree in 1929.

He began his dental practice in Battle Creek in July of that year. The Wall Street Crash that raised the curtain on the Great Depression occurred the following December, and Dr. Walkinshaw, remembered one week in which his dental practice brought in only four dollars. He maintained his office, however,

and went on to practice dentistry for nearly 40 years, retiring finally in 1968.

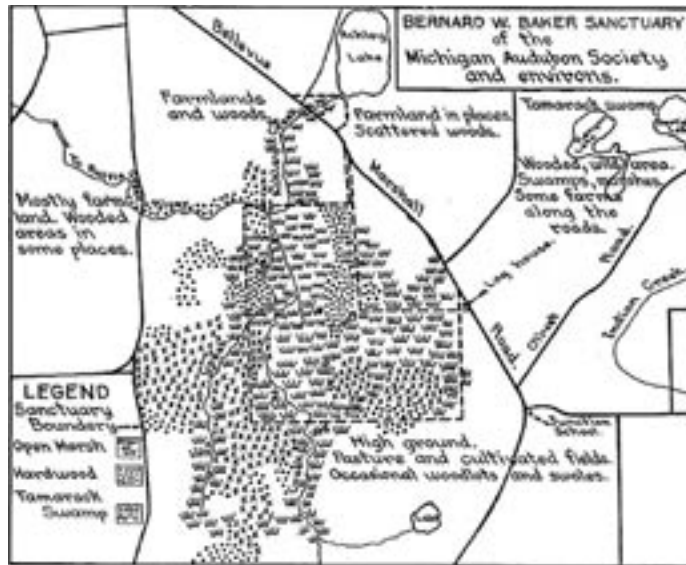
He and his wife Clara have been married 60 years. They are the parents of a son, James, a retired engineer for Oldsmobile Corporation who lives near Dr. and Mrs. Walkinshaw in rural Ingham County, and Wendy Anne, whose husband, Dr. Lowell Schake, is head of the Department of Animal Nutrition at the University of Connecticut.

(Mrs. Walkinshaw's great grandfather was Sen. George Hannahs, who coincidentally served in the Michigan Legislature at the same time that Dr. Walkinshaw's great grandfather, James Walkinshaw,

was a representative from Calhoun County.) "I began watching birds when I was this high," Dr. Walkinshaw said, gesturing with his palm about three feet from the floor. When he was 11 his mother showed him the first bird nest he had ever seen. "It was a chipping sparrow nest with a cowbird egg in it," he recalled. By the time he was 13, he had established a bluebird route around the family farm that contained about 15 nesting boxes.

He came by his interest in wildlife naturally. His father was a farmer who was devoted to hunting, fishing, and trapping. Dr. Walkinshaw recalled that his father trapped 38 mink one year and in 1901 shot a sandhill crane near his farm. Cranes were legal game birds then even though they were rarely seen in that part of the country at that time. (Conversely, prairie chickens, which are now extinct in Michigan, were abundant in Calhoun County and other parts of the state at the turn of the century. "I used to see flocks of 50 to 100 prairie chickens," Dr. Walkinshaw said.) His father's interest in deer hunting led him to join the Hiawatha Sportsman's Club in the Upper Peninsula, and the younger Walkinshaw maintained a membership in the club until transferring it recently to his son-in-law. (Dr. Walkinshaw, incidentally, found several crane nests on the club property over the years.)

Dr. Walkinshaw's mother's maiden name was Eva Grinnell. She was related to George Bird Grinnell,



Map of the new Sanctuary Area in Convis Twp., Calhoun County, Michigan. Drawn by Edward M. Brigham, Jr., and his associates from an aerial photograph of the area. Scale 1-3/4 inches to 1 mile. (as originally printed)



founder of the Audubon Society and editor of *Forest and Stream* (which merged in 1920 with today's *Field & Stream*).

Nineteen thirty-one was a vintage year for Dr. Walkinshaw. In May of that year he (1) met the woman who was to become his wife, (2) discovered his first crane nest, and (3) traveled north to Lovells, where he became interested in Kirtland's warblers after finding a nest of one of these birds while camping.

He returned the next year and earned the distinction of becoming the first person ever to band a Kirtland's warbler. He captured the bird by hand. ("They're real tame," he commented.) Since then he has banded over 600 Kirtland's warblers, an endangered species which is not known to nest anywhere in the world except in the jack pines of the northern third of the Lower Peninsula (they winter only in the Bahamas). In 1983 the Cranbrook Institute of Science published Dr. Walkinshaw's third book, *The Kirtland's Warbler: The Natural History of an Endangered Species*.

"I have been fascinated by cranes all of my adult life," Dr. Walkinshaw wrote in the preface to his second book, *The Cranes of the World*, published in 1973 by Winchester Press.

He saw a sandhill crane for the first time as a teenager when he was helping a neighbor fill a silo. The sighting occurred on a farm located on what is now the Michigan Audubon Society's Baker Sanctuary, where he had hunted squirrels and rabbits as a teenager. Here's how he describes the incident in his *Cranes of the World*: "My first crane observations were made in September, 1921, watching a group of three sandhill cranes coast over a cornfield. It was not until nine years later, however, on a visit to the 'Big Marsh,' or 'Junction Swamp,' in Convis Township, Calhoun County, Michigan that I had a sight of cranes which completely changed my life.

"Roaming over a ridge from which groves of old beech had recently been lumbered, I heard a loud call vibrating from the marsh ahead, reverberating between the bordering woods. What made this wild, haunting call? Wading forward through the muck and water at the ridge's base, pushing aside dense sedges and grass that hot afternoon, I saw ahead of me three tremendous birds, almost four feet tall, drawn up to their full height as if at attention, watching intently. Immediately, they took to the air, flying with extended necks and feet, moving with slow deliberate downward wing strokes, contrasting with a rather quick up stroke, to a far corner of the marsh. Only their loud, sonorous, trumpeting call came drifting back. This was the home of the greater sandhill crane. The next spring I found my first nest

on May 5, and thereafter, except for 1932, have found from one to 15 nests in Michigan annually."

While still practicing dentistry, Dr. Walkinshaw in 1961 began traveling to gather material for his *Cranes of the World*. In that year and in 1962 he journeyed to Egypt, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, Uganda, and Sudan. The following year he visited Denmark, Sweden, and Poland and in 1965 he went to Nigeria and Ethiopia. In 1968-69, after retiring from dental practice, he traveled to Australia, Japan and India (he has made three trips to the latter country) to study cranes.

There are 15 living species (25 species and subspecies) of cranes in the world – sandhill, whooping, common (two subspecies), black-necked, hooded, white-naped, Japanese, Siberian white, Sarus (two subspecies), Brogla (two subspecies), Demoiselle, Stanley, wattled, and two species of crowned cranes (two subspecies each). Dr. Walkinshaw has seen them all except the black-necked crane, a rare central China and Tibetan species.

He has also seen all six subspecies of the sandhill crane – the greater, lesser, Florida, Cuban, Mississippi, and Canadian sandhills.

Dr. Walkinshaw is intrigued by the increasing population of sandhill cranes and their expanding range. "Sandhills are now nesting in Michigan even in little cattail marshes," he said, "and they're doing the same thing in Florida if they aren't disturbed by people.

"The sandhill, to me, is an example of something that has succeeded. They have been able to do this because people have stopped shooting them and, I believe, because they are immune to pesticides."

Dr. Walkinshaw worked with the late Miles Pirnie, a waterfowl specialist who taught at Michigan State University, and Bernard Baker, a businessman who was interested in birds, to acquire a 490-acre tract in Calhoun County as a sanctuary for sandhill cranes. They offered to buy the land for \$5 an acre from the family that owned the property, and the offer was accepted. Baker, whose business was selling second-hand auto parts, put up the money, and the land was acquired in 1941. It was named the Baker Sanctuary in his honor. Dr. Walkinshaw believes there are seven pairs of sandhills occupying the sanctuary now [1991: *Ed.*] and says the birds have spread from the sanctuary to several other counties in recent years.

Dr. Walkinshaw supports the plan to attempt to establish a whooping crane breeding grounds at the Seney National Wildlife Refuge in the Upper Peninsula. The entire population of these endangered cranes numbers only a little over 200 and they breed only in the Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada's remote Northwest

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Territories (an experiment to establish a breeding population in the Gray's Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Idaho apparently has been unsuccessful).

"Federal authorities say that whooping cranes have never existed in the Upper Peninsula," Dr. Walkinshaw observed, "but the eastern U.P. looks more like Wood Buffalo than any other place I've ever seen except northern Ontario. "Dr. Walkinshaw's interest in birds extends beyond cranes and Kirtland's warblers. He has taken part in the Audubon Society's Christmas bird counts since 1923 and has banded over 40,000 birds since he started in 1930. With his wife's help he banded over 100 species of birds near a summer home they maintained north of Muskegon State Park. Using mist nets, the Walkinshaws would sometimes capture as many as 200 birds in a single day.

While practicing dentistry and conducting research on cranes in North America and around the world, Dr. Walkinshaw amazingly found time to undertake voluntary assignments of various kinds. He was, for instance, coeditor of the Jack-Pine Warbler, the magazine published by the Michigan Audubon Society, from 1939 to 1948 and served as the society's sanctuary chairman during the same period. He was president of the Wilson Ornithological Society, an international organization, in 1959-60 and served for three years as secretary of the American Ornithologists Union. He was president of the Southwestern Michigan Dental Society in 1945-46. A member of the Battle Creek Lions Club for 40 years, he was president of that organization in 1949-50.

He also was active in the Boy Scout movement for about 40 years. His record in Scouting dates to 1930. When working with Scouts he achieved honors as an Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Scouting. It became part of the family heritage. His son James also attained the rank of Eagle Scout and has two sons of his own who became Eagle Scouts.

In addition to his three books on cranes and Kirtland's warblers, Dr. Walkinshaw is the author of several books brought out by University Microfilms International in Ann Arbor – *Birds of the Battle Creek Area* in 1978, *The Sandhill Crane and I* in 1987, *Nesting of the Florida and Cuban sandhill Cranes* – in 1987, *Life History of the Eastern Field Sparrow in Calhoun County* in 1978, and *Nest Observations of the Kirtland's Warbler – A Half Century Quest* in 1988.

He also has put together three books on the Walkinshaw family genealogy and went to Scotland in 1989 to collect material on his ancestors.

All of his extensive notebooks on bird observations are now housed in the Smithsonian Institution. Cornell University has all of his nest records, which number in the thousands dating from 1918.

Not surprisingly, many accolades and awards have come Dr. Walkinshaw's way over the years. A fellow

ornithologist, Charles T. (Ted) Black of Okemos, speaks admiringly of him as "a professional lay person who has kept meticulous notes." In the preface to the Kirtland's warbler book published by Cranbrook, Robert W. Storer describes him as "a field ornithologist of enormous drive and ability, and a peerless collector of field data." A spokesman for Cranbrook says Dr. Walkinshaw "rightly... may be called a true amateur, although many professionals have less of a record of attainment for an equal span of labor."

A farm that was purchased by the Nature Conservancy in Oceana County and turned over to the U.S. Forest Service as a nature preserve has been named the Walkinshaw Wetlands in his honor.

He has received special awards from the Michigan Audubon Society, the Detroit Audubon Society, the Whooping Crane Conservation Association, and the Michigan Academy of Sciences.

Dr. Walkinshaw's fascination for cranes has taken him to the ends of the earth. He has traveled twice around the world and has visited every continent except South America and Antarctica, but – as he wryly remarked – "There aren't any cranes there."

Editor's note: Dr. Lawrence Walkinshaw died in 1993 at the age of 89.

YOUR HELP IS IMPORTANT

Baker Sanctuary today and the spectacular number of sandhills that migrate through it are the result of Dr. Walkinshaw's vision and commitment. You can help preserve that legacy. Anyone with information, memories, stories, etc. relating to Dr. Walkinshaw, Bernard Baker or Baker Sanctuary are urged to share them with the sanctuary's resident manager for the purpose of establishing an historical archive.

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