



Elsie Kollin Eltzroth

June 22, 1923 - February 1, 2019

The Bluebird Lady

Elsie Kollin Eltzroth, 95, died Friday February 1st in her home surrounded by her children. She was the youngest of four children of Rudolf & Valentina Kollin who emigrated from Bohemia. Her father was a master plumber in Cleveland, Ohio and her mother was a homemaker. After graduation with honors in 1941 from John Adams High School in Cleveland, she matriculated to Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.

Elsie met Merlin S. Eltzroth (Elzy) at Ohio University in November of 1941, and they were married in June of 1943 while Elzy was in flight school at Bainbridge, Georgia. Shortly after they were married, Army Air Corps Cadet Eltzroth earned his wings and his second lieutenant bars and was sent overseas to fly P-47's. He flew missions over Italy from the island of Corsica during WW-II. Elsie returned to Cleveland and held several jobs, including cutting threads for 81mm mortar shells at LEMPCO, a munitions manufacturing facility, in 1944 during WW-II. Their son was born in New York in 1945. Elsie graduated from Ohio University (cum laude) in 1947; Elzy graduated at the same time. Elzy rejoined the Army Air Corps service which then became the U.S. Air Force.

Elsie and Elzy travelled the northern hemisphere for the next 24 years while Elzy was transferred from location to location for his next duty stations. One of the first locations they were sent to was Germany where both became avid hunters. Elsie became quite a marksman, earning numerous medals and trophies. The couple's first daughter was born in Munich, Germany in 1949.

The family then moved to Portland, Oregon in 1952 for one year while Elzy started flying F-86's. In 1953 they were reassigned to Nouasseur Air Base, near Casablanca, French Morocco. The family remained there until 1956 when Elzy was reassigned to Rhein Main Air Force base in Germany. Elsie continued honing her hunting skills around Wiesbaden, Germany, where in August of 1956 their second daughter was born.

In 1962, Elsie received a Secondary School Teachers Certificate at Central Missouri State College, Warrensburg, Missouri where she was inducted into the Kappa Delta Pi education honor society.

In 1963, while living in Alexandria Virginia, Elsie first put up bird feeders in her yard. Wanting to learn more about the birds she saw, she bought a bird book written by noted ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson. This was the start of her life's work with birding activities.

After Elzy retired from the Air Force in 1971, he and Elsie moved to Corvallis, Oregon. Soon the couple became founding members of the Audubon Society of Corvallis, the Oregon Birding Association and Oregon Field Ornithologists. She and Elzy both obtained rehabilitation permits and worked with more than 100 species of orphaned and/or injured birds from hummingbirds to ospreys.

In 1976 Elsie initiated the Audubon Society of Corvallis Bluebird Trail in the Willamette Valley as a bicentennial project. She became a Master Bander in 1981 and learned how to use colored and numbered bands for unique identification from a distance. Elsie banded nestlings and rehabilitated any bluebirds in need. She documented every observation, including intra- and inter-species interactions, habitat and weather changes, breeding and social behavior, patterns of geographical movement, and causes of morbidity and mortality.

Elsie became known locally as the Bluebird Lady. She used her knowledge for public education, interfacing with countless organizations, conservation groups, school classes, scouts and garden clubs, inspiring others to protect the Western Bluebird and other cavity nesters. She recruited hundreds of volunteer monitors to watch for avian activity at or near their boxes and report back to her with their results. She said that she owed a debt of gratitude to those who participated, since she couldn't have done it without them. For more than 35 years, Elsie was tireless in her efforts to boost the population of Western Bluebirds. Only six nesting pairs were identified when Elsie started the Bluebird Trail. By the year 2000, 225 nest boxes were monitored and 559 bluebird chicks fledged. Helping to bring back the Western Bluebird became her mission and passion for the remainder of her life.

Between the late 1980's and 2000, the data and details compiled by Elsie became nationally recognized for its value to the scientific community. Both singly and in collaboration with others, Elsie's work was published in numerous journals, from The Bluebird Society newsletter to peer-reviewed ornithological works. She also contributed to,

or was featured in, various books, articles, news and television features.

Elsie authored, co-authored, or contributed to publications including:

- Acanthocephalan Parasitism in the Western Bluebird; Avian Diseases in 1979 and 2001.
- Violet-Green Swallows help Western Bluebirds at the Nest; Journal of Field Ornithology in 1984.
- 10 different articles in Sialia relating to the Western and other Bluebirds – Journal of the North American Bluebird Society from 1980 to 2000.
- Population Study and Breeding Biology of the Western Bluebird; Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife – Non-Game Program in 1987.
- Breeding information from the Audubon Society of Corvallis's Bluebird Trail was used in both The Complete Birdhouse Book in 1990, and The Bluebird Book by Donald and Lillian Stokes in 1991.
- Elsie contributed to and was featured in Bluebirds Forever by Connie Toops in 1994.
- Input to The Birds of North America (The Western Bluebird Monograph No. 510) in 2000.
- Data for a species count in the Birds of Oregon – A General Reference in 2003.
- Five Shy of a Century, an Interview with Elsie Eltzroth by James Billstine in Oregon Birds in 2018.

She was a founding member and served on the board of the North American Bluebird Society and was recognized with numerous conservation and environmental awards, including;

- The John and Nora Lane Award from the North American Bluebird Society for “outstanding contribution in the field of bluebird conservation” in 1987.
- Recognition in 1993 by General Motors Chevy Truck Division for “contribution to the protection of the future of our outdoor resources.”
- The Oregon State Federation of Garden Clubs Conservation Award (1994-1995) for her work with, and her leadership of, the Audubon Society of Corvallis Bluebird Trail.
- The Homer Campbell Environmental Award from the Audubon Society of Corvallis in 2009.
- In 2009 Elsie was featured as “The Bluebird Lady” in Oregon Public Broadcasting's TV program Oregon Field Guide.

She was most proud of the Homer Campbell Award and of being featured on OPB's Oregon Field Guide.

Elsie will be buried alongside Elzy at Arlington National Cemetery. She is survived by

three children, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. To honor Elsie's legacy, the family suggests volunteering with the ASC Bluebird Trail or making donations to The Audubon Society of Corvallis or Lumina Hospice.

A memorial service will be held at McHenry Funeral Home, Corvallis, Oregon at 3:00 pm on Saturday, February 9, 2019.

A graveside service will be held at 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 11, 2019 at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

Events

FEB **Memorial Service** 03:00PM
9
McHenry Funeral Home & Cremation Services
206 NW 5th St., Corvallis, OR, US, 97330

APR **Graveside Service**03:00PM
11
Arlington National Cemetery
Arlington, VA, US, 22211

Comments



“ An external video has been added.



McHenry Funeral Home - February 05 at 05:24 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Ann Wick - February 26 at 08:37 PM



“ Oregon Field Guide posted a very nice piece onto Facebook today. It was from Vince Patton the producer who did the segment on Elsie. Michael Bendixen the videographer also posted a very kind piece. It was his idea to do the story. Michael is our son and remembered Elsie coming to his Cub Scout meeting to talk about bluebirds and building nest boxes. We also participated in the B.B. Trail and got to know her and also watched some of the filming of Ger segment. Please let me know if you need help seeing the posting.

Holly Bendixen - February 19 at 10:42 PM



“ I worked for Elsie & Elz for 8 years. I learned a lot watching & doing at their house. I even got to feed a baby owl that was in somebody's chimney. She was the sweetest person and I felt privileged to have known both of them. She would loan books on birds to my young son. When he showed interest in them. Elsie is flying with her beloved bluebirds!

Donna Goodsell - February 11 at 05:16 PM



“ Dear, dear Elsie - I always considered her an aunt and Elzie an uncle. As “the other Eltzroths” I had known them since I was a child although not seeing them that often. Knowing these two as an adult was a great pleasure to myself and my husband. We heard from Elsie only last month, and she was cheerful and telling us about more bluebird sightings. She will be deeply missed. So glad she “flew away” with her family around her. She must be pleased.

Lee Eltzroth - February 09 at 08:39 AM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Rita Snyder - February 08 at 04:50 PM



“ Farewell to Elsie, our former neighbor on Vineyard Mountain. I will always remember Elsie when I see a Bluebird or Bluebird house. Thanks for all she has done for the birds.

John Snelling
Vineyard Mountain resident

John Snelling - February 07 at 08:33 AM



“ In 2009, I paid tribute to Elsie at our fall Audubon meeting, filmed in part by Oregon Field Guide and aired many times since. She was incredibly devoted to her conservation legacy, and I'm glad I got to wax poetic to a smiling Bluebird Lady on that day. God bless her and Elzy....together again at last.



Raylene Gordin - February 05 at 09:32 PM



“ We remember Elsie with fondness. She deserves all of her tributes. Dianne and Tom

Dianne Walta Hart - February 05 at 02:07 PM