

IN MEMORIAM

THOMAS S. HEINDEL, 1936–2023



Thomas (Tom) Scott Heindel was born on 30 June 1936 in York, Pennsylvania, where he spent the early years of childhood. Although born into challenging circumstances with a single mother, his claim that his long walk to school was uphill both ways is most likely not true. On a doctor's advice, his mother moved the family to southern California for Tom's health, and California was his home for most of his life. After a short illness he passed away in a hospital in Reno, Nevada, on 26 July 2023.

Tom arrived in California when he was 15 and shortly thereafter met the love of his life, Jo Ann Phelps. In a love story rich with irony, they first met at church, although it is not clear if they actually left the parking lot to enter the facility. Their first date was a stroll to watch birds, which would remain

a hobby and passion they shared across the world over the next seven decades. They were married in 1954 and remained the inseparable couple until Tom's death, at which time they had been married 69 years.

From 1954 to 1958 Tom served in the U.S. Air Force as an air policeman, stationed at Strategic Air Command bases during a rather tense time in the Cold War. One of his memorable assignments was being stationed overseas in Morocco. He was fascinated with, read about, and watched YouTube videos of planes for the rest of his life.

After his service, Tom went to college thanks to the GI Bill and in 1972 moved to Big Pine, California, where he and Jo accepted teaching positions at the local school. Their love of the Owens Valley, living in the shadows of the majestic Sierra Nevada, stayed strong throughout Tom's life. After several years in Big Pine, Tom and Jo Ann satisfied an adventurous streak by taking their teaching talents to Bolivia for two years, then Ecuador for one year. Although the early weeks in Bolivia were trying, as the bird books available at the time were most unhelpful, with the help of some heavyweight ornithologists from Louisiana State University, they hit their stride and were sad to leave when the time was up. Their next move was to teach in Saudi Arabia, where they lived for over eight years. In addition to adding much to the Saudi ornithological record, they were able to travel the world, adding adventures like a few safaris in Africa and whitewater rafting in Nepal to a lengthy list of memories.

In 1989 Tom and Jo returned to Big Pine, where they decided to write a book on Inyo County birds. They proceeded rapidly, if one uses a geological timescale, and *The Birds of Inyo County, California, Including Death Valley National Park* was completed shortly before Tom's death. It is now published and available as volume 5 of WFO's series *Studies of Western Birds* at <https://westernfieldornithologists.org/product/volume-5-the-birds-of-inyo-county-california-including-death-valley-national-park/>. It will serve as a wonderful legacy, as it is their lifetime's work and served as a source of inspiration for decades.

One of the highlights of those Big Pine years was forming a bird-study group where interested birders gathered regularly to hear and discuss his prepared lessons dealing with status, distribution, and challenging identification problems. It helped improve the quality of bird data in Inyo County and provided important friendships

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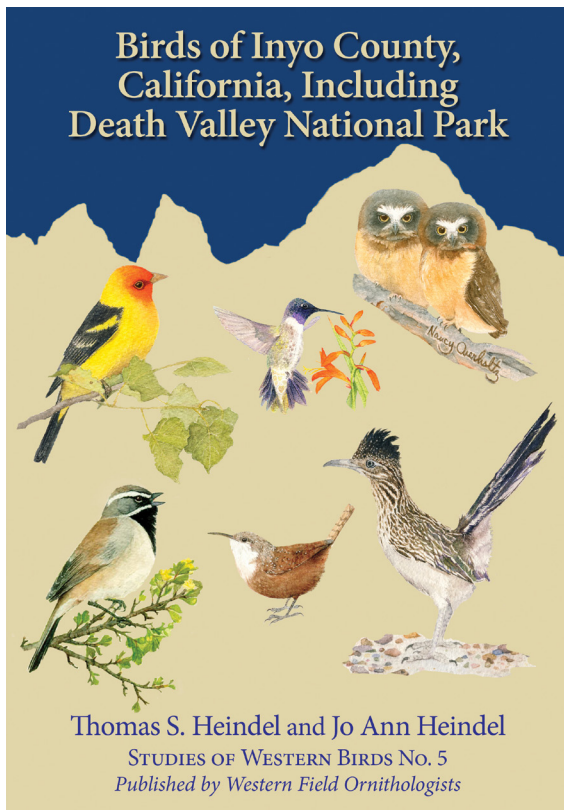
for the rest of Tom's life. Another great aspect of his later years was the steady arrival of letters and e-mails Tom would receive from former students from around the world, expressing their appreciation for the impact Tom had on them. These notes understandably provided immense joy.

Tom was a major sports fan, growing up rooting for the Dodgers, but in his last thirty years he was mostly focused on USC football and Angels baseball; basically, he was a very frustrated sports fan. There was consideration of having a burial with the Angels being the pallbearers so they could let him down one last time, but, alas, he was cremated and his ashes will be sprinkled in some of the places that were so special to him.

Tom leaves behind Jo Ann, four children, two nieces, and one grandchild. He was always a supporter of Western Field Ornithologists and was thrilled they decided to publish the *Birds of Inyo County*. And any desires to contribute anything in Tom's name should be directed to WFO.

Matthew T. Heindel

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