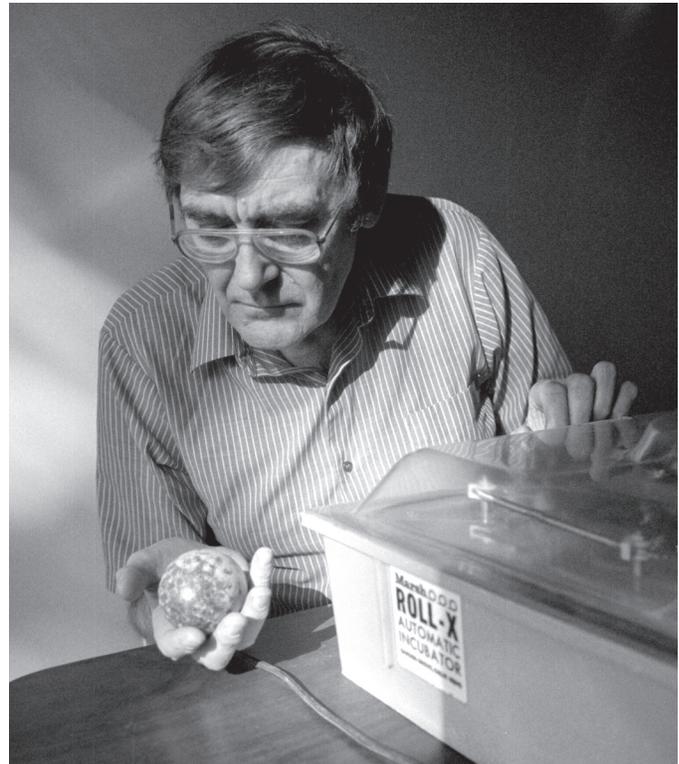


ERNIE KUYT (1929–2010)

In 1948, Ernie came to Canada from the Netherlands along with his parents and siblings. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of British Columbia in 1957, and took a biologist job at the Department of Natural Resources in Saskatchewan. That year, he was loaned to a cooperative study of barren-ground caribou headed by John Kelsall in Yellowknife. In 1960, he obtained a position with the Canadian Wildlife Service to conduct research on wolves. He established that tundra-taiga wolves migrated with caribou except when having pups. Ernie had the distinction of literally shooting himself out of the air! He was trying to shoot a wolf from a Cessna 180 when he hit the steel propeller with a load of buckshot and caused a forced landing. He was one of the first biologists to record surplus killing of caribou by wolves and the first to discover greater Canada geese on northern rivers. In 1961, Ernie inherited two wolf pups from the High Arctic and added a male pup from the Thelon River. The wolves in captivity produced 28 pups while Ernie was studying their behavior and interactions. Ernie's work on wolves resulted in an MA degree at the University of Saskatchewan in 1970.

In 1965, when the wild whooping crane numbers had dwindled to about 42 birds, Ernie was assigned to their conservation. That involved following their migration, removing one of two eggs from their nests, and ringing (tagging) chicks. Nesting success was improved by egg removal, and viable eggs were incubated under sandhill cranes in Idaho. That project was not successful and was abandoned in 1991 in favor of a similar project in Maryland. Through the media, Ernie always kept the public well informed on the status of the whooping cranes. Migration routes and behavior were better defined after a few young were equipped with radio transmitters. By the time of his retirement in 1990, the flock had increased to 196 birds and he had become well known throughout North America. The successful conservation efforts culminated in his receiving the Order of Canada in 1993 and the Rowan Distinguished Service Award from the Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society in 1997.

Without any predetermined plan along those lines, Ernie became associated with conservation of three charismatic species: the barren-ground caribou in northern Canada, the wolf at the centre of predator-prey controversies, and the whooping crane, the poster species for bird conservation in



Ernie Kuyt counting crane eggs to be sent to the Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Wayan, Idaho. Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, 1984. Photo: Ed Struzik.

North America. After retirement, he continued to mist net and tag birds in his back yard.

Ernie was a person to whom principles and ethics were important, as was family life. He had an inquiring and critical mind and was a lifelong student of the English language, culture, and human behavior. He is survived by Elsie and their children Pamela and Jonathan. His death at age 81 from a fall at home in Edmonton ended an outstanding career in wildlife conservation.

*Don C. Thomas
46 Pineview Drive
St. Albert, Alberta, Canada
T8N 4S8
caribou@shaw.ca*