

## Obituary

### Jim Shields



*Jim Shields (left) admiring an Azure Kingfisher (1978), (right) with Local Environmental Solutions after retirement*

Dr James Michael Shields (known to his colleagues as Dr Jimmy) died on 11 December 2019 after more than 30 years of being involved with the management of wildlife in New South Wales (NSW) forests. Jim was born in Armarillo, Texas, USA in 1952 and then moved to rural Kansas, where I first became acquainted with him when we were more enthusiastic than skilled members of rival high school basketball teams. When both of us took a biology class in summer school we found that we had many shared interests. One of these was a fledgling attraction to birds and birdwatching, leading to some memorable field trips and (mis)adventures. While studying for a degree in biology at Emporia State University, Jim conducted a project comparing the avifauna in a wilderness area managed by the United States Department of Agriculture with one used for forest production, his introduction to forest wildlife ecology.

I came to Australia in 1974, eventually ending up in the Bird Section of the Australian Museum. In 1978, together with Wayne Longmore and others, we planned a trip to the Clarke Range, Queensland, to search for the then undescribed *Eungella Honeyeater*. I recalled that Jim had help to fund his university studies by being a chef over summer at various restaurants, including steak houses and popular holiday locations. I invited him to join our expedition in the role of camp cook and he accepted.

After that successful trip, Jim gained Australian residency. In 1979, he joined the Forestry Commission of NSW as a Wildlife Research and Management Officer in the Ecology Section of the Wood Technology and Forest Research Division. This was a critical time for the forestry industry in the state.

One of Jim's major roles was looking at terrestrial vertebrate communities in the state forests and he produced management guidelines, particularly for multiple-use forests. His work then and subsequently was critical in introducing management practices such as provision of wildlife corridors between forest patches, logging of alternate areas, cessation of the conversion of native forest to pine, retention of buffer strips along waterways and protection of old growth forest and tree hollows. These recommendations arose from extensive field studies and survey work, mainly on birds, but also on arboreal mammals and invertebrates, as part of Jim's concentration on the long-term effects of logging. Another topic of importance was comparing the economic worth of wildlife to that of timber. Jim became increasingly a participant on other

government bodies, such as the Steering Committees for Regent and Superb Parrot recovery studies.

In 1985, he earned a Graduate Diploma specialising in forestry at the Australian National University. This was soon followed by enrolment at the University of Washington, pursuing a PhD on *The Effects of Logging on Birds in South-eastern New South Wales*. This required frequent commuting between there and Australia as he continued his field work as part of his research.

Not long after Jim graduated in 1990 and returned full-time to Australia, he was made Head of the Ecology and Silvicultural Section in the Forest Research Division. He subsequently became Wildlife Manager, Southern Region in 1995 and then Divisional Wildlife Manager at Coffs Harbour in 1998 in what had become State Forests of NSW and then Forests NSW. He served on several committees, including one dealing with the development of the National Forest Policy, and as NSW representative on the Joint Australian-New Zealand Standing Committee.

During the early 1990s, new legislation made it a requirement that Forests had to apply for a licence before logging could commence. As part of meeting this condition, environmental surveys had to be conducted before permission would be granted. This led to recognition of the need to train foresters how to identify faunal species of concern. With Jim's guidance, State Forests developed wildlife schools for its staff. These were very successful, eventually growing in scope as other organisations, both government and non-government, began to participate in them. This scheme was eventually expanded into a Masters in Wildlife Management at Macquarie University.

In his last few years with Forests NSW, Jim engaged in several external projects. In 2003, he and his partner Elizabeth Larsen set up an environmental consulting company, Local Environmental Solutions. He successfully trained Australia's first koala detection dog which he used extensively in his surveys and this stimulated a greater interest in the potential roles of conservation dogs. His company carried out impact statements, developed wildlife hazard management plans and was involved in Forest Restoration Planning (2003-2008).

A major achievement was the preparation and implementation of a plan to study Bell Miner-associated dieback on the NSW south coast. This phenomenon is widespread in southeastern forests, where it causes extensive damage. The study examined the apparent relationship between the growing numbers of Bell Miners, loss of smaller, insect-eating birds and dieback in eucalypt forests around the Miner colonies. Many Miners were culled and the health of the forest was monitored for several years, eventually showing significant improvement in that species' absence.

In 2008, a long-term shoulder injury (as a child he had fallen from a telephone pole while investigating a nesting American Kestrel) forced Jim to retire. From his home at Tura Beach on the south coast of NSW, he continued his environmental projects and participation in advisory bodies, as well as being active in groups such as the Far South Coast Birdwatchers Inc. Jim published many papers and authored even more that remained in the 'grey literature'.

Jim will be missed by his family, friends and colleagues.

**Walter Boles**