



James D. Yoakum (1926–2012)

The wildlife profession lost a dedicated colleague on 21 November 2012 with the passing of Jim Yoakum. Born in Templeton, California, Yoakum served in the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1947. Using the GI Bill, he was the first in his family to attend college, and graduated with a degree in wildlife management from Humboldt State College in 1953. Jim proceeded on to Oregon State University on a fellowship and, in 1957, he completed his thesis on Oregon's pronghorn population under the supervision of Dr. Arthur Einarson.

Shortly thereafter, Jim was hired as the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) first wildlife biologist, and was stationed in Ely, Nevada, where he also wrote a newspaper column on wildlife. His writing and photographs attracted the attention of Nevada BLM Director J. Russell Penny, who wanted Jim to highlight BLM's role in maintaining important wildlife habitat. Eventually, Jim published the first brochure featuring wildlife on public lands.

As BLM's wildlife representative, Jim had numerous demands on his time including the rebuilding of bighorn sheep populations on public lands. When the Devil's Hole pupfish was threatened with extinction from groundwater pumping, Jim attended the fledgling Desert Fishes Council meetings. Yoakum incurred the wrath of Nevada BLM Director Nolan Keil when he transferred funds from Elko to Las Vegas to build a wild horse exclusion fence to protect pupfish, but U.S. Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall praised his effort. In contrast to most BLM employees, who tended to relocate every few years, Yoakum spent his entire career as a wildlife biologist in Nevada. In 1967, he purchased land in Verdi, on the California-Nevada border, and this became his home — shared with his dogs, his garden, and his various collections of pronghorn art and Navy plates. Over the years, Jim also had acquired a near complete collection of *California Fish and Game*, and he provided duplicate issues from his collection to help others accomplish that goal.

Yoakum retired from BLM in 1986, but continued working with pronghorn as a consultant and researcher, and also taught classes at the University of Nevada. In 1990, Jim was very excited that the California Department of Fish and Game pursued the translocation of pronghorn antelope from Likely Tables, in Modoc County, to the Carrizo Plain, San Luis Obispo County, near his birthplace. During retirement, he continued to give presentations and publish, amassing >50,000 photographs and >50 professional papers. Among those are a number of chapters on habitat management techniques that appeared in several editions of *The Wildlife Techniques Manual*. Jim's magnum work, published in 2004, was *Pronghorn Ecology and Management*, which he co-authored with Bart O'Gara, and for which they shared The Wildlife Society's Outstanding Editorship Award in 2005.

Jim was a strong and dedicated supporter of the Biennial Pronghorn Workshop, which in December 2012 held its 25th meeting. In 2002 he was the recipient of its Berrendo Award, given in recognition of substantive contributions to the ecology and conservation of pronghorn. Additionally, Jim was an active member of the Desert Bighorn Council for nearly five decades, and attended the 50th Anniversary Meeting of that organization in 2007.

Yoakum was an advocate for all wildlife professionals, and was active in The Wildlife Society (TWS) — which he became a member of in 1952 — and he was especially active in the Western Section of TWS. Working with other wildlife professionals, Jim helped to produce an educational program called “Silver Mammals” that was distributed to Nevada schools and libraries, and led to the production of “Golden Wildlife,” a series of photographs with accompanying natural history summaries about California wildlife. In recognition of Jim’s many contributions, The Western Section established the James D. Yoakum Award to recognize individuals that have provided outstanding long-term service, support, and commitment to furthering the Section’s goals and facilitating its programs and operations. The Yoakum Award is unique, in that it recognizes service to the organization, rather than contributions to wildlife management or conservation.

Jim has been quoted as saying, “Wildlife has been my entire life. All my life.” Jim’s many friends — some of whom were initially surprised by what they interpreted to be a gruff personality, but that shared his love of wildlife and the outdoors — enjoyed his social, hospitable, and well-informed (but sometimes dogmatic) conversations, during which he often played the role of Devil’s advocate. Those of us that knew Jim would likely emphasize his friendliness and collegiality, in addition to his commitments to wildlife conservation and the wildlife profession.

Perhaps the most meaningful acknowledgment of Jim’s contributions appeared on a memory page (http://wildlifeprofessional.org/western/memorial_view.php), and was posted by a close friend and colleague who wrote, “Jim leaves a big void of scientific expertise and knowledge about a species few today seem to care about. But more importantly, Jim’s deep commitment and caring for sound stewardship, even when it was unpopular with the agencies, is becoming a rarity in our profession. He leaves a legacy few can match.” — *Friends and colleagues of James D. Yoakum* [adapted, in part, from http://wildlifeprofessional.org/western/memorial_view.php]