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Joy and Sorrow in Herkenham Award

Dena Greenwood was posthumously presented the Norman B. Herkenham Award April 6, 2019, by Keep Sedona Beautiful (KSB) at its 40th annual Native Plant Workshop, for her work on natural environments, bird habitat and education. The plaque was accepted by her husband, Randy Miller of Rimrock.

Locals who knew Dena from Jay's Bird Barn in Sedona or from her many free birding walks may not be aware she began her birding adventures more than 25 years ago as an Arizona State Park Ranger who developed bird lists for Slide Rock, Red Rock and Dead Horse Ranch State Parks. She received her graduate degree in environmental biology with an emphasis in ornithology, botany and geology. She conducted bird research for Colorado Plateau Research Station, National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service on the Verde, Colorado and San Juan River corridors. She was a Northern Arizona Audubon Board member and a founding committee member of the Verde Valley Bird and Nature Festival.

Dena was a regular at the KSB Native Plant Workshop, contributing gifts to every registrant as well as delivering fascinating presentations, including her 2016 keynote "Ecological Interrelationships between Insects and Birds in Your Garden."

"Imagine this," said Dena in a 2016 talk at KSB, "finally you see it, the faint V-formation high in the last light of day. A flock of wild Canada geese gets closer, and their honking gets louder and louder announcing their passing. You marvel at their beauty and the pink and salmon clouds of sunset. Your day was suddenly transformed into the simple pleasure of being; being part of something much bigger than yourself. For a brief moment in time you witnessed and were part of an ancient cycle of nature - the magic of migration.

“Thousands of species and tens of millions of individual birds make transcontinental journeys twice each year between their summer and winter homes. Many pass right through Arizona on their northward or southward migrations.” Have you seen a California seagull here? A Virginia Rail or a Sora? These and dozens more, including flocks of mesmerizing red-winged blackbirds migrate through or live here year-round.

Though the Sedona Wetlands Preserve was conceived more than a decade ago and was helped along by many people, including Anita MacFarlane, Cliff Hamilton and Sam Hough, it was Dena’s magic that drew droves of birding enthusiasts and wannabes to the 27-acre marshland utilizing the Sedona Waste Water Reclamation Plant’s treated A+ effluent. She led invasive species digs by the ton, as well as planting native trees and flowers. The Wetlands Preserve has become an international birding hotspot and a great example of ecotourism for Sedona and the Verde Valley. In 2018, more than 190 bird species were seen amongst the ponds, trees, shrubs and plants--vegetation native to the local area. Dena, as gentle as a Western Bluebird, died June 11, 2018, before that year’s count was completed.

Accepting the award, her biggest supporter in everything and the architect of the large viewing station at the Wetlands Preserve, Miller said, “As I look out over this audience today, I see people she educated, people she inspired. In you her legacy lives on.”

The annual award, begun in 2007, was named for Norm Herkenham who ran the Native Plant Workshop for 20 years. Herkenham, before retiring to Sedona, worked for the National Park Service. In the Red Rock Ranger District, he catalogued all the native plants in four park and wilderness areas. He is also called the “Father of the Sedona Trail System.”

Approximately 140 people attended the 40th Annual Native Plant Workshop. To submit a topic for 2020, suggest a keynote speaker or breakout session presenter, please contact KSB. Keep Sedona Beautiful, Inc. is committed to protecting and sustaining the unique scenic beauty and natural environment of the Greater Sedona area. For more information about KSB, please call 928.282.4938, or visit www.keepsedonabeautiful.org.