

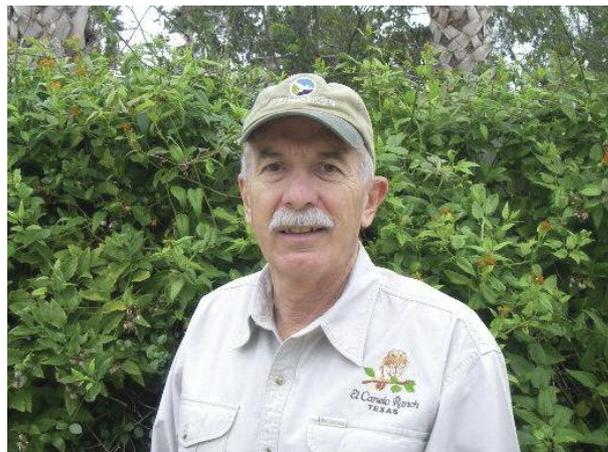
A Few Thoughts About the ABA

The place was Connecticut, and the year was 1972. I had just been formally introduced to the birding game. An adult advisor to a youth group that I recently had been asked to coordinate was the kind soul who opened that serendipitous door and invited me in. He worked as a quasi-warden overseeing a tract of land along Long Island Sound owned by the New Haven

Bird Club, and it was along those muddy shores that the birding bug took hold and hooked me forever.

I was soon a member of the New Haven Bird Club, and while attending its monthly meetings I was encouraged to join the American Birding Association. This then-fledgling organization

was, in the eyes of my fellow club associates, a clear indication that their avocation had reached a new level of acceptability and legitimacy. The “national” tone in the



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outreach of the association gave birders more than just a sense of belonging; it also gave them an expanded forum and opened new vistas and possibilities. For me,

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ABA members gather wherever the birds are—in the hot thickets of South Texas (below—McAllen, Texas; April 1998; © Brian E. Small) or on the cold seas off the Northeast (facing page—Bar Harbor, Maine; June 2006; © Bill Schmoker).



that year was 1974.

Fast-forward to the present, just one year shy of the 40th anniversary of the ABA. Almost 34 years after my joining, I now find myself as Chairman of its Board of Directors. It is obvious that a lot of things have changed over those years, and many of us know the history at least in its broader strokes. The ABA during recent decades has tried to stay with the flow of progress in birding, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing—but try it has.

I could attempt to tell you what I have liked most about the association over the 34 years that I've been a member. But let's be honest—that's just one man's opinion. Accomplishment and failures only have value inasmuch as they are brought to bear on future endeavors and projects. So I'll tell you what I would like ABA to be.

In the simplest of terms I would hope, dream, wish, and work that ABA be a stronger voice for birds and birders. Each of us has personal needs, desires, and expectations when it comes to what we want any given organization to

be but, again, they are “personal” and not necessarily achievable or relevant. What is relevant is that our voice speak to the larger issues—issues that need to be addressed for the good of not just our private “sport,” “hobby,” or “avocation” but also of the resource itself. Yet as we strive for relevance, let us do so without destroying the sense of the “game” or losing sight of the fun that most likely brought us to birding in the first place. That openness to the natural world and our response to it still lie at the core of what we do and why we do it.

And we clearly need to preserve that original sense of wonder in order for us to be that voice.

We all understand that conservationists are not born in a vacuum but are the result of exposure, so let serendipity reign. Joined together, we again can expand our forum through the ABA and make a relevant difference for birds and birding.

We're almost 40! Happy almost-40th anniversary, ABA. You have your work, your future cut out for you.

Thomas (“Father Tom”) Pincelli is Chairman of the ABA Board of Directors. He was voice of the Rio Grande Valley RBA from 1981 to 2002, and he has been President of the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival since its inception. Father Tom currently serves on the board of directors of the World Birding Center, he is Past President of the Frontera Audubon Society, and he is a former board member of the Valley Nature Center and Friends of the National Wildlife Refuges at both Laguna Atascosa and Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuges. Father Tom also authors a weekly article on birds and birding for three Rio Grande Valley newspapers, a task that he has undertaken for the past 14 years.

