

1996 DORIS HUESTIS SPEIRS AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS IN CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGY

James Murray

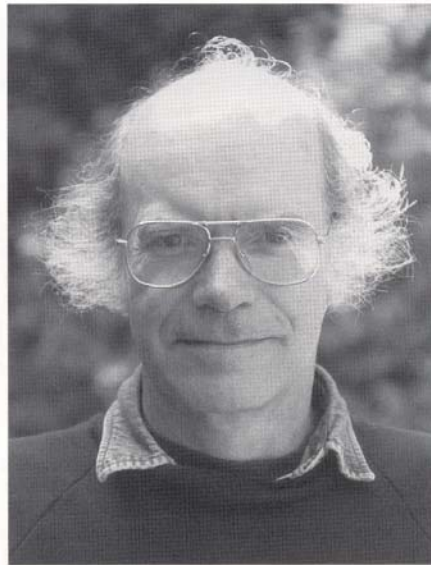


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At its 15th Annual Meeting on 25 August 1996, held at Fredericton, New Brunswick, the Society of Canadian Ornithologists presented its Doris Huestis Speirs Award to James Murray, Executive Producer and guiding light of the world-renowned natural history television production unit "The Nature of Things" of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Mr. Murray's modesty and deliberate effort towards non-exposure often give no inkling of his outstanding accomplishments in dispersion of knowledge and understanding of avian science and the conservation of birds and their habitats in Canada and elsewhere. The continued existence of "The Nature of Things" for 37 years, as Canada's premiere science television program, with audiences often exceeding one million viewers weekly, is a testament to Mr. Murray's skills as producer, developer of a distinguished team of film-makers, and public educator.

James Murray began his professional broadcasting career in 1957 as a radio producer with CBC, moving to television in 1960. He discovered his milieu in 1961 when he joined "The Nature of Things", with its challenge of an endlessly fascinating range of science topics to explore and develop for public consumption. That fascination has remained throughout his 35-year association with the unit, the last 22 years as Executive Producer. During that time, Jim Murray explored a diverse range of subjects on living systems and the need for greater understanding and protection of many of them from the

threats of our ever-growing technological culture. Themes ranged from broad sweeps of issues such as the philosophical critique of the human place in nature in "A Planet for the Taking" to the minutiae of subjects like the infrastructure of a single cell or the structure of a feather. Although wide-ranging in his interests, the subject of birds -their diversity, biology and conservation -always held a special place with him. Messages of his films are often global in context, but the focus was largely North American, on environmental issues and species ranging from the raptors, shorebirds and seabirds of the eastern Canadian arctic to the communities of wetland waders and forest songbirds in our more southerly climes. These careful examinations of the world of birds and the impact of human activity on them and other life-forms have made Jim Murray a world figure as one of Canada's most respected science film producers and environmental commentators.

Mr. Murray has been honoured for his science, natural history and conservation achievements worldwide. His production of "A Planet for the Taking", an eight-part series that explored historical and cultural roots of our relationship with nature and the consequences of that relationship, won enormous popular and critical acclaim around the world, including the prestigious United Nations Environment Program Medal and the World Environment Festival Award. Recently, he was executive producer of several specials on conservation issues of international importance including "Amazonia: The Road to the End of the Forest" (1989), "Sea of Slaughter" (1990), "James Bay: The Wind that Keeps on Blowing" (1991), "A Climate for Change" (1992), "Trading Futures: Living in the Global Economy" (1993), "Water: to the Last Drop" (1994), "The Dammed" (1995), and "Food or Famine" (1996). These broad overviews and those more directly related to birds and their habitat have culminated in major achievements. Under his leadership, "The Nature of Things" science film unit won the Gemini Award for Best Documentary Series on Canadian Television four times since the award's inception in 1986.

James Murray himself has been honoured with numerous awards, including ones for natural History. He received the "Conservation Award of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists" and "The Canadian Science and Film Association Award" for his exceptional contribution to science films in Canada, as well as two "Wilderness Awards" for his film productions "Darwin and the Galapagos" and "The Living Arctic". Furthermore, in 1988 he received the North American Association for Environmental Education's prestigious award for "Outstanding Service to Environmental Education", and in 1991 at the Wildscreen Festival in Great Brittan he was chosen to receive the "Outstanding Achievement Award".

The Society of Canadian Ornithologists' prestigious "Doris Huestis Speirs Award for Outstanding Contributions to Canadian Ornithology" is presented to honour outstanding

lifetime achievement in any discipline of Canadian ornithology. Although contributions in scientific research are most likely to be recognized by the Society, the award is also presented to persons or organizations that have contributed to ornithology in other ways such as conservation, public education, bird art and the popularization of ornithology. James Murray's work more than satisfies these criteria from several viewpoints. His contributions to avian conservation and public education are exemplary and of immeasurable value. The Society of Canadian Ornithologists, and all its members, takes great pleasure in presenting the "1996 Doris Huestis Speirs Award" to James Murray for his outstanding contributions to ornithology and the birds of Canada.