

## *A Tribute to Richard A. Dolbeer*

### Richard A. Dolbeer: scientist, innovator, manager, and mentor

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**RICHARD A. DOLBEER** retired in September 2008 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services (WS) program. Over the last 30 years, his research has encompassed the areas of population dynamics of pest species, economic assessment of losses, development of practical management techniques for resolving human–wildlife conflicts, and integrated pest management programs in the United States and abroad (Africa, Asia, Latin America). Most notably, he is one of a few individuals who recognized, early on, the cost in lives and property due to wildlife collisions with aircraft and that much of that cost is avoidable through the application of findings wrought by solid science. For the last 20 years, he has served in the forefront of research, management, and policy development to reduce wildlife hazards to aircraft.

In the mid-1980s, Richard developed a research effort that led to establishment of the aviation project of the USDA/WS National Wildlife Research Center. He served as project leader for the aviation project through 2002, focusing entirely on reducing wildlife hazards to aviation.

From 2002 to 2008, Richard served as the national coordinator of the WS Airport Wildlife Hazards Program. He worked collaboratively with 5 foreign governments and produced advances in how airport habitats should be managed to reduce use by wildlife, in the design of turbine-powered engines and airframes to withstand bird strikes, and in how wildlife strike data are reported and interpreted. In addition, he led the effort to establish information exchanges within aviation, wildlife management, and research communities, as well as government agencies and the private sector, to mitigate the growing threat posed to aviation safety by wildlife populations.



**Richard A. Dolbeer**

Richard's work on management of airport habitats to reduce its attractiveness to wildlife has been applied by WS biologists at >750 airports in the United States. In particular, he played a key role in the development of a long-term research and management agreement between WS and John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFKIA).

Concurrent to his work at JFKIA, Richard's insight into wildlife behavioral ecology and management led to the establishment of a series of interagency agreements with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to conduct research on wildlife hazards to aviation. In collaboration with the FAA, Richard and scientists under his guidance have evaluated >30 control products and wildlife management strategies.

Richard received formal training at the University of the South (B.A., biology), the University of Tennessee (M.S., zoology), and Colorado State University (Ph.D., wildlife

biology). During his career, he published >170 scientific papers and book chapters. He is a past associate editor of the *Journal of Wildlife Management*, served as chairperson of the Bird Strike Committee U.S.A. and is an elected member of the American Ornithologists' Union. Richard is a 3-time recipient of the USDA Honor Award. Twice he was the recipient of the Jack H. Berryman Institute Research Award. Additionally, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from Bird Strike Committee U.S.A. and the FAA Excellence in Aviation Research award. The Air Line Pilots Association honored him for "scientific integrity and worldwide leadership in the reduction of wildlife hazards to aviation." In 2008, he was the first person to receive the Caesar Kleberg Award for Excellence in Applied Wildlife Research from The Wildlife Society.

On a more personal note, Richard Dolbeer has been an outstanding mentor and colleague. He is blessed with a combination of wisdom, forthrightness, professionalism, ethics, and desire that all led to his unquestioned success as a scientist and manager. Notably, he always was open to allowing his employees the opportunity to pursue work that complimented their strengths and interests. The result was some novel and entertaining work, the bulk of which has led to improved management of human-wildlife conflicts. Laura Francoeur, senior wildlife biologist at JFKIA, echoed those sentiments, noting that Richard Dolbeer's approach is to "be open to new ideas, base decisions on sound research, and always be ethical."

Richard Dolbeer lives in Huron, Ohio, with his wife Sandra.

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**BRADLEY F. BLACKWELL** has been a research wildlife biologist for the USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services' National Wildlife Research Center since 1997. He worked under Richard Dolbeer's management from 1997 through 2002, co-authored several papers with him, and then worked with him indirectly through his retirement in 2008.

**TRAVIS L. DeVault** is the field station-project leader with USDA Wildlife Services' National Wildlife Research Center, Ohio Field Station in Sandusky, Ohio. He counts Richard Dolbeer among his foremost mentors, and has collaborated with him over the past year on several projects dealing with wildlife hazards to aviation.