



Robert (Bob) Ellis Jenkins (1940–2023)

Author: Hilton, Eric J.

Source: Ichthyology & Herpetology, 111(4) : 659-662

Published By: The American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1643/t2023088>

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

OBITUARIES

Robert (Bob) Ellis Jenkins (1940–2023)

Eric J. Hilton¹

ROBERT (BOB) ELLIS JENKINS, a long-time member of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists and a well-respected ichthyologist with expertise on the fishes of the southeastern United States, passed away in Salem, Virginia, on 12 July 2023, following declining health in recent years. Bob is survived by his ex-wife Diane Giessler, whom he married in 1967 but divorced in 1987 (they, however, remained close friends), and their two children, Glenn R. Jenkins (b. 1969) and Katherine (Katey) S. Jenkins (b. 1973).

Bob was born on 9 February 1940 in Brooklyn, New York to Ellis A. Jenkins and Mabel A. Jenkins. His parents moved Bob and his younger sister Peggy to East Rockaway, on Long Island, early in Bob’s childhood. As a child he developed an interest in keeping aquarium fishes and observing nature. His parents encouraged Bob’s interest in the natural world by buying him books on natural history and by encouraging his developing interest in fishing, which would become a lifelong obsession. Bob’s father first took him fishing when he was four years old, and from then on, he greatly enjoyed fishing for alewife, skates, sea robins, puffers, and other fishes in the freshwaters, bays, and coast of the southern shore of Long Island near his home.

Bob graduated from high school in 1957 and went off to Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia. His interests and activities grew tremendously during his undergraduate years. He was the vice president of his class, and he became heavily involved in his fraternity, the honors council, and was the sports editor for the yearbook. Bob was obsessed with sports his entire life, with particular interests in running and bicycling, both as a spectator and a participant. He raced bicycles for a couple of years in the 1970s, and then, after watching the Tour de France one year, he became inspired to take riding up again in the 1990s, though for pleasure rather than competition. Bob began running in his sophomore year at Roanoke College on the cross country team, which he captained and led to many wins for the team. After a hiatus, Bob took up running again in the 1970s, and began running marathons. His first was the Richmond Marathon in 1978, which he completed in two hours and 53 minutes. Over the course of seven years, Bob would go on to run a total of 15 marathons, including Boston, Philadelphia, Bermuda, and Cleveland, and he was sponsored by Adidas. His personal best time (2:24:08) occurred at the New York City Marathon in October 1982, in which he was the first American in the Masters Division (runners 40 or older). His success in running came at the cost of a time-intensive training

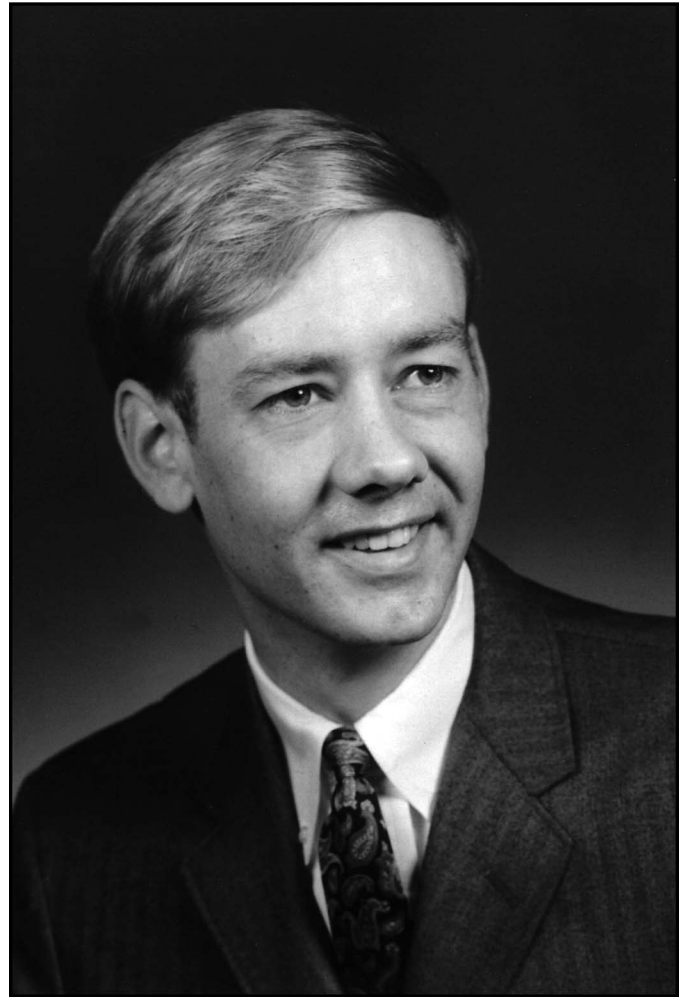


Fig. 1. Bob Jenkins, as a student at Roanoke College (c. 1959). Image copyright Roanoke College (used with permission).

schedule, usually 75 to 80 miles per week. Running gave him focus and a regular schedule, although it prolonged the timeline of finishing large projects such as *Freshwater Fishes of Virginia*. Bob stopped running competitively in 1983 to focus more attention to his research and other responsibilities.

Bob graduated from Roanoke College in May 1961, and spent the summer back in New York as a fisheries technician during which he conducted stream sampling and population surveys. He returned to Virginia as a master’s student at

¹Virginia Institute of Marine Science, William & Mary, Gloucester Point, Virginia 23062; Email: ehilton@vims.edu.

the Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech) with the ichthyologist Robert D. Ross (1910–1983; Jenkins and Burkhead, 1994) as his advisor. For his master's, Bob initially worked on the morphometric and meristic variation of the cyprinids of the upper Roanoke River drainage and the distribution of the fishes that lived in this river. The one aspect Bob liked of this project was the field work and summarizing the knowledge of the fishes of this river. His interest began to waver, though, and he petitioned to have his project changed to the taxonomy and zoogeography of the nest-building species of the genus *Nocomis* in Virginia. In 1963, Ross instructed Bob to discuss his research with Ernest A. Lachner (1915–1996; Jewett and Collette, 1997) at the Smithsonian, who had a long-term interest in *Nocomis* stemming from his own graduate research under Edward C. Raney (1909–1984; Robins et al., 1992). Bob and Lachner quickly became friends and collaborators, and Bob was encouraged to apply for a position in the NOAA Systematics Lab at the Smithsonian, to work with Dan Cohen (1930–2018; Dunn and Pietsch, 2005) and Bruce Collette (b. 1934; Hilton and Smith, 2014). Lachner's thought was that after Bob had worked during the day on gadids and tunas for NOAA, the two of them could work on *Nocomis* during nights and weekends. Bob was interviewed for the NOAA position at the 1963 International Congress of Zoology held in Washington, D.C. In addition to being interviewed at the meeting, Bob recounted this meeting as particularly influential in his thinking of biogeography, having heard the presentation by George S. Myers (1905–1985; Cohen and Weitzman, 1986) in which he spoke on the adoption of plate tectonics and continental drift as an explanation for the distribution of some freshwater fishes. Bob was offered the position, and he soon left Virginia Tech without finishing his master's degree.

Bob spent the fall of 1963 through the summer of 1964 at the Smithsonian and took advantage of his time by meeting and talking with other ichthyologists from all over the world who made visits to the collections, as well as getting to know the curators and other ichthyologists who were there at the time. Most importantly, he became close friends with Lachner. Even after Bob moved on from Washington, D.C., they remained close and would frequently drive together to ASIH meetings until Lachner passed away in 1996. On the afternoon of 3 September 1964, Bob gave his first ASIH presentation in Morehead City, North Carolina, titled "New cyprinid fishes (genus *Hybopsis*, subgenus *Nocomis*) of eastern United States," co-authored with Lachner, in which they laid out some of their developing ideas of the taxonomy and zoogeography of these fishes.

Bob met Ed Raney while at the Smithsonian, during one of Raney's visits with his former student Lachner. Raney encouraged Bob to apply for a Ph.D. with him at Cornell. Bob applied, and was accepted, and he moved to Ithaca for the fall semester in 1964. Bob and Lachner drove together to Ithaca by way of the University of Michigan, so that they could examine specimens of *Nocomis* together before Bob began his graduate work on these fishes. Bob recalled, "I was thinking to take on—and take apart—'*Hybopsis*,' the genus in which *Nocomis* and numerous other non-close relatives had been lumped. Nearly all of my research in the first two years at Cornell was a *start* on '*Hybopsis*' and a *continuation* on *Nocomis*, and my first collecting trip in September was for *Nocomis* chubs in Virginia." In the last collection of this

trip, Bob collected the first records of redbhorse suckers (*Moxostoma*) from the James River drainage. These fishes had long been of interest to him, from his days as a master's student at Virginia Tech. Raney allowed him to change topics to *Moxostoma*, and also gave him latitude to continue his research and collaboration with Lachner, which led to several papers on the taxonomy and biology of *Nocomis* (Lachner and Jenkins, 1967, 1971a, 1971b; Jenkins and Lachner, 1971; Lachner and Wiley, 1971).

Tension developed between Raney and Bob, and by the spring of 1968, Raney directed Bob to wrap up his dissertation and find a job. Fortunately, at the ASIH meeting in Ann Arbor in June 1968, during which Bob gave a presentation titled "Characters of the cyprinid fish genus groups referred to *Hybopsis*, with suggestions for reclassifications," he was alerted by the Chair of the Biology Department at Roanoke College of a faculty position that was soon to be advertised, for which he was encouraged to apply. Bob applied, and although he did not have his Ph.D. in hand, he was hired as a lecturer with the condition that he would finish as soon as possible. It would take him two years to complete his dissertation due to his teaching load, a young family, and his research activities. However, he defended his dissertation, titled "Systematic studies of the catostomid fish tribe Moxostomatini" (Jenkins, 1970) in June 1970; it was 799 pages in length, bound in two volumes. Upon completion of his Ph.D., he was promoted to a tenure-track Assistant Professor.

During his career as professor at Roanoke College, from which he retired in 2007, he taught a wide range of courses, from General Zoology and Introductory Biology, to Human Anatomy, Vertebrate Morphogenesis, and Field Biology of Fishes, among others. A frequent theme of courses was getting the students into the field, both locally and farther afield (e.g., the Florida Keys and Eleuthera). In the early 1990s, he had developed a May-term course in Field Biology that he taught every other year in which he would lead students sampling in all the different habitats Virginia has to offer, from the barrier islands of the eastern shore working their way west through the coastal plain and piedmont ending in the ridge and valley. He also involved a total of 43 students in research in his lab, seven of which authored or co-authored peer-reviewed papers. Bob received several awards for his research and teaching, including the Thomas Jefferson Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Natural Science (1989) from the Virginia Museum of Natural History, the Sesquicentennial Distinguished Alumnus of Roanoke College and the Professional Achievement Award of Roanoke College (both awarded in 1992), and the establishment of the Robert E. Jenkins Undergraduate Scholarship by the Virginia Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, which has been awarded annually since 2003.

Over the course of his career, Bob published 39 peer-reviewed papers on a wide range of taxa and two monumental books (Lee et al., 1980; Jenkins and Burkhead, 1994). Bob's research on the fishes of the southeastern United States focused primarily on catostomids and cyprinids, but they also included studies of ictalurids, percids, and centrarchids, as well as general zoogeography of fishes of this region. Highlights of his research career include: rediscovering the Yellowfin Madtom, *Noturus flavipinnis*, which had been considered extinct (Taylor et al., 1971); working with other ichthyologists brought together by Jim Williams of

the Office of Endangered Species at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Gainesville, Florida in 1974, to evaluate the conservation status of southeastern fishes, resulting in the petitioning of the Snail Darter (*Percina tanasi*) for listing; and surveying national forests for rare and endangered fishes, including the Orange-fin Madtom (*Noturus gilberti*), the Yellowfin Madtom, several minnows (e.g., the Slender Chub, *Erimystax cahni*), the Rustyside Sucker (*Moxostoma [Thoburnia] hamiltoni*), and the Roanoke Logperch (*Percina rex*). Bob's contributions were recognized by the patronym for the Conasaugua Logperch, *Percina jenkinsi*: "I take great pleasure in naming this form after Dr. Robert E. Jenkins, Roanoke College, in recognition of his work with freshwater fishes in eastern North America, and particularly for his efforts in the subgenus *Percina*, commonly called logperches" (Thompson, 1985: 4).

Foremost among Bob's research legacy is the monumental book *Freshwater Fishes of Virginia*, coauthored with his former Roanoke College student, Noel Burkhead (b. 1950) in 1994 (Jenkins and Burkhead, 1994). Bob first began compiling distributional data for this book in 1964 while he was at the Smithsonian, and he generated an unpublished annotated checklist of freshwater fishes of Virginia in 1967 while he was a student at Cornell. Burkhead became a student at Roanoke in 1968, the same year that Bob became a lecturer, and he quickly impressed Bob with his skills in the field; the two made many collections together in support of the book project. Following graduation (1973) and his own master's degree under David Etnier (1939–2023) at the University of Tennessee, Burkhead came back to Roanoke College to work on the book between 1979 and 1981, but it was not until January 1987 that a more-or-less complete draft was completed (though additions and edits were made well beyond that time). Support for the book came from varied sources, including state grants and private donations but largely from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fishes (VDGIF; now the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources). The delay in getting a full draft caused significant tensions between Bob and the VDGIF. It also caused some shifts in the publication plans for the book. Initially the University of Virginia Press was going to publish it, although the enormity of the project and the death of the executive editor who was the primary champion of the project caused the press to drop the project late in 1987. VDGIF approached the American Fisheries Society as a publisher, and they agreed, although this forced significant change of format and style for the manuscript. From 1988 to 1992, several cycles of revision and editing occurred on the manuscript which was now at more than 2,400 pages. *Freshwater Fishes of Virginia* was finally published in April 1994—30 years after the tracks were first laid down!—and comprised 1,080 printed pages, detailed accounts of 210 species of fishes and extensive chapters on topics such as the history of ichthyology in Virginia and the hydrology, physiography, aquatic habitats, and biogeography of the state. The scale of the book, in its final form, was reflected in the glowing book reviews that followed (Burr and Warren, 1995; Daniels, 1995; Hastings, 1996).

Following the publication of Jenkins and Burkhead (1994), Bob was eager to return to his studies of *Moxostoma*. He developed a list of more than 15 working titles for the manuscripts, not including the three papers on *Moxostoma* that were eventually published (Branchaud and Jenkins,



Fig. 2. Bob Jenkins fly fishing the Jackson River, Virginia, June 2006. Photo by Jack Musick, and courtesy of Noel M. Burkhead.

1999; McAllister et al., 2009; Tracy et al., 2013). This set of planned papers included methods papers (e.g., aging techniques), detailed morphological and taxonomic revisions, and observational life history studies (e.g., spawning behaviors). Bob always felt that there were more specimens to examine, more data to be collected, and more collections to make (particularly of young-of-the-year, juvenile, and adult samples to base descriptions upon) to make these studies comprehensive. In 2022, Bob realized that this was an impossibility, and he passed along his data to Jon Armbruster at the Auburn University Museum of Natural History, who is in a position to complete some of those projects on catostomids for which Bob outlined and collected data and to find others to help complete the remaining studies and see them into publication. Unfortunately, Bob will not see the fruits of his years of labor. I recall the discussions Bob and I had about his redhorse studies specifically, but his career more broadly, and that, with a sadness in his voice, he said, "but I just wasn't finished."

Postscript.—I originally began writing a Historical Perspectives article for *Ichthyology & Herpetology* based on interviews I conducted with Bob, first on May 19–20, 2013 at his home in Salem, Virginia, and then again on August 25–29, 2018 in Williamsburg, Virginia, and which continued over sporadic email exchanges and annual visits. Although a draft was completed several years ago, Bob's final edits and suggestions on the story of his life were not made until the spring of 2023, and they were not received until after his death.



Fig. 3. Bob Jenkins at work in the lab in 2006, examining a specimen of Sicklefins Redhorse (*Moxostoma* sp.). Image copyright Roanoke College (used with permission).

This obituary is an abstracted version of that story, the manuscript for which grew in scope, detail, and length; it was published as in the Southeastern Fishes Council Proceedings (Hilton, 2023). I greatly appreciate Bob's unwavering candor and for his email correspondence thoroughly documenting a lot of his life and career. I am grateful to Linda Angle Miller for providing the images from the Roanoke College Archives used for Figures 1 and 3, and to Noel Burkhead for providing the image used for Figure 2.

LITERATURE CITED

- Branchaud, A., and R. E. Jenkins. 1999. Pierre Fortin (1823–1888) et la première description scientifique du chevalier cuivré, *Moxostoma hubbsi*. *Canadian Field Naturalist* 113:345–358.
- Burr, B. M., and M. L. Warren, Jr. 1995. [Review of] *Freshwater Fishes of Virginia*. *Copeia* 1995:259–262.
- Cohen, D. M., and S. H. Weitzman. 1986. George Sprague Myers 1905–1985. *Copeia* 1986:851–853.
- Daniels, R. A. 1995. [Review of] *Freshwater Fishes of Virginia*. *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 124:283–284.
- Dunn, J. R., and T. W. Pietsch. 2005. Daniel Morris Cohen. *Copeia* 2005:693–700.
- Hastings, R. W. 1996. [Review of] *Freshwater Fishes of Virginia*. *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 71:283–284.
- Hilton, E. J. 2023. It's all about fishing: Robert Ellis Jenkins (1940–2023) and his life among the suckers and freshwater fishes of Virginia. *Southeastern Fishes Council Proceedings* 63:39–74.
- Hilton, E. J., and D. G. Smith. 2014. The second 50 years of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists: personal reflections on the society by Bruce B. Collette. *Copeia* 2014:372–380.
- Jenkins, R. E. 1970. Systematic studies of the catostomid fish tribe Moxostomatini. Unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.
- Jenkins, R. E., and N. M. Burkhead. 1994. *Freshwater Fishes of Virginia*. American Fisheries Society, Bethesda, Maryland.
- Jenkins, R. E., and E. A. Lachner. 1971. Criteria for analysis and interpretation of the American fish genera *Nocomis* Girard and *Hybopsis* Agassiz. *Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology* 90:1–15.
- Jewett, S. A., and B. B. Collette. 1997. Ernest A. Lachner 1915–1996. *Copeia* 1996:650–659.
- Lachner, E. A., and R. E. Jenkins. 1967. Systematics, distribution, and evolution of the chub genus *Nocomis* (Cyprinidae) in the southwestern Ohio River basin, with the description of a new species. *Copeia* 1967:557–580.
- Lachner, E. A., and R. E. Jenkins. 1971a. Systematics, distribution and evolution of the chub genus *Nocomis* Girard of eastern United States, with descriptions of new species. *Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology* 85:1–97.
- Lachner, E. A., and R. E. Jenkins. 1971b. Systematics, distribution, and evolution of the *Nocomis biguttatus* species group (family Cyprinidae: Pisces) with a description of a new species from the Ozark Upland. *Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology* 91:1–28.
- Lachner, E. A., and M. L. Wiley. 1971. Populations of the polytypic species *Nocomis leptcephalus* (Girard) with a description of a new subspecies. *Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology* 92:1–35.
- Lee, D. S., C. R. Gilbert, C. H. Hocutt, R. E. Jenkins, D. E. McAllister, and J. R. Stauffer. 1980. *Atlas of North American Freshwater Fishes*. North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, Raleigh, North Carolina.
- McAllister, C. T., W. C. Starnes, H. W. Robison, R. E. Jenkins, and M. E. Raley. 2009. Distribution of the Silver Redhorse, *Moxostoma anisurum* (Cypriniformes: Catostomidae), in Arkansas. *Southwestern Naturalist* 54:514–518.
- Robins, T. W., B. B. Collette, and C. R. Robins. 1992. Edward C. Raney 1909–84. *Copeia* 1992:1143–1150.
- Taylor, W. R., R. E. Jenkins, and E. A. Lachner. 1971. Rediscovery and description of the ictalurid fish *Noturus flavipinnis*. *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington* 83:469–476.
- Thompson, B. A. 1985. *Percina jenkinsi*, a new species of logperch (Pisces, Percidae) from the Conasauga River, Tennessee and Georgia. *Occasional Papers of the Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University* 61:1–23.
- Tracy, B. H., R. E. Jenkins, and W. C. Starnes. 2013. History of fish investigations in the Yadkin-Pee Dee River Drainage of North Carolina and Virginia with an analysis of nonindigenous species and invasion dynamics of three species of suckers (Catostomidae). *Journal of the North Carolina Academy of Science* 129:82–106.