

Ernie Kuyt - Canadian Wildlife Pioneer

Ernie Kuyt is recognized across Canada as a “pioneer” with the conservation of barren-ground caribou in northern Canada, the wolf that followed the caribou in migration and the whooping crane, the poster species for bird conservation in North America.

Ernie was born May 3, 1929, in the Netherlands. His family moved to Canada in 1948. In 1957, he obtained a B.A. at the University of British Columbia and immediately took a biologist job in the Department of Natural Resources in Saskatchewan. That same year, he was loaned to a cooperative study of barren ground caribou headed by John Kelsall in Yellowknife, NWT. In 1961, Ernie began research on wolves that followed the caribou during migration. During this work, he was one of the first to record surplus killing of caribou by wolves and the first to observe greater Canada geese on northern rivers. In 1970, Ernie received his M.A. degree at the University of Saskatchewan for his research on the behaviour of captive wolf pups. However, he then moved from “fur to feathers” for the rest of his career.

Ernie Kuyt is best known for his work on saving Whooping Cranes from extinction. In 1941, the wild flock was down to about 22 birds and its status was not much better when Ernie became involved with the recovery effort in 1965 when the wild population was 42 birds. By the time of his retirement in 1990, the flock had rebounded to 196 birds, largely due to the efforts of Ernie and his colleagues across Canada and the U.S. Ernie was a big proponent of keeping the public informed about Whooping Cranes and their plight. For his conservation efforts, Ernie received the Order of Canada in 1993 and the Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society’s Rowan Distinguished Service award in 1997. Ernie Kuyt died on May 21, 2010 from a fall at his home in Edmonton, Alberta.