

Gustave Joseph Yaki, Alberta Champion

About Gus Yaki By: Mason Green

Anyone who enjoys the company of animals will agree that there is one Albertan that stands out: the exceptional naturalist, stupendous birder and incredibly seasoned explorer - Gus Yaki. Born on August 19, 1932 in Sandwith, Saskatchewan, Gus enjoyed viewing birds on his daily 5 kilometer walks to and from school and loved nature from his early years. He would identify a bird on his way to school, check his analyzations with his teacher's bird book, and find the same bird on the way home. He was an enthusiastic birder as a young man and a self-educated naturalist.

After Gus's schooling, in 1951 he joined the RCMP and was trained in Regina, then moved to Toronto. He was then stationed on the Six Nations Reserve in Ohsweken, Ontario. In the early 1960's, he was president of the local nature club and lived in Lindsay, Ontario, and in 1966, he founded and became the first president of the Niagara Falls Nature Club. This club had more than 400 members in 1967, and Gus was then given a position on the board of directors of the FON (Federation of Ontario Naturalists). This then resulted in the creation of a land conservation organization, which soon became the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

As Gus joined many different clubs and groups to conserve nature, he also launched his own eco-tour company, NTS (Nature Travel Service), where Gus conducted guided trips all over the world to see many different species of birds. Gus has seen an estimated 5,000 bird species, or nearly 50% of all birds and was a mentor to many other renowned birders, botanists, biologists and naturalists. He gave numerous presentations, spent countless hours leading birding and botany trips and raised enough money to buy several dozen bikes, all for conservation efforts. Even after retiring, he continued volunteering to help birds. At age 84, to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday, Gus walked from Saskatchewan to Waterton Park in the name of bird study and habitat conservation.

As a result of his work, Gus has won many awards and honors and has had a large impact on the people and birds around him. He was named one of Calgary's "Top 7 Over 70" and received 6 other honours in late 2019 alone. The Governor General also awarded him the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers. Lyn Hancock, an author who participated in one of Gus's bird seeing trips, wrote a book about the experience called "Looking for the Wild". He passed away peacefully in Calgary after living 87 years and 356 days. He is remembered by and inspiring thousands worldwide, and after his death, Gus's close friends and fellow naturalists continued the bird walks and nature clubs for him.

How Gus Yaki Inspires and Connects to Me

TURTLES & TRIPS - Gus was devoted to helping the environment, and he was focused on birds. This is similar to me because I enjoy helping the environment too, but focus on shelled reptiles, like turtles, tortoises and terrapins. I started to be fascinated by turtles in early 2019,

when I went to Hawaii and experienced the company of sea turtles, which quickly became my favorite animal. I have been researching turtles for about 4 years and have been back to Hawaii twice. This April, I am going on a trip to Boston to interview a Marine Biologist who rescues sea turtles from cold shock. I hope to learn what I can do to get to be a Marine Biologist when I finish university. Gus also went on trips around the world for birding, and I want to travel the world to see turtles.

ECO CLUB - There is an Eco Club that I am a part of at my school designated for creating slideshows about reasons and ways to keep the environment safe. We also go around our school's neighborhood looking for trash to clean up. Me and my friends do this every Thursday during lunch hour, because we all have a passion for the environment. Some special events happen at the club too. For example when everyone was asked to wear warmer clothing one day so that the temperature could be lowered. The purpose was to use less electricity so that we would lower our ECOlogical footprint. This is just like Gus Yaki's Nature Clubs; doing *their* part to help *our* environment.

SEEING THE SPECIES - Gus also inspired me to want to see every species of turtle that I can. I'm hoping that I can be like Gus and see at least 50% of all turtle, tortoise and terrapin species. There are a total of nearly 400 species, so I'm going for at least 200. So far I've only seen three: Green Sea Turtles, Western Painted Turtles, and Pink-Bellied Sideneck Turtles. That means about 197 to go!

RAISING MONEY - This summer, I am going to raise money for conservation efforts to help turtles, just like how Gus Yaki raised thousands for birds. I am planning to do so by selling turtle-shaped homemade cookies door-to-door, and I will find a group or website for donating to about my cause. Maybe eventually I'll raise thousands like Gus did.

PRESENTATIONS - Last year, I gave a presentation to my Grade 5 class about turtles and how to help them. This year, I'm volunteering to go to the elementary school as a guest speaker to some Grade 3s. I plan to become a mentor to younger grades, just like Gus.

Because of Gus Yaki, I have discovered that if I try hard and start early, my passion can become a career. If he can help birds, I can help turtles, and anyone can pitch in to make this world a better place for the millions of species that also call planet Earth home. We have made ourselves the dominant creature in every place we've gone, but we don't seem to realize that no other predator has ever left such devastating repercussions. That being said, it is clear that we need more people like Gustave Joseph Yaki in our world, and I intend to be one of them.

Bibliography

[Gus Yaki, 1932-2020 - Birds Calgary](#)

[In Memoriam - Gus Yaki - Nature Calgary](#)

[Gus Yaki, 1932-2020 - Alberta Champions](#)

[NCC: Where We Work - Alberta - A tribute to Gus Yaki](#)

[Passing of Gus Yaki | Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation](#)

Slideshow version:

[Gus Yaki, Alberta Champion](#)