



## Paul Jorgensen, Borrego conservationist and birder

Friday, June 15, 2012

**BORREGO SPRINGS** — Be it bighorn sheep, the Tijuana Estuary, or endangered birds and plants, Paul D. Jorgensen spent much of his life battling for the environment.

Mr. Jorgensen, a 19-year resident of Borrego Springs, a former State Parks ecologist, expert ornithologist, author and a San Diego County native, died June 8 after an eight-year struggle with prostate cancer. He was 65.

“Paul lived a tremendous life. He gave gratitude for every day, and he loved his friends and family,” said brother Mark Jorgensen, former superintendent of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

“It was a joy and an honor to spend a day in the field with Paul.”

Born and raised in Fletcher Hills, Jorgensen attended San Diego State University, where he earned a zoology degree and later a master’s in biology.

His career spanned more than 30 years and included a decade-long stint as the reserve manager of the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve, where he oversaw many improvements, including the development of the visitor center.

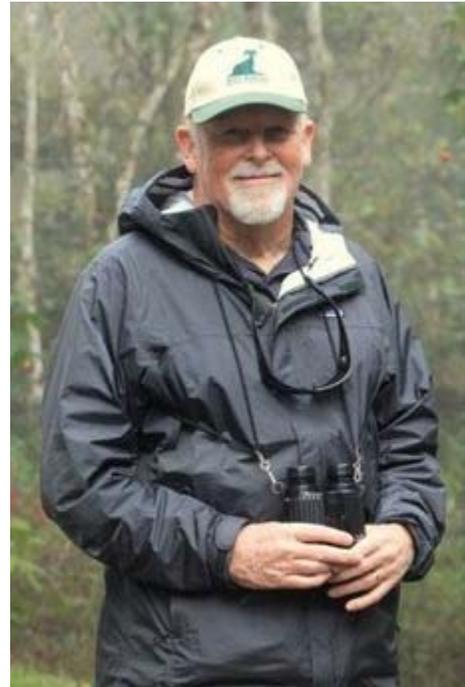
“He had a unique sense of humor and was a prankster,” his brother said. “He was also a protector of the environment. He wasn’t afraid of standing up for the land and the environment.”

In the late 1970s, Mr. Jorgensen joined others to oppose a proposed marina that would have developed and destroyed much of the rich estuarine habitat near the border, home to several species of rare birds. The project was eventually defeated and led to the establishment of the Tijuana reserve.

In the 1990s, he helped develop a plan to protect Coyote Canyon in the desert from motorized vehicle traffic that threatened bighorn sheep and sensitive habitat. Those restrictions, despite several failed lawsuits, remain today.

From 1993 until his retirement in 2005, Mr. Jorgensen was the first full-time state park resource ecologist for the park department’s Colorado Desert District, which includes Anza-Borrego Desert, Cuyamaca Rancho, Palomar Mountain, and the Salton Sea and Picacho state recreation areas.

He has authored or co-written many books and papers, mostly having to do with bird populations in specific areas of the San Diego and nearby regions.



During his final months, Mr. Jorgensen was able to travel with several family members on a birding trip to Ecuador and Uruguay. He spent 25 days in South America, acquiring 225 new birds for his life list.

“For many days, he no longer had cancer — he was totally enthralled with birding,” said Mark Jorgensen. “The trip was a gift of life, joy, nature, camaraderie and family.”

Mr. Jorgensen grew up surfing the Sunset Cliffs and La Jolla areas and maintained a lifelong interest in the sport. He was a woodworker well-known for his carvings of birds, wooden kitchen utensils and handcrafted furniture. During his retirement he combined his interests and began making specialty surfboards of high quality.

A memorial service is planned for Nov. 18 in Borrego Springs at the amphitheater at the desert park’s visitor center.

Mr. Jorgensen is survived by his wife of more than 15 years, Kathleen, his two sons, Evan and Damon, and granddaughter, Kaylee Jorgensen.

The family suggests donations to the Anza-Borrego Foundation, P.O. Box 2001, Borrego Springs, CA 92004.

If you care to share thoughts with Mr. Jorgensen’s family, Kathy Jorgensen can be reached at: P.O. Box 665, Borrego Springs, CA 92004.