



Ornithologists Flock to Nebraska for 2011 Annual Meeting

Like cranes descending from a prairie sky, ornithologists flocked to Kearney, Nebraska, for the 89th Annual Meeting of the Association of Field Ornithologists. Over 400 student, professional, and avocational ornithologists attended the March event, which coincided with annual meetings of the Wilson Ornithological Society and the Cooper Ornithological Society. The joint conference featured over 260 oral and poster presentations, as well as symposia focused on Cerulean Warbler biology, Piping Plover and Least Tern management, prairie grouse research, and avian conservation in agricultural landscapes. The remarkable breadth and quality of the scientific program demonstrated the vibrant condition of the AFO and of contemporary bird study, in general.

Each of the hosting societies sponsored a plenary address, including one on Sandhill Cranes delivered by the AFO's invited speaker, Dr. Gary Krapu. Dr. Krapu is a research scientist with the USGS Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center in Jamestown, North Dakota. His superb talk described multiple facets of the biology

and natural history of the mid-continental population of Sandhill Cranes, explaining, among other things, why so many cranes gather in the Platte River Valley. Many in attendance were surprised to learn that at least some of the cranes observed in the area were on their way to northern Russia!

Planned and spontaneous field trips allowed meeting participants to view astonishing numbers of migrating cranes, ducks, and geese. Some even witnessed the dramatic courtship rituals of Greater Prairie Chickens and Sharp-tailed Grouse. For more meeting highlights, including information on its origins, organizers, and AFO Council business, please read the "Message from the President" on page 2.

Photos: Watching birds of the Platte River valley was a highlight of the 2011 annual meeting in Kearney, Nebraska. At left, Pam Hunt, Jason Pietrzak, Becky Suomola, and Jennifer Ma focus on a distant group of Greater Prairie Chickens. At right, Sandhill Cranes in flight.



Dan Lambert



Reed Bowman



Message from the President

Reed Bowman

The AFO chose Kearney for its 2011 meeting site to give members a chance to witness the renowned, late-winter aggregation of hundreds of thousands of Sandhill Cranes on the Platte River. When the previous AFO president, David Bonter, and I first proposed having our meeting in Kearney, we were immediately asked, “Even with the cranes, do you really think we can get many people to come to the middle of Nebraska... in March?” We were, however, confident that we could get at least one hundred individuals to attend, a goal that was assured when the Wilson and Cooper societies signed on to create a joint meeting. However, we had no idea how attractive this venue would be. The meeting drew over 500 individuals. The cranes also did not disappoint; meeting participants were treated to a truly breathtaking ornithological spectacle.

All in all, the meeting and associated activities went off without a hitch thanks to the foresight, organization and hard work of the local committee, especially the indefatigable and always smiling Local Committee Czar, Mary Bomberger Brown, and Master of Logistics, Chris Thody, both from the School of Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In appreciation of Mary’s efforts, the three societies are most pleased to be donating \$1,500 to the program she administers, the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership. The AFO would also like to thank Elaine Connelly, Jacki Loomis, Mark Mesarch, Gregg Hutchison, Paul Johnsgard, Sarah Focke, Joel Jorgensen, the Rowe Audubon Sanctuary, and the Younes family for making this meeting not only possible but also a terrific and memorable event. I suspect it will not be long before another bird meeting is held in Kearney. The AFO also thanks members of the Scientific Committee, John McCarty (AFO), Bob Curry (WOS) and Scott Robinson (COS) for putting together the scientific program, all the while continually adjusting to an unexpectedly large number of presentations and posters!

Highlights of the AFO Council Meeting

The AFO Council had a well attended and very productive meeting one day prior to the annual meeting. The Council is currently comprised of 21 thoughtful and engaged individuals working to support the AFO and ornithology on numerous fronts (see: <http://www.afonet.org/about/council.html>).

The Council discussed potential sites for annual meetings to follow the North American Ornithological Conference that will take place in Vancouver in August, 2012. For some time, there has been strong interest in meeting at a Caribbean location (a notion that gained more appeal for some after two hours in a crane blind on a chilly Nebraska March morning). We have begun to investigate this option.

The Council made changes to policies and procedures regarding AFO awards to students, including travel awards to annual meetings and Bergstrom and Skutch research awards (see page 5).

The Council also decided to continue representing AFO members on the North American Banding Council.

In addition, the Council proposed a change in the AFO’s bylaws, which will allow individuals who have served two terms as a “regular” Council member to move directly into an officer position on the Council, if so elected. In the past, councilors completing two terms have had to step off the Council for at least two years before they could be considered for the position of President, Vice President, Treasurer or Secretary. Not only will this change provide continuity on the Council but, given that officer positions involve a substantial amount of work for no compensation, it seems foolish to turn away an individual who is willing to put forth further effort on behalf of the AFO. The change in the bylaws was approved by members at the AFO business meeting, which took place the following day.

Under the leadership of John Cavitt, the Council began work in earnest on a long-standing goal to reach out to and support ornithologists in the neotropics. In the coming year, we will be moving to add individuals working in the neotropics to the AFO Council. We are also making plans to meet jointly in the near future with one of the many ornithological societies based in the neotropics. Furthermore, we will be making an effort to better inform Neotropical ornithologists of research funding available through the AFO. Finally, we are very excited about an upcoming initiative that will allow current AFO members to sponsor AFO memberships for ornithology students based in the neotropics. This option will be available for 2012 as part of the AFO membership renewal process, which is administered by the Ornithological Societies of North America.

The Council spent a substantial amount of time discussing the AFO’s online Banding Supplies business, which is operated out of the Manomet Center for Conservation Science. (see <http://catalog.manomet.org/catalog/cart.cgi>). The AFO sells high-quality Japanese-made mist nets, banding pliers, and much more in the way of ornithological research equipment. Plans are now in place to improve the operation’s website and to expand the inventory. Our Banding Supplies business has, unfortunately, been a “well-kept secret” for too many years. Thus, we are also planning to improve our marketing to ornithologists around the world. This is a business by ornithologists, for ornithologists. Proceeds are used to fund AFO grants and awards that support students conducting ornithological research throughout the western hemisphere.

Please consider obtaining your field supplies from the AFO and take advantage of the 10% member discount.

Take care,

L. Scott Johnson, President, AFO

The Journal of Field Ornithology

Best Student Publication, 2010

The winner of the first annual **Best Student Publication Award** in the *Journal of Field Ornithology* is **Jared Wolfe**, Ph.D. candidate, Louisiana State University. Jared's winning paper was, "Using molt cycles to categorize the age of tropical birds: an integrative new system," *Journal of Field Ornithology* 81(2):186-194.

Systems to differentiate age classes in birds are essential for investigating avian population dynamics. Age classification models, which largely depend on molt and plumage criteria, have long been available for temperate species. Unfortunately, these are of limited value in the tropics because they employ nomenclature that does not adequately account for the annual life-cycle events of tropical birds. Jared Wolfe, the winner of the 2010 *JFO* Best Student Publication Award, has proposed a method to resolve this problem. Together

with his colleagues, Jared developed an approach to aging tropical birds that is based on identification of the molt cycle (as unknown, first, second, or definitive) and classification of plumage (as juvenal, formative, alternate, or supplemental). Use of this system to complement calendar-based models can help improve our understanding of avian population dynamics in both temperate and tropical regions. Jared's coauthors were Thomas B. Ryder (Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center) and Peter Pyle (Institute for Bird Populations).

The high quality of student publications in the 81st volume of *JFO* made it difficult to select a winner. However, Jared's article stood out for its clear composition, contribution to the advancement of field techniques, and potential to illuminate avian ecology and conservation opportunities. Jared, who has operated banding stations throughout the western hemisphere, is currently studying landscape genetics and demography of Amazonian birds in Brazil.



Jared Wolfe with a Black-faced Hawk in Brazil.

Luke Powell

Journal of Field Ornithology Updates

The *Journal of Field Ornithology* continues to thrive under the leadership of editor Gary Ritchison. Gary and his team of associate editors give unusually prompt attention to manuscripts, which explains why the average submission-to-decision time for a paper sent to *JFO* is now a mere 42 days. Clearly, *JFO* is the place to go if one wants to get work published quickly, perhaps to help secure a postdoctoral fellowship, a full-time job, tenure, and/or a promotion. In all likelihood, high-quality papers submitted in the next few weeks will be published in 2011.

The AFO Council is in the process of creating a new award for the best publication to appear in each volume of the *Journal of Field Ornithology*, starting with Volume 82 (2011). All papers,

including those by professionals, students, and non-professionals (or any combination thereof), will be eligible to receive this honor. A committee of AFO members will judge and rank papers based on the quality, significance, and potential impact of the research on our knowledge of avian biology, the conservation of species, and/or the future study of birds.

If you are a member of the AFO and would consider serving on the evaluation committee for the first-ever Best Publication Award, please contact the chair of AFO's Publications Committee, Reed Bowman at: rbowman@archbold-station.org. Look for more information on this topic in upcoming editions of *AFO Afield*.

AFO Best Student Presentations: 2011 Annual Meeting

Best Oral Presentation

Cara Joos, Ph.D. candidate, University of Missouri

Presentation title: Settlement order and productivity of Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii bellii*)

Co-authors: Frank R. Thompson, III (USFS Northern Research Station, University of Missouri) and John Faaborg (University of Missouri)

Assessing habitat quality is important in population studies because habitat quality influences the fitness of its occupants. We need a better understanding of the factors that influence fitness in order to make informed habitat management decisions. The ideal despotic distribution model hypothesizes that individuals select high-quality territories first. This selection pattern should result in increased fitness of earlier-arriving individuals, therefore territory settlement order will predict fitness of occupants. Cara and her co-authors estimated fitness as "productivity," measured as total number of chicks fledged per territory and then tested if territory settlement date, the date the first egg was laid, whether males were philopatric or not, or Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) abundance predicted productivity in a population of individually marked Bell's Vireos (*Vireo bellii bellii*) in central Missouri. Prior to the arrival of vireos on their breeding grounds, Cara systematically searched territories for newly arriving males, noted the band combinations of returning occupants, and color-banded as many new territory owners as possible. Next, she located and monitored nests to record the date that first eggs were laid and the number of chicks fledged. She also conducted point counts to estimate



Barbara Kus

Best oral presentation award winner Cara Joos.

cowbird abundance. Cara found both early arrival and nest initiation to be important predictors of productivity. Productivity declined with settlement date and first egg date, but settlement date may be the more important of the two. For example, if two territories have the same first egg date, the one that was settled earlier will have higher productivity. Cara's findings support the ideal despotic distribution model in which settlement order predicts fitness. Thus, if territory quality is a function of habitat features, Cara's results will allow us to better define high-quality Bell's Vireo habitat and allow land managers to make informed management decisions.

Best Poster Presentation

J. Ryan Shipley, Ph.D. candidate, Oklahoma Biological Survey, U. of Oklahoma

Presentation title: Why is there a gap in the breeding range of the Painted Bunting?

Co-authors: Andrea Contina, Nyambar Batbayar, Eli Bridge, and Jeff Kelly (Oklahoma Biological Survey, University of Oklahoma)

Explaining the factors that influence a bird species' breeding range is an enduring problem in ornithology. Ryan's research focused on explaining the breeding range of the Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*), a small Neotropical migrant songbird that occurs in two disjunct breeding populations in the United States. The larger population occurs primarily in the states of Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas whereas a smaller population exists along the Atlantic coast in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Although landscapes vary greatly between these two regions, no obvious climatological or geographic features exclude Painted Buntings from occupying the gap between them. To investigate explanations for the disjunction of these breeding populations, Ryan and his co-authors at the Oklahoma Biological Survey used species distribution modeling to determine if the bioclimatic envelope derived from breeding location data would occupy the region where the species is currently absent. In addition, they used winter presence data to delineate regions with suitable conditions on the breeding ground during spring arrival and examined historical origins of this gap in the breeding range by modeling current distribution variables onto two Last Glacial Maximum (ca. 21,000 years ago) paleoclimate models. The results suggest that (a) a bioclimatic explanation does not explain the gap between the current breeding distributions and (b) the species exhibits niche tracking within these breeding regions. In addition, the paleoclimate distribution reconstructions suggest that the species' migra-

tory distance was historically shorter than it is at present, and that two, or possibly three populations may have previously existed in western Mexico, the Yucatan Peninsula, and southern Florida. These different glacial refugia may help explain the differences in molting schedules and migratory behavior seen in the two present breeding populations.

The AFO thanks Bob Beason (Wilson Ornithological Society Chair of Student Presentation Awards Committee), Craig Benkman, Reed Bowman, Jeff Buler, John Cavitt, Jameson Chace, Karie Decker, Mark Deutschlander, Greg H. Farley, TJ Fontaine, Eileen M. Kirsch, Barb Kus, J. Daniel Lambert, Michael P. Lombardo (AFO Chair of Student Presentation Awards Committee), Kathryn Purcell, Martin G. Raphael, Paul G. Rodewald, Susan Skagen (Cooper Ornithological Society Chair of Student Presentation Awards Committee), David Swanson, Carol Vleck, Margaret Voss, Lindsey Walters, and Doris J. Watt for judging student presentations at this year's meeting.



Best poster presentation winner J. Ryan Shipley.

E. Alexander Bergstrom Awards, 2011

E. Alexander Bergstrom (1919-1973) was Vice President of the Northeastern Bird-Banding Association (now the AFO) and the Editor of *Bird-Banding* (now the *Journal of Field Ornithology*) for 21 years. These awards honor his memory and dedication to bird research. The purpose of the award is to promote field studies of birds by helping to support a specific research or analysis project. In judging among proposals of equal quality, special consideration is given to those that: 1) focus on avian life history, 2) use data collected all or in part by non-professionals, and/or 3) employ banding or other marking techniques. Awards are given to researchers in the US or Canada and in Latin America. Further information on how to apply for a Bergstrom Award can be found at: <http://www.afonet.org/grants/Bergstrom/Bergstrom.html>.

In 2011, the AFO received 26 Bergstrom Award applications, including 18 from the United States and Canada and nine from six different countries in Latin America. Six applicants from the US and Canada received \$850 each. Four applicants from Latin America received \$1125 each. Awardees were:

Sarah Cancellieri, Portland State University, An experimental investigation on nest reuse in an open-cup nesting passerine

Gloria Denise Augusto Castiglioni, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Vocalização como ferramenta para estudos da biologia reprodutiva da Murucututu de barriga amarela (*Pulsatrix koeniswaldiana*)

Rebecca I. Cooper, Arkansas State University, Development of a non-lethal method for measuring persistent organic pollutants in adipose tissue of migratory songbirds

Brehan Furfey, Arkansas State University, Impacts of a major oil spill on Louisiana waterbirds in the Gulf of Mexico: identification of vital use areas and recommendations to enhance population recovery

Maricel Grana Grilli, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina, Migration and carry-over effects on Antarctic Skuas

Chris Millow, San Diego State University, Black skimmers (*Rynchops*

niger) in an urban landscape: contaminant impacts on reproductive success and foraging ecology in the San Diego Bay

Angélica María Hernández Palma, Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia, Estrategias de muda de las aves residentes en un bosque húmedo premontano del Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Morgan Niccoli, College of William and Mary, Effects of urban development on Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) juvenile survival and dispersal

Tatiana Straatmann, Biological Dynamics of Forest Fragments Project, Brasil, An assessment of site-fidelity among three species of resident understory birds from the central Amazon

Joanna X. Wu, University of Hawaii, Seed dispersal ecology in endemic versus exotic birds in Hawai'i

Bergstrom Awards chair Andrew Farnsworth and the AFO would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance in reviewing proposals: Dan Ardia, Nacho Areta, Luis dos Anjos, John Arvin, Dan Brooks, Felipe Chavez, Paul Hamel, Dan Lambert, Dan Lebbin, Jason Mobley, Eugene Morton, Kathryn Purcell, Renata Ribeiro, Lee Robinson, James Roper, and Andrea Townsend.

Changes to the Bergstrom Awards

At its recent meeting in Nebraska, the AFO Council made two changes regarding administration of the Bergstrom Awards, which will be effective starting in 2012. First, to be eligible for an award, applicants, their research supervisors, or both must be members of the AFO at the time of application. Second, individuals applying for Bergstrom Research Awards that are set aside for Latin America-based researchers will now submit applications by 15 July, rather than 7 January. This change was made because, for many individuals working in Latin America, January falls in the middle of the field season. The 7 January deadline will be retained for Bergstrom Award applicants working in the US or Canada.

Jeffrey Buler Joins the AFO Council

The AFO is pleased to welcome Dr. Jeffrey Buler as the newest member of its governing body. Jeff is a Research Assistant Professor in the department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. He holds graduate degrees in wildlife and biology from Louisiana State University and the University of Southern Mississippi. His research is focused on the movement, behavior, and ecology of birds during migratory stopover and modeling bird species distributions across spatial scales. Jeff is also one of a handful of biologists in the United States actively using the national network of weather surveillance radars to study the distribution, movement, and habitat use patterns of migratory birds. His radar research aims to develop techniques to quantify bird distributions, assess bird response to habitat management and restoration activities, identify important stopover areas, and examine how migrating birds respond to extreme weather events and negotiate ecological barriers to migration.



Would You Like to Get Involved with the AFO?

We're always looking for people who are interested in the AFO. There are a number of ways you can help out. These include serving on the committee that reviews proposals for the Bergstrom and Skutch Research Awards or the committee that gives out awards for the best publications in the *Journal of Field Ornithology*. You can also volunteer to help judge student oral and poster presentations at our annual meeting. Finally, you can serve on the governing body of the AFO, the AFO Council. If you are interested in any of the above and/or would like to nominate yourself or someone else as an AFO councilor, please contact AFO Vice President Kathryn Purcell (kpurcell@fs.fed.us).

Fun in Four Letters: Musings of a Field Ornithologist

By Liz Tymkiw, University of Delaware

What did the grad student say when she counted her billionth Northern Mockingbird during her point count? NOMO!

And so it started, all alone in the "woods" of Delaware, laughing to myself like a crazy person. I'm not sure how this first joke popped into my head (something to do with not interacting with other people for a few weeks?) but it started a chain reaction. I could no longer write down a four-letter alpha code without trying to make a joke out of it. And since that was pretty much my job, it became a hilarious summer. Or hilarious to me!

Since that day in 2008, these jokes have become a mainstay of my graduate career. I have some indulgent friends with questionable senses of humor who created a fun blog at <http://birdblgr.blogspot.com/> (What do you call a Blue Grosbeak who writes stories online? BLGR!). I have other friends who refuse to call them jokes at all. I put one in a conference presentation (What did the Mourning Dove say when he was robbing the bank? MODO!). One was even put to me as a question during my oral exam (What do Carolina Chickadees play in the backyard? CACH!). Regardless of your opinion of these jokes, they certainly make data entry fun (and who can argue with that?!)

Now that I've exhausted most of the comedic resources here at the University of Delaware, I figured I'd go further afield for additional suggestions. There are only two rules: you must have actually seen or heard the species in question and the code must conform to the Bird Banding Lab's list (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/manual/specalist.htm#100>). So let's hear 'em! Send your own to birdblgr@gmail.com. The best entries will be published in the next edition of *AFO Afield*.

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