

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Lately, I've been thinking quite a bit about just what defines WFO is as an organization. To do this, I need to start with our base, the many diverse individuals who collectively constitute our membership. What is the membership base, what are their interests and experience level, where do they fall in the continuum between bird-watcher and hard-core science, and where do they call home? What are our strengths and weaknesses as an organization? Where are we going? From discussions with the membership, and looking into other resources, some interesting facts emerge that I would like to share with you.

Membership. WFO is composed of a continuum of interests and skills, from casual birders to starving field technicians to kamikaze listers to research scientists. We have a wide diversity within the membership, including diversity by age, sex, and geographic locality. We have members in 46 states and provinces in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. California continues to lead in overall membership, but that is to be expected because of the institutional ties with WFO's founding group, California Field Ornithologists. If we look at the per capita membership per million people for each western state (thanks to Robbie Fischer, Kimball Garrett and Jay Withgott for these numbers), Alaska leads with 19.8, followed by California (15.2), New Mexico (10.5), Oregon (8.1), Washington (5.6), Nevada (5.1), Idaho and Colorado (5.0), Arizona (2.4), Hawaii (2.3), Montana (2.2), Utah (2.1), and Wyoming (2.0), Canada is at 0.8, Mexico at 0.01. These numbers identify disproportionate geographic coverage in our membership. For an organization whose goal is to represent all western states, I would like to see levels of membership of all western states similar to that in California. In addition, while it appears on the surface that we are doing well, our membership has declined (we have had a membership as high as 1100+ but are currently under 900), and the median age of our members continues to increase. Red flags? Yes, and this certainly has caught the attention of WFO's board of directors.

Publications. *Western Birds*, WFO's flagship publication, continues to set the standard for field-oriented science publications. Among its many qualities, its content fills a unique niche between what is offered in more popular publications, such as *Bird Watcher's Digest* and *Birders' World*, and that in professional scientific journals, such as the *Auk* and *Condor* (although *Western Birds* also publishes stellar scientific manuscripts). However, high-quality WFO publications do not end with *Western Birds*. As many of you know, WFO has just published the *Rare Birds of California* (September 2007). The WFO monograph series has been launched with the upcoming publication of *California Bird Species of Special Concern*, due to be published in late 2007 or early 2008. When it comes to WFO publications, we are sound and healthy.

Annual Meetings. With the 32nd annual meeting held in Las Vegas this past September, WFO continues to reach out to new members in states where our representation is not particularly strong. Our policy of scheduling the annual meeting outside of California on alternate years has been a great success, allowing our members to enjoy the birds and learn about the diversity of natural habitats throughout the West. It also has an additional benefit of attracting new members from the meeting locale and spreading the word about WFO to states outside of California. At the recent meeting in Las Vegas, we had participants from 16 states and two countries, with some members in attendance from Maryland, Georgia, and Ontario. This is another accomplishment for WFO and its membership.

Website. With our long-time webmaster Peter LaTourrette stepping down after many dedicated years of service (we all thank you, Peter!), we will continue our web presence with a new webmaster and a commitment to redesign the website to be as informative and user friendly as possible. Tim Avery has stepped up to the plate as the new webmaster. With the help of Jay Withgott and Ted Floyd, WFO aims to make

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the website a one-stop shopping resource for birders and ornithologists throughout the West. This is yet another major plus for WFO.

As you can see, WFO appears to be as healthy and vibrant as at any time in our past. While this may be true, the officers and the board of directors have continued concerns about our median membership age and lack of recruitment, both from within and outside of California. We are not content with being "just good enough;" we want to excel in all facets of the organization, and I think that we are close. The one area where the membership can help WFO the most is in recruitment. I challenge every member to commit to recruiting one new member into the WFO ranks in 2008. I also challenge each professional and each academician to recruit two members from among their colleagues and students, and each board member to recruit five members from their contacts. If we were to do this, we would be a healthier and more vibrant organization, prepared for the challenges of field ornithology in the 21st century. Will you do your part?

Dave Krueper, October 2007