

WFO'S 33RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE: RETROSPECTIVE

A record-high 230 attendees flocked to San Mateo, California, from 9 to 12 October 2008 to partake in the 33rd annual conference of Western Field Ornithologists. Coordinated by WFO treasurer and membership secretary Robbie Fischer, the conference received rave reviews from its participants.

Organizational Business

Osvel Hinojosa-Huerta of Sonora and Dave Quady of California were elected to the board of directors. Osvel is WFO's first Mexican board member. Thomas Ryan and Jay Withgott were re-elected to second terms. Kimball Garrett and Robert Gill rotated off the board because of term limits and were thanked for their many years of dedicated service.

Catherine Waters was elected president of WFO. Judging by the energy that Cat has brought to our organization, we can look forward to an industrious next two years. Dan Gibson will act as WFO's vice-president, while Robbie Fischer continues as treasurer and membership secretary, and Jean Brandt continues as recording secretary. Dave Krueper stepped down after two fruitful and dynamic years as president. During this period of growth and change, WFO benefited immensely from Dave's steady hand and creative vision.

Scientific Program

This year's paper sessions, coordinated by Debbie Van Dooremolen, featured 30 presentations by field ornithologists from seven states and two nations. Abstracts of all papers are archived at www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.

The talks presented research on population trends, breeding biology, wintering raptors, ecological restoration, migration data from radiotelemetry, Mexican avifauna, and conservation issues in San Francisco Bay. Allen Fish of the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory shared the work of Ryan Jones, a promising young scientist who died tragically this year. Jones had begun creating a three-dimensional interactive online field guide featuring computer animations of birds. Concluding the sessions were reports from this year's field expedition to the Sierra de La Laguna Biosphere Reserve in Baja California Sur, run by WFO and the Sonoran Joint Venture. Carol Beardmore, Dave Krueper, Richard Erickson, and Nathan Pieplow focused on the many little-known subspecies endemic to this remote area.

All these talks proceeded despite a power outage that knocked out electricity in the hotel throughout the Saturday session. With the digital projector down, we were unable to project slides onto the screen, and viewers could only squint at a battery-powered laptop computer. But WFO rose to the challenge. With Debbie steering us through the crisis, the presenters soldiered on with their talks, board members worked behind the scenes with hotel staff, and the audience took it in stride, pulling out binoculars to view slides on the laptop's screen!

Keynote, Panels, and Book Event

Our keynote speaker, Carla Cicero of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley, addressed the MVZ's efforts to resurvey sites first surveyed a century ago by pioneering biologist Joseph Grinnell. Dr. Cicero described how Berkeley biologists are comparing data from transects across California to data from Grinnell's original surveys and how this is revealing ways in which climate change is altering the distributions of birds and other animals.

This year Ed Harper moderated our photo-identification panel, presenting an impressive array of his own bird photos, while the panelists led us through identification

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tips. Sound-panel moderator Nathan Pieplow and panelists guided us through some challenging vocalizations, including a fascinating comparative tour of the six western species of thrasher. Panelists included Kimball Garrett, Steve Howell, Oscar Johnson, Jon Dunn, Ted Floyd, Alvaro Jaramillo, and Kristie Nelson.

A panel moderated by Dave Compton addressed bird-records committees. Representatives from California (Alvaro Jaramillo), Nevada (Martin Meyers), Alaska (Dan Gibson), and New Mexico (Dave Krueper) showed photos of recent rarities and discussed how these committees adapt to the unique conditions in each state.

In addition, WFO celebrated the publication of *California Bird Species of Special Concern*, a book edited by David Shuford and Thomas Gardali. Lyann Comrack and Kevin Hunting of the California Department of Fish and Game, which co-published the volume with WFO, helped us celebrate the occasion. Accompanying this event was a book-signing session involving numerous authors from WFO's membership, as well as a silent auction in the exhibitor area.

Workshops and Field Trips

Ed Pandolfino coordinated a series of innovative workshops. Caitlin Robinson led a group through San Francisco Bay's salt ponds, newly public lands now constituting one of the world's largest ecological restoration projects. John Muir Laws led workshops on techniques for sketching birds, while Steve Wood guided us in using GPS technology for field biology. Alvaro Jaramillo led a transect across the San Mateo Peninsula's ecological zones, and Brian Sullivan treated us to a hands-on exploration of the popular online sightings database eBird.

The field trips visited birding hotspots of the Bay Area: Golden Gate Park and the Presidio in San Francisco; Palo Alto Baylands, Coyote Point, Redwood Shores, and Hayward Shoreline along the bayshore; the coast from Point Reyes, Hawk Hill, and Rodeo Lagoon to Half Moon Bay; and upland sites at Jasper Ridge and San Bruno Mountain. In addition, Debra Shearwater led one of her acclaimed pelagic trips on Monterey Bay. Altogether, the trips recorded 215 species. See www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference for a complete list, by trip.

Youth Scholarship Attendees

This year, WFO funded five promising young field ornithologists to attend our meeting: John Garrett of Pasadena, California; Neil Gilbert of Orange, California; Benjamin Knoot of San Carlos, California; Nora Papian of Costa Mesa, California; and Scott Wieman of Katonah, New York. John, Neil, Ben, Nora, and Scott lived things up, and we hope to see them at future conferences! Our thanks to Kate Grabenstein, coordinator of Sea and Sage Audubon's Junior Naturalist program, and Paul Wieman, principal and director of Rye Country Day School, New York, for accompanying them as chaperones. WFO aims to offer youth scholarships for future conferences and solicits sponsors; please donate at www.westernfieldornithologists.org/support.

WFO Gives Thanks

Many people contributed to the success of this conference, performing countless tasks behind the scenes. Bruce Webb ably coordinated the exhibitors. Jean Brandt handled on-the-ground logistics, with invaluable help from Larry Allen, Maureen O'Reilly, and Clarann Levakis. Volunteers from Sequoia Audubon included Sue Cossins, Sonny Mencher, Rita Jennings, and Leonie Batkin. Above all, our thanks go to conference organizer Robbie Fischer, who along with Joe Morlan was primarily responsible for the event's great success. We all enjoyed a wonderful mix of new faces and old friends, and we look forward to seeing everyone at **next year's conference in Boise, Idaho: 10-13 September 2009.**

Jay Withgott