



The Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology is a 501(c)(3), tax-exempt, non-profit research institution whose mission is to obtain, protect, and manage ornithological collections in a manner that ensures their continued survival and accessibility to the international research community, educators, and students.

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NEWS

WESTERN FOUNDATION of VERTEBRATE ZOOLOGY



Update from the Executive Director

Welcome to our new look! The Newsletter of the WFVZ has metamorphosed into a new format and style, and we hope you like it. **Cathie Dunkel**, professional geologist, educator,

and editor, has recently joined the WFVZ team, and we look forward to her contributions as newsletter editor and website technician.

A lot of other things have happened at the WFVZ since our Winter 2007 issue came out. First and foremost, Parker Brown Inc., General Contractors (818/999-5078) finished the construction of our Multipurpose Room in April, and the room is now in regular use (see Ornithology class photos on page 6). A plug for this company: they were a dream to work with, keeping the cost down for us, and doing a beautiful job. I had always heard horror stories about working with construction companies, but the crew at Parker Brown (led by the able **Tom Featherstone** and his crew manager **Brian Stalzer**) was a pleasure to work with. In another plug: **Mark Pittman**, of Pittman Group Architects (805/388-2724), was the architect for the room, and was extremely helpful to the WFVZ during the design and permitting phases of the project. The quality of his (and his brother's!) work on the plans for our new room was very high, and so we hope you'll consider contacting Mark, and Parker Brown, if you ever need any construction work done!

Our Room-Warming Party on April 13th was a lot of fun, and was attended by more than 50 specially invited guests, including our members and volunteers, organization and agency representatives, and friends in the community. WFVZ Board President **Kathy Harrison Killelea**, daughter of founder **Ed Harrison**, spoke about how happy her father would have been with the construction of this room, and I spoke about the importance of this room to the education mission of the WFVZ. Afterwards, we held a ribbon-cutting ceremony and indulged our appetites with some authentic Mexican tacos (see photos on page 4).

Currently, we are using the room for our Ornithology class, which I am teaching for California State University Channel

Islands students and for interested members of the public (see photos on page 6). We're in our 6th week of class already, and have covered such topics as the origination and diversification of birds, external and internal anatomy, and reproduction. I'm also teaching about the systematics and taxonomy of birds, and we will cover details on nearly 250 western U.S. species, both in our classroom and out in the field. It's a great class, and a wonderful opportunity to learn more about birds — I hope that more of our members and friends in the community will consider taking the class next fall when we offer it again!

In May and June René and I traveled to Guatemala to work on our field project (see photos and story on page 5). In addition, in August we traveled to Ireland to visit our colleague **Dr. Allan Mee**, and to visit his study site in County Kerry where he is in charge of a project to reintroduce White-tailed Sea Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) to his country. We also visited the egg, nest, and study skin collections at the British Museum of Natural History in Tring, England, for several days. Here we stayed with **Douglas Russell**, Curator of the egg and nest collections (who visited us at the WFVZ in March of this year; see photo on page 4), and had a chance to look through these collections and to learn about some of the issues facing Douglas in regards to their organization and curation (see photos on page 5). It was a great experience being in these bird collections, which date as far back as the 1700s and are housed in the famous Lord Rothschild's buildings and museum. For example, we were even able to see Charles Darwin's finch specimens from the Galapagos, which was a real pleasure.

There were many other happenings at the WFVZ over the past 6 months, some of which are highlighted in this newsletter. There's always a lot going on at the museum, and we still consist of only a small staff and a handful of dedicated volunteers. So, if you'd like to help, please consider joining as a Member, and definitely, please come to our annual events! For instance, we will be holding our 5th Annual Open House on 13 October 2007, so be sure to mark your calendars! In addition, we plan to have another special event in April 2008, so watch for the invitations!

Best wishes, Linnea

News from the Collections

A number of researchers visited the Foundation during this past spring and summer. For instance, **Nigel Collar**, of BirdLife International and Cambridge University, England, who is working on speciation issues in White-eyes (*Zosterops spp.*), stayed with us for a day to examine our study skin specimens for this genus. Also, **David Lahti**, from the University of Massachusetts, is looking at the adaptive significance of blue-green eggs by measuring their reflectance, and stayed with us for a week to measure many eggs, including those from African weavers (*Ploceus spp.*). In addition, **Harry Carter** and **Percy Herbert**, from Canada, visited the WFVZ for two days to delineate



David Lahti entering spectrophotometer data.

differences between eggs of Xantus' (*Brachyramphus hypoleucus*) and Craveri's (*B. craveri*) murrelets, which involved numerous photographs of egg color and pattern variations, and length and breadth measurements (taken by René) of about 300 individual eggs.

Crissa Cooley, a graduate student at West Virginia University, visited the WFVZ to obtain a skin sample from an unknown-aged California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) in our collection. Her project involves trying to determine the age of condors based on the amount of collagen and pentosidine in their skin, which accumulates at steady rates as the birds mature.

John Maio, of W.H.E.E. (Wholesome Home Entertainment Enterprises), visited the Foundation several times to look at — and borrow — film of wild condors taken by **Ed Harrison** and **Bill Pemberton** in the Los Padres National Forest in the mid-1900s. John is working on a documentary of California Condors for distribution by the Ventana Wildlife Society and other non-profit wildlife conservation organizations, including the WFVZ.



René Corado
Collections Manager

In addition to visitors, René received (and answered) approximately 90 requests for data from our egg, nest, and study skin collections, and Linnea received and answered about 20 requests for materials from our library. The Foundation also received an important collection during the period: more than 500 egg sets and nests collected by **H. Arden Edwards** and others in the early 1900s from all over the U.S., and also from foreign locations, and including all of the original data. We also received eggs from several captive breeding programs in the country (e.g., Los Angeles Zoo, Hawaii Endangered Bird Conservation program) working to conserve imperiled species, as well as many birds that had, unfortunately, been killed due to impacts with cars, windows, and cats.

Continued...



Researcher **David Lahti** with **Linnea** and **René**, sharing a comment about life, the Universe, and birds' eggs at the WFVZ on 30 August.



John Maio projecting old condor film in our new Multipurpose Room.

... Continued

Other projects in the collections have included shifting egg and study skin drawers among hundreds of cabinets to integrate 15 new cabinets that we received in June, thanks to a generous bequest from the late **Joe Kice** (for \$20,000, which paid for 14 cabinets). We also received a donation from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 1 cabinet to accommodate Peregrine Falcon eggshells to be collected over the next 5 years to monitor thickness and other factors. The moving of drawers among cabinets is always a huge project, and former staff member **Bridget Greuel** (who left the Foundation in August), and CSU Channel Islands interns **Brooke Mills** and **Daniel Freitas**, assisted greatly with this effort in July and August.

As always, there is also continual curation needed in the collections. One of the tasks that René has been working on this year is going back to the Foundation's "work" cabinets to examine materials for which no data could be found in the 1980s and early

1990s, before he was Collections Manager. Fortunately, he is finding the data for a lot of these materials, but each set for which the collector and collection date seem to be unknown, for example, requires him to act like a detective, tracing the set back through time through the fieldnotes of the collector, or his other egg sets, or through another collector who might have been a colleague of the original collector. It is time-intensive work, but every egg set that is paired with its data is another egg set that is available for researchers to use, and to help answer questions that could lead to the conservation of the species.

Another ongoing task at the WFVZ is the computerization of our records. Nearly every week, volunteers **Bill and Dixie Anderson**, and **Linda Reynolds**, have been entering data from study skins in our collection into our "skins" database. Linda also enters all of the incoming scientific journals (more than 60 per month!) into a database, and **Peggy Ellis** tracks all use and donations of library materials, as well as

continues to enter existing records. And finally, **René, Bridget Greuel**, and **Chris Bumbar** entered egg and nest records into that database this year too, bringing our total number of egg/nest records computerized to 58,300 (out of about 200,000 records).

Last, but definitely not least, the reorganization of the journal section of the library was finished in the spring by volunteer **Peggy Ellis**, with able assistance by **Peg Stevens**. This project took nearly 2 years of Peggy's time, and has already been of great help to researchers and to our staff (when they get the time to do bird research)!

Overall, you can see that it has been a productive year in the collections. They are the heart and soul of the Foundation, and thus, need to receive a lot of attention and care. So, thanks for supporting the WFVZ through joining as a member, serving as a volunteer, or sending us a contribution. We promise that the money goes to a great cause — maintaining the collections that we hold so dear!



Egg sets and nests collected by **H. Arden Edwards** (above) were generously donated to the WFVZ by the Irvine Ranch Conservancy, which originally received them from the Bower Museum, in August.

Welcome New Members!

WFVZ extends a warm welcome
to our newest members.

Thank you for your support
and welcome to our flock!

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (\$25)

Yannis Grammatis
Kathy, Jeff & Alexander Lawrence
William Seaver

AMERICAN KESTREL (\$50)

Kathryn & Robert Field
Su Part

BROWN PELICAN (\$100)

Jill Forman
Janet Wall

Multipurpose Room

Snapshots from our Room-Warming Party in April ...

Ribbon-cutting team, L to R: Volunteers **Bill and Jean Hulberg**, **Don Klabunde** and Board Member **Chrystal Klabunde**, volunteer **Peg Stevens**, former Collections Assistant **Bridget Greuel**, Executive Director **Dr. Linnea Hall**, Collections Manager **René Corado**, Board President **Kathy Harrison Killelea**, Board Member **Bill Langford**, and volunteer **Peggy Ellis**.



Community supporters listen to a presentation by WFVZ Board President **Kathy Harrison Killelea** (Ed Harrison's daughter) and Executive Director **Linnea Hall**.



Community supporters (left) and **Mark Pittman** (right), the architect who designed our multipurpose room, maneuvering to get tacos.

... and from our First Presentation in March



Douglas Russell, Curator of birds' eggs and nests at the British Natural History Museum, in Tring, England, is shown giving a seminar to about 40 guests in our new room in March 2007. Douglas spoke about "The Worst Journey in the World: The Weirdest Bird's-nesting Expedition That Has Ever Been or Ever Will Be." The story of why several biologists risked their lives to acquire just 3 eggs of Emperor Penguins (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) in the Antarctic in the early 1900s — braving temperatures of 70 degrees below in the dead of winter — was a compelling example of the lengths that people have gone to over time to acquire bird specimens, and was a good reminder of the perils of fieldwork, even in current times.

Research & Collaborations

Guatemala



René holding **White-throated Magpie Jay** (*Calocitta formosa*) caught and banded at the WFVZ's study site in central Guatemala, June 2007.

The WFVZ's Guatemala project continues! René and Linnea conducted fieldwork in May and June this year, collecting more difficult-to-acquire nests, and also continuing the Foundation's monitoring project in the thorn-scrub region of central Guatemala.

In addition to fieldwork, René and Linnea taught a bird ecology and museum techniques course to students from the Universidad del Valle (University of the Valley) and Universidad de San Carlos, and met with biologists at our partner organization Defensores de la Naturaleza (Defenders of Nature) to discuss the WFVZ holding a point counting and banding training workshop in January 2008.

> *Fenceline made of palm trunks in La Avellana, Guatemala, showing **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*) nest cavity.*



< *Corn plantation with scattered few trees, showing **Yellow-winged Cacique** (*Cacicus melanicterus*) and **Rose-throated Becard** (*Pachyrampus aglaiae*) nests in the same tree, about 60 feet off the ground. René and his assistants collected these nests in May 2007.*



René teaching Guatemalan students at Universidad del Valle, in Guatemala City, about museum preparation techniques, May 2007.

British Museum of Natural History

During their recent trip to England (see page 1), Linnea and René toured the British Museum of Natural History's ornithological collections, which are among the largest in the world and the most comprehensive. The BMNH's collections include about 1,000,000 bird skins representing well over 90% of known species, with types for over 8,000 taxa. They include many extinct and endangered species and a wealth of historic material, including specimens collected by Darwin, Audubon, and others. There are about 800,000 individual eggs (compared to the

1,000,000 individual eggs held at the WFVZ), some 17,000 specimens preserved in spirit, over 14,000 skeletons, and 2,000 nests. The BMNH also houses one of the finest ornithological libraries in the world with over 80,000 volumes, and including unpublished manuscripts, field notebooks, and paintings.



René and **Katrina Cook**, Bird Preparator at the BMNH, made study skins together.



Linnea and **Douglas Russell**, Curator of the egg and nest collection at the BMNH, talked about egg collections. Douglas visited the WFVZ earlier this year (see pages 1 and 4).

Education

Ornithology Class

As discussed by the Executive Director (see page 1), the Ornithology ("study of birds") class is currently scheduled to be taught each fall, from the end of August through mid-December. The class covers all of the "classic" ornithology subjects, and is open to all interested students who have some ecology background or experience. If you are interested in taking the course in 2008, please contact the WFVZ. In addition, watch for future announcements about our Oology/Nidology workshops ("study of eggs and nests," respectively), and other classes planned for the community in 2008!



Some of the students (from CSU Channel Islands) in the WFVZ's Ornithology class, with **Linnea**.



Dr. Linnea Hall talks with students about the probable characteristics of the ancient common ancestors of ratites (birds without keels) and tinamous, and the students try their hands at drawing these ancestral birds (top).

Calendar

5th Annual Open House

October 13, Saturday, 11 AM

The Foundation will be open from 11 AM to 3 PM, during which members of the public are encouraged to tour the extensive bird, nest, and egg collections of the WFVZ, and to experience the ambience of a real research museum! Demonstrations of museum techniques will be presented at 12:00 PM and 2:00 PM. Entry is free — although donations are always welcome — and families are encouraged to attend!

Seminar Series/Film Nights

Coming Soon!

The Western Foundation will begin holding regular seminars on bird-related topics, as well as showing films on bird and environmentally related subjects, later this year (2007). Watch for flyers and e-mails about upcoming dates!

Public Tours

October 26, Friday, 3 PM

November 30, Friday, 3 PM

December 28, Friday, 3 PM

The general public is invited to tour the WFVZ's large collection of bird eggs, nests, and mounted specimens. Tours are generally held on the last Friday of the month at 3 PM. Tours require a reservation; please call at least one day in advance to get on the waiting list (805/388-9944). Our suggested donation for public tours is \$3 per person.

Conejo Valley Audubon Society Meetings

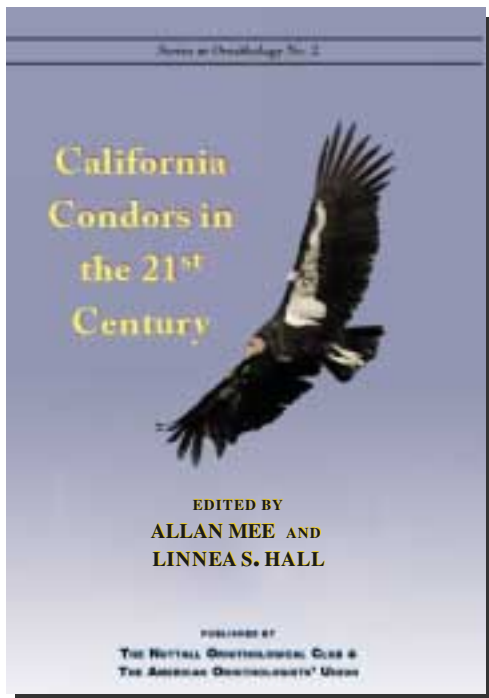
October 1, Monday, 7:30 PM

November 5, Monday, 7:30 PM

December 3, Monday, 7:30 PM

The Conejo Valley Audubon Society holds its meetings regularly on the first Monday of the month, September through May, from 7:30 to 9 PM. Meetings are held at the WFVZ.

New Publications



Condor Book Soars

Published in August 2007, this edited book presents the current status of California Condors in both wild and captive populations. **Drs. Allan Mee** and **Linnea Hall** summarized and edited 13 chapters by the current leading researchers of condors in North America, and suggested recommendations for future research and conservation efforts for this highly imperiled species.

This volume is likely to become the major reference handbook on California Condor biology, and will act as a blueprint for future conservation efforts for this species and for other critically endangered bird species.

The book can be purchased through Buteo Books (<http://www.buteobooks.com/archives/condors.html>).

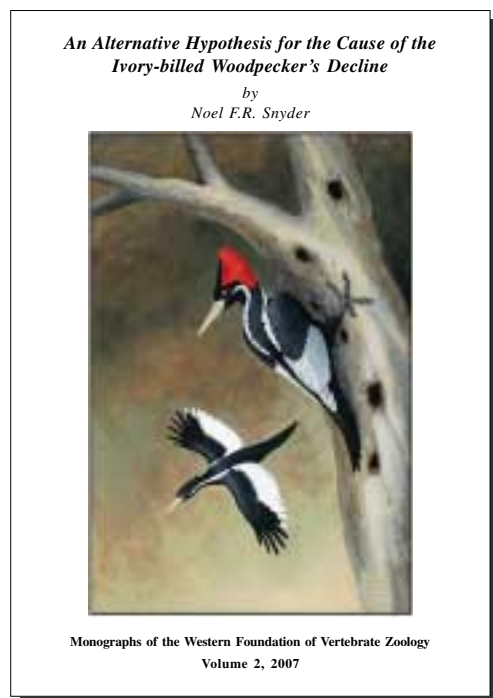


IBWO Monograph Released

This fall the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology released the latest issue in its Monograph series, "An Alternative Hypothesis for the Cause of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker's Decline", by **Noel Snyder**, edited by **Linnea Hall**.

This interesting historical piece, which chronicles the decline and extinction of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in North America, proposes that this species declined most likely due to extreme shooting pressure, as opposed to habitat loss, as has most often been assumed. Supported by substantial historical documentation, it is a thought-provoking hypothesis that will be sure to stimulate much discussion, especially regarding the future protection of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, should it not actually be extinct!

This volume is available for \$25 each (shipping and handling within the U.S. included) from the WFVZ. Credit card orders can be placed through PayPal on our website (www.wfvz.org), or checks can be sent to our mailing address.



Going-away party for Collections Assistant **Bridget Greuel** on 30 August. Bridget worked for the WFVZ from 2003 to 2007.

Thank You Donors!

Many thanks for the generous support of the late **Joe Kice**, and many thanks to **Douglas & Eunice Goodan**, each of whom donated \$20,000 to the WFVZ.

Your gifts help us continue WFVZ's mission and programs!

New Board Member

The Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology welcomes **Dr. Michael Kelly** as the newest member of its Board of Directors.

Michael received his Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine in 1998, and his Masters in Avian Science in 1977, both from U.C. Davis. He has been a small and exotic animal vet at his practice in Ventura, California, since 2001, and among other posts, also served with the Holiday Humane Society, in North Hollywood, in 1999 and 2000. He also had his own successful building and design firm in Carmel, California, which he operated from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, while serving his community in a number of ways, including being on the Boards of the Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society and the Ventana Chapter of the Sierra Club.

In addition to serving the Ventura County community as a Board Member of the WFVZ, Michael is also an active supporter of youth team sports. Welcome Michael — we look forward to working with you!



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Sat. 1-3

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Michael has been a supporter, and is now a Board Member, of the WFVZ. We hope you'll patronize his business!

WESTERN FOUNDATION OF VERTEBRATE ZOOLOGY



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WFVZ News is published quarterly by the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology to keep our Members, Board of Directors, Volunteers, Associates, and the community informed of our activities, resources, and events.

We welcome comments, contributions, and advertising support of our newsletter, and will gladly acknowledge individual or corporate sponsorship in upcoming issues. Please direct inquiries and correspondence to the above address or contact us at:

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