

“IOU Flutter”



The Official Newsletter of the International Ornithologists' Union

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IOU News!!!

The 2022 IOCongress® will be held in Durban, South Africa. The IOU is delighted to partner with the University of KwaZulu-Natal to organize the IOCongress2022 again in Durban, more than two decades after the first IOCongress in Africa in 1998. It will be quite rewarding to revisit this part of the world, renowned for its unique biological diversity, as well as for its vibrant research in avian biology and ecology, and I trust that you will want to be part of the IOCongress there in 2022! Visit <https://www.internationalornithology.org/blog/10791> for more information!

Message from the President



Dear Colleagues and Members of the IOU,

Much has changed in our world since the last issue of *The Flutter* – changes that none of us anticipated and that are likely to persist for some time. Nevertheless, we scientists were aware that our overabundant, dense and mobile human society had created conditions that were perfect for pathogens to flourish. We had plenty of warning, such as the excellent 2018 report by the World

Health Organization “Managing Epidemics: Key facts about major deadly diseases
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/managing-epidemics-interactive.pdf> .

While all of us are adapting to the new way of life and are engaged in supporting and caring for our families, neighbours, and community, while continuing our work, we ornithologists also need to consider the effects of the global Covid-19 epidemic on the environment, wildlife, and birds. While many or most of us are restricted in our movements and mostly confined to our homes, we can start to plan for actions post-Covid-19.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created an experiment that could not have been performed otherwise. For example, the sudden cessation of industrial activities and automobile traffic can be correlated with clearer skies and cleaner air. As the streets in cities have been deserted by people, wildlife is starting to spread out into suburban and urban areas. As people stay home and the hospitality industry closes down, synanthropic, or hemerophile, animals, such as rodents and monkeys that have come to depend on leftovers by humans, roam the places in search of food.

For us ornithologists this situation provides many new questions to be studied for many years. Are birds returning to softer calls and songs now that they do not need to raise the volume of their vocalizations to be heard over the din and noise pollution created by humans? Are the stress hormones of birds lowered now that they do not need to eke out a living in increasingly restricted, disturbed and impoverished habitats in order to avoid humans? Will the rate of reproduction in birds increase now that they are less disturbed by humans wandering around in the last remnant nature reserves? Studies in Chernobyl and Fukushima have documented significant changes in wildlife after the nuclear disasters, some of the changes being attributed to the absence of humans. Corona-19 provides a more focused experiment to measure the effects of the overabundant human population on wildlife without the confounding side effect of radiation.

The current pandemic also forces us ornithologists to ponder questions at the cross-section between science and public policies. Will we be willing to give up cleaner air now that we have been able to experience the difference it makes to billions of humans and surely also to plant and animals? Will we be able to return to our activities that harm our co-inhabitants in this world in good conscience now that animals have shown us how we are restricting them? And finally, can we scientists afford not to get involved in activism on behalf of nature, wildlife, birds, and humanity as a whole? We scientists have knowledge that we were able to acquire through the support of society (public schools, universities, libraries, research grants, etc.) and we may feel now more than ever a need to give back to society by sharing our expertise more publicly on behalf of the environment for the good of all.

The IOU itself has been grappling with such questions and has taken steps anticipating changes in our organization and actions already before the current crisis. For example, a Working Group Ethics in Ornithology (WGEO <https://www.internationalornithology.org/ethics-ornithology>) under the leadership of Jane Popowich has been drafting guidelines for ethical principles in ornithology. And the leadership of the IOU and BirdLife have agreed to collaborate on issues of mutual benefit, such as coordinating and possibly dove-tailing the IOCongresses and World Congresses to allow congress participants to attend both events with a single roundtrip. Preparations for the IOCongress2022 in Durban include serious efforts to minimize the human footprint, and the Scientific Program Committee is exploring innovative approaches to enable some on-line participation by colleagues who cannot or do not want to travel, but still want and need the information that is presented at IOCongresses. If you feel that you would like to be part of and contribute to these initiatives, please drop me note at IOUpresident@internationalornithology.org.

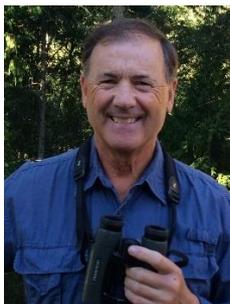
Finally, allow me to thank our Editor-in-Chief of The Flutter, David Bird, for his important work on the newsletter and I strongly encourage you to submit material to him for future issues.

With best wishes and kind regards, until the next issue,

Prof. Dominique G. Homberger, President, International Ornithological Union

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From the Editor



Despite the fact that our first thoughts must be with our loved ones and those suffering from the pandemic all over the world, it is worth asking the question “What is the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our birds?” And I can immediately think of some very important benefits to the birds. Perhaps the most critical factor behind the serious global declines in bird populations is the destruction and degradation of their habitats by the almost eight billion humans on earth. Since the pandemic has had a huge negative impact on the world markets, this could mean that a number of large-scale development projects potentially set to destroy valuable habitat for both breeding and

wintering birds may at least be postponed for the foreseeable future. In other words, the virus may have bought the birds some time. Second, with humans everywhere engaging in social distancing and staying at home, closed factories and office buildings, and less vehicles, planes and ships using fossil fuels, that has translated into less air and water pollution, as well as reduced noise and light pollution, all of which affect bird populations globally. Another major cause of bird declines in the world is illegal harvesting of birds. It is now believed that the coronavirus originated somewhere in the legal and illegal “wet” markets where birds and other wildlife are captured, kept cruelly under barbaric conditions, and then sold as cage pets or for ornaments, traditional medicines, and food. While it may not have been a bird that hosted the original virus, governments all over the world are now acknowledging that the wild animal trade, legal or illegal, could spawn even more dangerous viruses in the future and they are now taking steps to shut them down. Along these lines, it was the bird flu scare that prompted the European Union to adopt more stringent laws preventing the cross-border trade in wildlife and of course, birds.

On a local scale, is the virus a good thing or a bad thing for the birds in one’s neighborhood? At first blush, one can immediately conclude that with literally billions of humans hunkering down in their homes and not travelling to places where birds are feeding and/or breeding, that means less direct pressure on bird populations. In short, the less they are disturbed during these activities, the better for them. On the other hand, there are those who are somehow involved with birds in a professional or voluntary sense in a good way, for example, doing nest surveys or bird counts or conserving or improving habitat. If they are not able to carry out their tasks due to staying home either voluntarily or ordered to do so by their employer, that could be a bad thing for the birds. And what about the billion-dollar bird-feeding industry? How is it being affected by the pandemic? While it is true that many retail stores have closed their doors to help promote social distancing and thus, help flatten the curve to slow down viral transmission, retail and delivery companies on the internet have, at least for now, been ready and willing to sell and deliver both feeders and bird food right to people’s homes. If one is relegated to sticking to one’s house and yard with little to do but watch television or sort through family photos, why not keep one’s feeders well-stocked to enjoy the birds!? Their stunning colours and beautiful songs can certainly be uplifting in these dark times. Along those lines, one does not even have to give up birdwatching during the pandemic. One can still go to a favourite forest, field or marsh to see birds. One just needs to practice social distancing. That is, either do it alone or in very small groups of trusted friends. Finally, yes, the economy has indeed tanked, the markets are down, and there exist many human needs. However, please do not forget those organizations dedicated to bird conservation. They still need your help to do good things for the birds and one does not have to leave one’s home to make a donation!

And finally, remember that the birds were here on this earth long before we were and they are telling us to clean up our act before we join the ranks of the dodo and the passenger pigeon.

Emeritus Prof. David M. Bird, Editor

Member Profile

Editor's note: In each newsletter, we like to feature a brief profile on hard-working volunteers who make the International Ornithological Union an effective and useful organization for ornithologists all over the world. If you are an officer or Council member of the IOU, please send me a brief profile (250 words or so) of yourself as well as a photo, just like the ones below!

Prof Colleen T. Downs (BSc Hons, MEd, PhD, Pr Nat Sci)

Prof Colleen T. Downs (BSc Hons, MEd, PhD, Pr Nat Sci) is the Congress Convenor of the 28th **International Ornithological Congress® (IOCongress®)** in Durban, South Africa, August 14-20, 2022. She has been at the University of KwaZulu-Natal since mid-1994. She started as a lecturer teaching biology in the Science Foundation Programme and to 1st year students. She is now a Professor in the School of Life Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus and is a University Fellow. She holds an NRF SARCHI Research Chair in Ecosystem health and biodiversity in KwaZulu-Natal and the E. Cape. She is a terrestrial vertebrate biologist with broad and interdisciplinary research interests. These include conservation, ecology, physiology and behaviour of terrestrial vertebrates (herps, birds and mammals) in unpredictable environments and with changing land use. Another interest is science education (particularly problems experienced by Biology students and development of strategies to address these). Her other contribution has been in the development of research capacity, particularly at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She was appointed as BirdLife South Africa's Honorary President for 2016-2020. She is an Honorary Fellow of the International Ornithological Union and the American Ornithological Union. Her hobbies include bird watching and bird banding.



Requests for Assistance

Editor's Note: This newsletter exists to help IOU members....if you need some help, please forward a brief version like the one below for me to post.

Registering parrot research in Australasia and Oceania (IOU survey)

Please help us building a comprehensive and up-to-date database about ongoing parrot research by filling out this register for the Australasia-Oceania region of the Working Group on Psittaciformes (WGP): <https://forms.gle/dctpbhiSHS2wjcrU7>

Opinion letters



Photo by Flavio Amiel on Unsplash

Op-Ed: For scientists like me, good research isn't enough. We have to tell our stories

Ornithology conferences aren't typically of interest to anyone but ornithologists. We spend days cooped up in meetings, listening to speakers, staring at graphs and tables, and attempting to digest research on bird physiology, migration and genetics.

But last year, on a late June evening in Anchorage, we did something else as well — something scientists too often overlook. At an event modeled on “The Moth” radio show, participants from the American Ornithological Society’s annual meeting were allotted seven minutes each to tell a story, with the loose theme being, as you might have guessed, birds.

One of the first tales featured the nuances of birdsong among golden-crowned sparrows, chunky, fist-sized birds with distinctive facial markings that can be found in California during the winter. In the summer, they nest in open habitats of Alaska and western Canada.

Their sweet, simple song is easily recognized and, as a result, is often one of the first that beginning birders add to their repertoires. It consists of three long, descending notes best described through the mnemonic, “Oh dear me...” At first listen, there’s not much to it. Sometimes a bird stutters, stopping mid-song only to pick up again with the next verse. But the basic pattern remains the same, repeated again and again. What many people don’t know, however, is that birds, like humans, have unique dialects that develop through generations of cultural evolution.

The scientist telling this story was Daizaburo Shizuka, a young researcher who immigrated to the United States from Japan as a 7-year-old child, at the tail end of what’s known as the “critical period” for language acquisition. He explained that birds learn their songs through a process similar to how we learn language. Like us, they also have critical acquisition periods early in their lives; as a result, they sing the songs of their natal origin — in other words, a bird speaks the language of its homeland.

Shizuka studied a mixed-dialect population of golden-crowned sparrows that breed in the mountains near Whitehorse, in Canada’s Yukon. Although the territories of these birds sometimes overlap, each bird sings just one dialect in its life. Except, he explained to us, one exceptional bird. This lone male could sing two dialects perfectly — an avian version of being bilingual. He roamed across a large area, singing his extraordinary songs.

Shizuka took special note of this individual, which he could identify by the unique arrangement of color bands on its legs and its distinctive voice. As an ornithologist specializing in avian vocalizations,

Shizuka was attuned to the subtleties that might appear on a spectrogram of birdsong. As an immigrant, he could relate to the experience of isolation through language.

Shizuka had no discernible accent. Still, he explained, sounding the same as everyone else doesn't necessarily equate to feeling the same. Even though he had arrived in the U.S. just in time to catch the critical language acquisition period, the rest of his family hadn't. He told us how he had witnessed his older brothers' inability to perceive the nuances of English and his parents' struggle to adapt. Often serving as translator, he felt their embarrassment and alienation as his own.

As the season progressed, the bilingual bird continued to roam. He visited one territory and then another. He sang and sang, rendering perfect notes from both dialects. But every time the researchers saw him, he was alone. Despite his unique talents, or perhaps because of them, he never found a mate. Eventually, while all the other birds were busy raising their young, he stopped singing. One day, he simply disappeared.

Shizuka told us how he hoped the bird had found his home, somewhere over the mountain. He, too, understood the challenges of occupying two worlds at once. He felt the burden of being different. And through the story of this unusual bird, singing its lonely heart out, so could we all.

Do most of us care whether a sparrow sings "Oh deeee-ar me" or "Or dear meeeee"? Probably not. Can we all relate, in some capacity, to the feeling of being ostracized or excluded? Of course. Can we learn by example how curiosity and connection lead to scientific discovery? There's no better precursor to knowledge. Through the simple act of storytelling, we can help cultivate both scientific literacy and empathy.

The ordinary way for Shizuka to share his research would have been to describe his observations of birdsong, draw conclusions about the different populations he observed and leave it at that. The bilingual bird would have been considered an outlier, and ignored. Instead, by sharing its unique story, and its relevance to our own experiences, Shizuka taught us something about birdsong, but also so much more. In that moment, we remembered what it meant to be both scientists and humans.

In this time of scientific apathy and social divisiveness, we can no longer afford to treat narrative as the antithesis of knowledge. To be good scientists, we need not be emotionless robots. Instead, we have an obligation to add storytelling to our resumes as statisticians, ecologists, naturalists, physiologists, mathematicians and geneticists. By sharing experiences, we expand our collective

understanding — about science and about one another. We begin to appreciate how a seemingly minute difference in a three-note birdsong might matter to all of us.

By Caroline Van Hemert, a wildlife biologist in Alaska and author of “The Sun Is a Compass: A 4,000-mile Journey into the Alaskan Wilds.”

(appeared in the L.A. Times on March 15, 2020 <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-03-15/op-ed-for-scientists-good-research-is-not-enough-we-have-to-tell-our-stories>)

Grants, Fellowships, Internships, and Positions



Photo by Tyler Lastovich on Unsplash

Editor’s Note: If you know of other opportunities for ornithological grants, fellowships, internships and positions, please forward them to me for posting. I am also posting other databases rather than duplicate all pertinent listings in The Flutter.

General Grants and Awards Databases:

This is a database of recurring grants, awards, prizes, scholarships, fellowships, etc. in the field of ornithology. While it does include some of the opportunities listed below, there are other useful ones. For more information, visit <https://ornithologyexchange.org/funding/grants/>

World-wide:

British Ecological Society Training & Travel Grants: These grants help PhD students and postgraduate research assistants to meet the costs of specialist field training courses and to network and publicise their research by presenting their work at workshops and conferences. Note that Our first round of Training & Travel Grants for 2020 are now CLOSED as all of the funding has now been allocated.

Read more: <https://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/funding/training-travel-grants/>

Captain David Simpson Award: The Royal Navy Birdwatching Society administers a fund left by the late Captain David Simpson, MN for a scholarship in his name. Researchers are encouraged to apply for grant funding in support of scientific seabird studies with clear aims and objectives.

Read more: <http://www.rnbws.org.uk/about-us/>

Chicago Zoological Society, Conservation Leadership Awards: The awards were created in 2005 by the Board of Trustees of the Chicago Zoological Society to honour the lifelong legacy of animal welfare and the worldwide conservation leadership of George Rabb.

Read more: <https://www.czs.org/Chicago-Zoological-Society/Conservation-Leadership/Conservation-Awards>

Darwin Initiative Funding for Biodiversity: The Darwin Initiative is a UK government grants scheme that helps to protect biodiversity and the natural environment through locally based projects worldwide. Deadline: July

Read more: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/darwin-initiative-applying-for-main-project-funding>

Frank M. Chapman Collection Study Grant, Frank M. Chapman Fellowship, Frank M. Chapman Grant, American Museum of Natural History: several continuous grant schemes aimed to assist ornithological research.

Read more: <https://www.amnh.org/our-research/vertebrate-zoology/ornithology/grants>

Hawk Mountain, Graduate Student Program: internship programs and competitive grants for graduate students working on raptors at major universities throughout the United States and elsewhere.

Rad more: <https://www.hawkmountain.org/about/careers/graduate-student-programs>

Holohil Grant Program: supports endangered species research and educational work world-wide that makes significant use of Holohil transmitters for data collection.

Read more: <http://www.holohil.com/grant-program/>

Idea Wild Equipment Assistance: grants for the acquisition of field equipment. IDEA WILD encourages the use and reuse of equipment and gives preference to proposals that clearly explain how the equipment will be used when the project is finished.

Read more: <http://www.ideawild.org/apply.html>

Professional Development Grants, World Wildlife Fund: Professional Development Grants (PDGs) provide support for mid-career conservationists to pursue short-term, non-degree training to upgrade their knowledge and skills through short courses, workshops, symposiums, conferences, and professional exchanges.

Read more:

https://c402277.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/publications/1095/files/original/PDG_Guidelines_2020.pdf?1568057598

Small Grants for Nature Conservation, The Rufford Foundation: funds nature conservation projects across the developing world.

Read more: <https://www.rufford.org/rsg/>

Sophie Danforth Conservation Biology Funds: supports conservation programs that protect threatened wildlife and habitats worldwide.

Read more: <http://rwpzoo.org/danforth-conservation-grants>

Raptor Research Foundation, Inc.: The Raptor Research Foundation, Inc. offers several grants to amateurs and students with limited access to alternative funding to support research on birds of prey and also gives out several awards annually to deserving individuals contributing to the biology and conservation of raptors world-wide.

Read more: www.raptorresearchfoundation.org

The International Osprey Foundation: research grants awarded annually for osprey and other raptor-related research in the United States and worldwide.

Read more: <https://www.ospreys.com/styled-4/index.html>

Waterbird Society: various grants to support projects producing significant scientific advances in the biology, ecology, or conservation biology of wading birds (i.e. herons, storks, ibises, and their taxonomic allies).

Read more: <https://waterbirds.org/awards/>

Young Explorers Grants, National Geographic: currently offering Explorers a variety of funding opportunities in the fields of conservation, education, research, storytelling, and technology, including birds.

Read more: <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/funding-opportunities/grants/>

British Ornithologists' Union: small research grants of up to £2,000 per project aimed at supporting small projects outright or to part-fund medium-sized research programmes.

Read more: <https://mailchi.mp/bou.org.uk/funding-ornithology-july-564053?e=1cb38bcd10>

Africa:

African Bird Club Conservation and Expedition awards: The ABC's Conservation Programme supports small to medium sized conservation and expedition projects in Africa. For Undergraduate Students, Masters Students, Doctoral Students, Postdoctoral, Early Professionals, and Established Professionals. Next deadlines: end of June, end of October.

Read more: <https://www.africanbirdclub.org/conservation-fund-awards>

Raptor Research Foundation, Inc.: Leslie Brown Memorial Grants offered specifically for research on birds of prey in Africa.

Read more: <https://www.raptorresearchfoundation.org/grants-and-awards/leslie-brown-memorial-grant/>

Australasia:

Australian Bird Study Association Research Fund: Each year, the Association awards grants to its members to support specific projects that increase our knowledge of Australian birds. Usually, two grants are awarded. The purpose of the grants is to fund equipment purchases to enable new projects to get started, or to sustain long-term projects.

Read more: <https://www.absa.asn.au/grants-2/fund-for-avian-research/>

Birds Queensland Research Grant: Each year Birds Queensland offers small grants for research relating to the conservation of birds and their habitats in Queensland, especially those under threat. Full details of the 2021 grants including application kits will be available in early July 2020.

Read more: http://birdsqueensland.org.au/research_grants.php

Nearctic:

American Ornithology Society: a variety of research and travel awards aimed at student and post-docs and various prestigious awards for professionals, publications, service, and presentations.

Read more: www.americanornithology.org

Wilson Ornithological Society: a variety of research and travel awards aimed at students and various prestigious awards for professionals, publications, service, and presentations.

Read more: www.wilsonsociety.org

Bird Studies Canada: jobs for ornithologists at all levels, as well as plenty of opportunities for citizen scientists dealing with birds; also offer annually two main research grants, one for Canadian-based species and another dedicated to murre populations.

Read more: www.birdscanada.org

American Bird Conservancy: offers job opportunities for ornithologists in the area of bird conservation in the U.S.

Read more: <https://abcbirds.org/about/employment/>

Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology: for those seeking jobs and volunteer positions as well as opportunities for students. Visit www.birds.cornell.edu/home/jobs/. They are also once again offering one UK Birder between the age of 16 - 18 the opportunity to win the Cameron Bespolka Scholarship to attend Cornell Lab of Ornithology Bird Event, in Ithaca, New York in 2021. For more information, visit

<https://www.cameronbespolka.com/sponsorship-to-attend-cornell-university-ornithology-event>

Carolina Bird Club grants: The CBC provides grants to support research, education and conservation of birds of the Carolinas and their habitats. Grant applications are accepted on an ongoing basis. The CBC Grants Committee meets quarterly to review applications.

Read more: <https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/grants/>

Delaware Museum of Natural History, Collection Research Grants: The Collections & Research Division of the Delaware Museum of Natural History announces the availability of graduate student grants in support of research in the Museum's collections. Information about the 2020 grants will be available soon.

Read more: <http://www.delmnh.org/collections-research/collection-research-grants/>

Neotropics:

Neotropical Bird Club Awards and Grants: for conservation work or research that has an intended conservation benefit. Next deadline: July.

Read more: <https://www.neotropicalbirdclub.org/conservation/conservation-fund/conservation-fund-guidelines/>

Pamela and Alexander F. Skutch Research Award, Association of Field Ornithologists: supports minimally invasive research into the life histories, especially social relations and reproduction, of little known birds of the continental Neotropics, including Trinidad and Tobago. Deadline: 15 July.

Read more: http://afonet.org/wp_english/grants-awards/skutch-award/

Oceania:

Pacific Seabird Craig S. Harrison Conservation Fund, Pacific Seabird Group: The Conservation Fund makes grants for conservation of seabirds in the Pacific Ocean, and for expanding seabird expertise in developing countries within or bordering the Pacific Ocean.

Read more: <https://pacificseabirdgroup.org/grants/>

Recently Published Papers: Editor's Choice



Photo by chuttersnap on Unsplash

Wang X., H. K Tang, and J. A. Clarke. 2020. Flight, symmetry and barb angle evolution in the feathers of birds and other dinosaurs. *Biology Letters* 16(1): doi: 10.1098/rsbl.2019.0622

Did basal birds (e.g. *Archaeopteryx* and *Confuciusornis*) exhibit active flight? A recent study of barb angles by Wang et al. (2020) has suggested they likely could not but instead may have exhibited a gliding phase. Pennaceous primary flight feathers were proposed to show significant shifts in barb angle values of relevance to the inference of flight in these extinct taxa. However, evolutionary trends in the evolution of these barb angle traits in extant volant taxa were not analysed in a phylogenetic frame. Neither the ancestral crown avian condition nor the condition in outgroup dinosaurs with symmetrical feathers were assessed. Here, Wang and associates expand the fossil sample and reanalyse these data in a phylogenetic frame. They show that extant taxa, including strong flyers (e.g. some songbirds), show convergence on trailing barb angles and barb angle asymmetry observed in Mesozoic taxa that were proposed not to be active fliers. Trailing barb angles in these Mesozoic taxa are similar to symmetrical feathers in outgroup dinosaurs, indicating that selective regimes acted to modify primarily the leading-edge barb angles. These trends inform dynamics in feather shape evolution and challenge the notion that barb angle and barb angle ratios in extant birds directly inform the reconstruction of function in extinct stem taxa.

Read more: <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2019.0622>

Birds in the news



Photo by Roman Kraft on Unsplash

Editor's note: If you have some late-breaking news on some exciting ornithological research that you would like to share with IOU members, send along a summary and a photo if you wish for inclusion in the next issue of *The Flutter*.

American Robins Now Migrate 12 Days Earlier Than in 1994!

Every spring, American robins migrate north from all over the U.S. and Mexico, flying up to 250 miles a day to reach their breeding grounds in Canada and Alaska. There, they spend the short summer in a mad rush to find a mate, build a nest, raise a family, and fatten up before the long haul back south. A new study, published in *Environmental Research Letters*, revealed that robins have been migrating about five days earlier per decade since 1994, kicking off earlier by about five days each decade. The study is also the first to reveal the environmental conditions along the migration route that help the birds keep up with the changing seasons. Lead author Ruth Oliver completed the work at Canada's Slave Lake where researchers have been recording spring migration timing for a quarter century. In order to understand what factors are driving the earlier migration, Oliver and her associates looked at the flight paths of individual robins by attaching tiny GPS "backpacks" to the birds, after netting them at Slave Lake in mid-migration. The units are light enough for the robins to fly unhindered and as the thin nylon string degrades, the backpacks fall off. The researchers slipped these backpacks onto a total of 55 robins, tracking their movements for the months of April through June. With the precise location from the GPS, the team was able to link the birds' movements with weather data on air temperature, snow depth, wind speed, precipitation, and other conditions that might help or hinder migration. The results showed that the robins start heading north earlier when winters are warm and dry and suggest that local environmental conditions along the way help to fine-tune their flight schedules.

Story Source: Paraphrased from Science Daily. Original full story written by Sarah Fecht

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/04/200401150819.htm>

African Grey Parrots Spontaneously Help Their Neighbours!

People and other great apes are known for their willingness to help others in need, even strangers. Now, researchers reporting in *Current Biology* on January 9, 2020 have shown for the first time that some birds -- and specifically African grey parrots -- are similarly helpful. According to Désirée Brucks of the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology, Germany and study co-author Auguste von Bayern, parrots and crows are known for having large brains relative to the size of their bodies and problem-solving skills to match. The researchers enlisted several African grey parrots and blue-headed macaws, both of which seem eager to trade tokens with an experimenter for a nut treat. However, only the African grey parrots were willing to transfer a token to a neighbor parrot, allowing the other individual to earn a nut reward. The African grey parrots appeared to understand when their help was needed. When they could see the other parrot had an opportunity for exchange, they'd pass a token over. Otherwise, they wouldn't. In other words, the parrots would help out whether the other individual was their "friend" or not, she adds. But, their relationship to the other individual did have some influence. When the parrot in need of help was a "friend," the helper transferred even more tokens. The researchers suggest the difference between African greys and blue-headed macaws may relate to differences in their social organization in the wild.

Story Source: Désirée Brucks, Auguste M.P. von Bayern. Parrots Voluntarily Help Each Other to Obtain Food Rewards. *Current Biology*, 2020; DOI: [10.1016/j.cub.2019.11.030](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2019.11.030)

Research tools



Photo by Hunter Haley on Unsplash

Editor's note: If you have some late-breaking news on a new ornithological research tool that you would like to share with IOU members, send along a summary and a photo if you wish for inclusion in the next issue of The Flutter.

High-resolution Migration Maps by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology Provide a New Way to Witness Biodiversity

As of early March 2020, the eBird program at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (CLO) used more than 750 million observations from 179,297 bird-watchers across the Western Hemisphere to create 500 animated maps spanning the entire Western Hemisphere and showing in fine detail where hundreds of species of migratory birds travel, and how their numbers vary with habitat, geography and time of year. Using that tool, scientists can now not only find a bird, but also determine where that bird is most abundant too. Combining observations of 610 species contributed to eBird, the largest biodiversity citizen science project in the world, with NASA satellite imagery of land cover, land use and water, along with nighttime light data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, has created animated abundance maps show movements and abundance of birds through the Americas as birds travel to and from their breeding grounds. A spokesman for the CLO said, " Such spatial and temporal information helps guide more flexible conservation solutions that can more readily accommodate human and ecological needs."

Story Source: Kathi Borgmann, the communications coordinator for Macaulay Library of the CLO.

To read more, visit <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2020/03/ornithology-lab-releases-high-resolution-migration-maps>

Conservation



Photo by Dr Dejan Stojanovic

Editor's note: Please forward any conservation issues or ongoing efforts for inclusion in the next issue of The Flutter. Meanwhile, I draw your attention to the following article, which packs a very powerful message for bird conservation. It was penned by Robert J. Burrowes in Climate of Change on January 4, 2020. Here is a brief excerpt to whet your appetite:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is estimated that the total number of passenger pigeons in the United States was about three billion birds. The bird was immensely abundant, as illustrated by this passage written by the famous ornithologist, naturalist and painter John James Audubon:

'I dismounted, seated myself on an eminence, and began to mark with my pencil, making a dot for every flock that passed. In a short time finding the task which I had undertaken impracticable, as the birds poured in countless multitudes, I rose, and counting the dots then put down, found that 163 had been made in twenty-one minutes. I traveled on, and still met more the farther I proceeded. The air was literally filled with Pigeons; the light of noon-day was obscured as by an eclipse, the dung fell in spots, not unlike melting flakes of snow; and the continued buzz of wings had a tendency to lull my senses to repose... Before sunset I reached Louisville, distance from Hardensburgh fifty-five miles. The Pigeons were still passing in undiminished numbers, and continued to do so for three days in succession.' So numerous was this bird that, in the nineteenth century, the passenger pigeon was one of the most abundant birds on Earth. In 1914 it was extinct. While new settlements kept reducing the bird's habitat, more importantly, it was literally hunted from the sky. Shot for its meat. So... I have two questions for you? When is the last time that you saw a flock of birds so vast that 'the light of noon-day was obscured as by an eclipse'? And when did you last see a flock of just 20 birds? Sobering to ponder, isn't it?

To read the rest of the article, visit <https://www.nationofchange.org/2020/01/04/our-vanishing-world-birds/>

Conferences



Photo by Mikael Kristenson on Unsplash

Editor's note: This list is by no means exhaustive. If I am missing some noteworthy events, please let me know so that I can include them in the next issue. Also, note that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some meetings are being cancelled, some are being postponed, some are being done online, and some are still under consideration.

August 10 - 15 2020 [PENDING DUE TO THE PANDEMIC: WATCH FOR FURTHER NEWS]: The **North American Ornithological Conference (NAOC)** will host the annual meetings of the **American Ornithological Society, Wilson Ornithological Society, British Ornithologists' Union, Association of Field Ornithologists, Canadian Society of Ornithologists, CIPAMEX, Neotropical Ornithological Society,** and **Birds Caribbean** in Puerto Rico. For more information, email NAOC@americanornithology.org

August 23 - 28, 2021: The **American Ornithological Society** is holding its annual meeting in London, Ontario, Canada. For more information, visit <https://americanornithology.org/meetings/>

October 4 - 8, 2020 [POSTPONED UNTIL OCTOBER 9-12 2021 DUE TO THE PANDEMIC]: The **Raptor Research Foundation, Inc.** and **Neotropical Raptor Network** are holding a joint meeting in Boise, Idaho. For more information, email Sarah Schulwitz Schulwitz.Sarah@peregrinefund.org or Rick Watson rwatson@peregrinefund.org

September 20 – 24, 2020: The **World Owl Conference**, originally scheduled for October in 2021, will be held in Onalaska/La Crosse, Wisconsin, USA. For more information, visit

<https://www.internationalowlcenter.org/futureconferences.html>

October 5 - 10, 2021: The **Asian Raptor Research Conservation Network [NOTE: THE RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION HAS WITHDRAWN DUE TO THE PANDEMIC]** is meeting in Kuching, Borneo, East Malaysia. For more information, contact Chong Leong Puan, University Putra Malaysia chongleong@upm.edu

April 7 - 9, 2020 [POSTPONED DUE TO THE PANDEMIC]: The **British Ornithologists' Union** annual meeting themed upon "Restoring bird populations: scaling from species to ecosystems" will be held in Nottingham, UK. For more information, visit <https://www.bou.org.uk/bou-conferences/>

March 30 - April 1, 2021: The **British Ornithologists' Union** annual conference themed upon "Avian reproduction" will meet in Nottingham, UK. For more information, visit

<https://www.bou.org.uk/bou-conferences/>

November 16-17, 2020: **International Conference on Genomics and Molecular Biology** themed on Advances in Genome and Molecular Biology Evolution Technologies will be held in Lisbon, Portugal. For more information, visit <https://genomics.insightconferences.com/europe/>

September 27 – October 2, 2020 [POSTPONED TO SEPTEMBER 11-16 2022 DUE TO THE PANDEMIC]: The 18th **International Behavioral Ecology Congress** will be hosted in Melbourne, Australia. For more information, visit <http://www.behavecol.com/meetings-conferences/>

November 15 – 19, 2020: The **Society for Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC)** will hold its annual North America meeting in Fort Worth, Texas. For more information, visit

<https://www.expohour.com/setac-north-america-meeting-aa>

Editor's note: Other more local **SETAC** meetings planned for 2020 and 2021 are listed on their web site: https://www.setac.org/events/event_list.asp

May 4 – 6, 2020: The sixth World Seabird Twitter Conference Remote is being hosted by the **British Ornithologists' Union**. Follow the #WSCT6 tag on Twitter for updates. For more information: visit

<https://www.bou.org.uk/bou-conferences/>

October 7 –8 2020: The first-ever International Shorebird Twitter Conference is being hosted jointly by the **British Ornithologists' Union** and the **International Wader Study Group**, as part of ISWG's 50th anniversary celebrations. Follow the #ISTC20 tag on Twitter for updates. For more information: visit <https://www.bou.org.uk/bou-conferences/>

November 24 2020: Climate Change & Birds & Twitter Conference is being hosted by the **British Ornithologists' Union** in Peterborough, UK and includes an online Twitter conference. For more information: visit <https://www.bou.org.uk/bou-conferences/>

Courses and Workshops



Photo by Rita Morais on Unsplash

Courses and workshops for PhD students, postdocs, and professional researchers.

Editor's Note: Workshops that benefit ornithologists are not easy to locate on the internet and they are often buried in the web site of an upcoming conference. If you know of any upcoming courses or workshops of interest to our members anywhere in the world, please forward the information to me.

May 2 – 20, 2020: The Bioacoustics Research Program at the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** will offer a week-long introductory-level Sound Analysis Workshop. The workshop usually held twice per year is intended primarily for biologists interested in analysis, visualization, and measurement of animal sounds. Read more: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/brp/sound-analysis-workshop/>

Contact:

For feedback or more information, or to provide information to be included in the IOU Newsletter, please contact the editor at:

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The next deadline for material from IOU members is July 31, 2020.

Please stay safe!!