

ORNITHOLOGICAL COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2005-2006

The Ornithological Council is pleased to provide its 2005-2006 annual report, prepared in July 2006, at the conclusion of our fiscal year. In the past, we provided individual annual reports for each of our member societies, prepared at the time of the annual meetings of each society. However, the OC Board of Directors decided at its November 2004 meeting to just prepare one annual report covering the OC's prior fiscal year. Therefore, this report covers the period 1 July 2004-30 June 2006. When it is transmitted to each society, at the time of the society's annual meeting, significant updates for matters covered in this report will be added.

Please contact either your society representatives or OC Executive Director Ellen Paul [e-mail: ellen.paul@verizon.net; phone 301/986-8568] for further information on any matter of interest to you.

The Ornithological Council *seeks to:*

- *Ensure that the best ornithological science is incorporated into legislative, regulatory, and management decisions that affect birds;*
- *Enhance the ability of ornithologists to pursue professional activities; and*
- *Promote the influence of ornithology in public affairs.*

Our work has emphasized permits, animal welfare issues, research funding and other policies that affect researchers and scientific societies. In the period covered by this report, OC accomplished much, including the following.

Permits

- Published two guides (October 2005) regarding importation of specimens and of live birds. These guides are available on BIRNET. We are revising the permit specimen guide to include shipping regulations and policies, including the U.S. Department of Transportation and the International Air Transport Association, and to incorporate recent procedural changes at the USDA.
- Worked with the USDA National Center for Import and Export to develop standard permit application and permit conditions for importation of specimens and related tissue. We continue to work with the USDA on several areas of concern, including required certifications and approval of additional methods to treat specimens and associated tissue to inactive H5N1 avian influenza virus.
- Submitted extensive comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the proposed CITES regulations, which included a number of beneficial changes pertaining to import of scientific specimens that the OC had requested in earlier discussions.
- Assisted numerous institutions in obtaining USDA import permits or permit amendments and assisted in resolving specific import problems (including University of Kansas, University of Michigan, the National Museum of Natural History, California Academy of Sciences, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the University of Florida).
- Submitted comments on the proposed revision of U.S. regulations pertaining to the international transport of live birds.

Animal welfare

- Approved a workplan and budget for a major revision of *Guidelines to the Use of Wild Birds in Research*. A funding proposal has been submitted to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).
- Organized a panel presentation at the annual meeting of the Applied Research Ethics National Association (ARENA, which is now known as Public Responsibility in Medicine and Research, or “PRIM&R”), the largest organization of individuals and organizations involved in the animal welfare aspects of research involving animals. Panelists Ian Nisbett, Anne Clark, and Mark Pokras discussed the application of animal welfare principles to ornithological research in the field and in the laboratory.
- Commented to the NIH Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare, regarding a proposed revision of the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (which, despite the title, is the “bible” for Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees, which review all research protocols, including field studies). Our comments emphasized the need to include wildlife biologists in the development and review of any revisions. We offered to provide expertise with regard to any material pertaining to birds.
- Assisted ornithologists at Harvard, Villanova, Manomet, Duke, and a MAPS station with questions pertaining to IACUC procedures and animal welfare policies. Developed plans to work with the North American Banding Council to produce a power point presentation explaining these procedures and policies to banders and researchers.
- Became a member in the International Council for Laboratory Animal Science, which is attempting to harmonize on an international basis policies for the care and use of animals in research.

Research funding

OC is a member of the following coalitions that work together to inform the Administration and Congress of the importance of increased funding for scientific research:

- Bird Conservation Funding Coalition
- USGS (U.S. Geological Survey) Coalition
- Coalition for National Science Funding (focuses on National Science Foundation)

OC organized a birdwalk for Congressional staff, and senior members of the Administration (including the Deputy Secretary of the Interior). Co-organized by the American Bird Conservancy and held in conjunction with International Migratory Bird Day, this year’s birdwalk was led by Kenn Kaufman. In June, we participated in the annual Congressional Reception and Exhibit organized by the Coalition for National Science Funding to demonstrate the value of funding for the National Science Foundation. Our exhibit featured two NSF-funded projects at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology – one on emerging infectious avian diseases and the other on a project to educate urban children about science and the environment by involving them in research projects about urban birds.

Other policies that affect research and scientific societies

- The U.S. Bird Banding Laboratory has established a Federal Advisory Committee, which the OC proposed and requested that USGS create. The USGS appointed OC Executive Director Ellen Paul to the committee, which is addressing a wide array of issues pertaining to the BBL, including permit policy and procedure and data collection and release issues. In 2005-2006, the committee met three times and is now preparing a draft set of recommendations.

- The OC published a peer-reviewed fact sheet on the impact of avian influenza on ornithological research. The fact sheet is available on BIRDNET, has been widely republished and cited, and has been translated into Spanish.
- OC continued to monitor policy developments in the “open access” situation, and to provide updates to member societies.
- The White House Office of Management and Budget published a draft bulletin providing guidance to federal agencies that publish guidance documents. As ornithological research is regulated or affected in some way by a half dozen or more federal agencies, agency guidance documents are very important for the ornithologist who is attempting to find, understand, and comply with agency policy. The OC’s extensive comments noted that some agencies have little or no guidance, and that others have comprehensive guidance but fail to seek input from the regulated community. Our comments largely supported OMB’s suggested best practices with regard to the issuance of agency guidance documents.

Providing Scientific Information about Birds

- In response to the recommendation of the AOU Committee on Public Responsibility that the AOU be a prominent source of unbiased scientific information about birds, the OC has increased its outreach to AOU committees charged with responsibilities that relate to the provision and use of this information. We have asked the Committees on Public Responsibility, Conservation, and Young Professionals to help us devise new ways to support the efforts of ornithologists who would like to be actively involved in communicating scientific information about birds to policy makers and others whose decisions affect birds. All three committees have agreed to work with us in this effort. We plan to begin with a meeting at the 2006 North American Ornithological Conference, so as to be able to include interested members of all OC member societies.
- OC obtained funding for and is coordinating a critical literature review on the impacts of wind energy on grassland and shrub steppe bird species, for the National Wind Coordinating Committee.
- Together with Bat Conservation International, initiated and coordinated an effort to urge the wind industry and investors in wind energy to cooperate in research efforts to assess the impacts of wind energy farms on wildlife and to allow access to wind farm sites for this research.
- Recommended expert ornithologists to the National Research Council for an NRC committee assessing the impact of wind energy on wildlife, to a conservation organization concerned about a proposed management plan for Western Snowy Plovers, to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on the impacts of climate change in the Arctic, and to other organizations.
- Organized a meeting of ornithologists and Department of Interior officials to help establish a working relationship between the ornithological community and DOI in addressing avian influenza issues.

Informing ornithologists about policy issues

- Re-activated the OCNET listserv to provide ornithologists with news pertaining to policies affecting ornithology and birds, and to give them an opportunity to discuss these issues or share other relevant information
- Continued to use the Ornithological Newsletter and BIRDNET to disseminate policy information of interest to ornithologists
- Informed ornithologists about government decisions pertaining to ornithology (such as the new

“appropriate use” policy issued by the National Wildlife Refuge System), endangered species (including Bald Eagle, Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Red Knot, Florida Scrub Jay, Piping Plover, California Brown Pelican population, and the Western Snowy Plover), and other birds (e.g., Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on Migratory Bird Hunting)

Organizational management

- Completed and approved a strategic plan. As noted in a March 2006 report to the AOU Council, the Board anticipates using this strategic plan and more detailed action plans to assess progress and adjust strategies and activities as needed.
- Initiated developing a management plan.