

ORNITHOLOGICAL COUNCIL
QUARTERLY REPORT
January – March 2007

The Ornithological Council is pleased to provide a quarterly report spanning January – March 2007. At the direction of the OC Board of Directors, these quarterly reports will supplement the annual report prepared at the end of each fiscal year (30 June). Please contact either your society representatives (see attached list) or OC Executive Director Ellen Paul [e-mail: ellen.paul@verizon.net; phone 301/986-8568] for further information on any matter of interest. We welcome your input at any time, and are particularly interested in hearing about issues or problems that we may not be addressing.

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 focuses on permits, animal welfare issues, research funding and other policies that affect ornithologists and ornithological societies.

A special note: OC north and south of the U.S. border

Some ornithologists seem to be under the mistaken impression that the OC is a “U.S. only” organization. It is true that most of the issues we address are U.S. issues. In part, this is due to the fact that 7 of our 11 member societies - including the four largest societies - are U.S.-based and most of their members are in the U.S. However, most are or are attempting to become international in membership and scope, so we do not regard this as a limiting factor. And, after all, these ornithologists work all over the world and the birds they study cross international borders.

Instead, the limitation arises from the fact that we can't address what we don't hear about. There are more ornithologists in the U.S., and perhaps there are more problems in the U.S. - which has far more permit regulations and more procedure-laden animal welfare systems than do other countries in the Western Hemisphere. But even in the U.S. - we can't address what we don't hear about.

We do address issues in other countries and international issues such as CITES and problems arising from the implementation of the Convention on Biodiversity. And right now, for instance, we are working to address permitting policies in Canada and have continuing interaction with the Canadian Council on Animal Care.

Of course, what we do anywhere is bounded by our mission statement and strategic plan, which we would be glad to provide to you if you don't already have them. Subject to those constraints, then, we would like to remind you that you and your members can and should alert us to issues of concern to them. Be assured that we always consult with the in-country or in-region society

before taking any action.. In almost all cases, we can certainly provide advice and other resources (such as the ever-important connections that often help to resolve a problem).

Now, back to our regularly scheduled programming!

In the period covered by this report, OC's activities were as follows:

Permits

- Met with officials of the Department of the Interior and the Smithsonian Institution to develop strategies to address the National Park Service (NPS) policy regarding specimen ownership. We have yet to receive a response from the NPS to our October 2006 discussions with agency officials.
- Worked with several universities and museums on USDA permit and import issues, including: University of New Mexico, Yale University, University of Nevada Las Vegas, and the California State University San Bernardino.
- Worked with the University of Michigan on a permit fee waiver under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and on identifying the correct CITES application forms. We also notified the ornithological community about the permit fee waiver policy and how to comply with USFWS requirements to qualify for the waiver.
- Assisted the University of Nevada Las Vegas in resolving a Migratory Bird Treaty Act export problem.
- Continued efforts to persuade FedEx to eliminate or modify its prohibition on the shipping of dead animals. We also assisted a USGS researcher trying to ship bird tissue and feathers via FedEx from Russia via discussion with our FedEx International liaison in the United States.
- Organized a discussion among ornithologists to consider a proposed solution to the long-standing impasse in the finalization of the USFWS policy on scientific collecting.
- Continued communication with the Canadian Wildlife Service regarding that agency's potential development of a scientific collecting policy.

Animal welfare

- OC finalized the workplan to revise *Guidelines to the Use of Wild Birds in Research* and developed a position description for the editor-in-chief.
- OC Executive Director Ellen Paul met with counsel for the Senate Agriculture Committee to discuss correction of an error in the 2002 Farm Bill that inadvertently extended USDA APHIS oversight to research involving wild birds; a discussion on the same topic was also held with a representative of the Humane Society of the United States.
- The 6th World Congress on Alternatives and Animal Use in the Life Sciences invited OC Executive Director Ellen Paul to give a talk on the application of animal welfare policies and oversight practices to ornithological research specifically and field biology generally. The Congress will be held in Tokyo. Paul's acceptance of the invitation is contingent upon funding by the Congress organizers.

Other policies that affect research and scientific societies (including funding)

- OC is participating in an ad hoc coalition of scientific societies that is seeking legislative solutions to reverse policies of the Administration (in the United States) that are detrimental to scientific integrity and restraints on the dissemination of scientific information.
- OC provided an ornithologist (who asked that his name not be revealed) with information about federal policies and ethical standards pertaining to the sharing of data among co-principal investigators, collaborators, students, research technicians, and others involved in collecting data under a federal grant or contract.
- The U.S. Geological Survey responded to our comments regarding that agency's peer review practices. We continue to be concerned and to monitor the situation, and are considering additional measures that we, together with our colleagues in the other scientific societies that signed the letter, might take.
- We are preparing to participate in the annual Congressional Exhibit and Reception organized by the Coalition for National Science Funding. This coalition advocates for increased funding for the National Science Foundation. This year, we are likely to spotlight the Migration Interest Group: Research Applied toward Education (MIGRATE) Research Coordination Network, whose principal investigators include ornithologists Jeff Kelly, Sarah Mabey, Frank Moore, Tom Smith, and Martin Wikelski.
- Together with the Wildlife Society, OC developed a legislative strategy to address the restrictions that bar scientists who are employed by the U.S. government from serving on the boards of outside organizations.

Providing scientific information about birds

- OC is organizing the third annual International Migratory Bird Day Birdwalk for members of Congress and the Administration. Our co-sponsors this year are the American Bird Conservancy and Smithsonian Ornithology. Secretary of the Treasury Hank Paulson and Wendy Paulson have agreed to serve as honorary co-hosts. We have extended a similar invitation to Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne. This year's celebrity birder is Scott Weidensaul, who will lead the walk.
- In December, OC entered into a Memorandum of Cooperation with the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) of the U.S. Geological Survey to help improve the ornithological content of the NBII. Work began in January, when we contracted with a professional survey designer to develop an online survey. This survey is intended to determine what information natural resources managers use when making decisions about bird conservation and management, where they find it, and what additional information they would like to have. It has been distributed to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff in the Division of Refuges and Ecological Services, state wildlife management agencies, staff of the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service, and land managers in the Nature Conservancy and the National Audubon Society.

Informing ornithologists about policy issues

OC provides information via the Ornithological Newsletter, our BIRDNET website <<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET>>, Ornith-L, OCNET <<https://listserv.umd.edu/archives/ocnet-l.html>>, AVECOL, and NEOORN. Specific issues

covered in this quarter include: a call for nominations for a Federal Advisory Committee on wind energy and its impacts on wildlife, issuance by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) of the regulation governing take of migratory birds by the Department of Defense when conducting military readiness activities, a call from the USFWS for input on proposed changes to CITES listings and policies, and significant changes in staffing at the USFWS, including the Office of Migratory Bird Management and the CITES Office of Management Authority. Also reported: a bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives that would extend whistle-blower protections for scientists employed by the U.S. Federal government.

Organizational matters

The OC Board will meet on 23 April 2007. Planned agenda items include review of biannual financial report, approval of the 2007-2008 budget (which will be provided to member societies once it has been approved), completion of management plan, annual evaluation of staff, review of recent and ongoing activities. We will also hold annual elections of officers.

Jill Deppe, Ph.D has joined the OC Board as the second representative of the Cooper Ornithological Society. Greg Butcher, Ph.D has resigned from the Board. The Association of Field Ornithologists has not yet named a replacement.

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