



## **Elliott Coues Award, 2007**

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## ELLIOTT COUES AWARD, 2007:

KEITH A. HOBSON



Keith A. Hobson, August 2007. (Photograph by Heidi den Haan.)

Keith A. Hobson is a senior Research Scientist with Environment Canada in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Saskatchewan in 1991 and currently holds an adjunct professorship there. Previously, he was active in the field of physics and participated in radiocarbon dating studies at Simon Fraser University.

Hobson began his biological research career with studies of diving behavior and diurnal roost-site use of Pelagic Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) in British Columbia. He examined aspects of the behavioral ecology of Yellow Warblers (*Dendroica petechia*) for his M.Sc. degree at the University of Manitoba, and his Ph.D. research on trophic segregation among high-Arctic seabirds using stable-isotope analyses was completed at the University of Saskatchewan in the early 1990s. He continues to develop stable-isotope techniques in the study of seabird feeding ecology. Currently, he is also involved in studies of boreal-forest songbirds, with particular emphasis on the effects of forestry practices on population dynamics and distribution.

Hobson is widely known for his research on the development of stable-isotope techniques in evaluating avian diets and tracking

movements of migratory wildlife populations. He and his team pioneered stable-hydrogen-isotope tracking technology, which heralded an entirely new way to track migratory organisms in North America and elsewhere. Most importantly, this technology does not depend on conventional mark and recapture of the same individuals but instead uses natural geographic isotopic fingerprints (isoscapes) of natal origin recorded within organisms. This stable-isotope technology is poised to augment and, in many cases, supplant conventional tagging methods because it provides clear and quantitative information on long-distance population linkages that cannot be gained with traditional techniques. Among the numerous successful research projects are migratory studies of Monarch Butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*), Neotropical songbirds, Loggerhead Shrikes (*Lanius ludovicianus*), Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*), and scaups (*Aythya* spp.), to name a few.

Hobson's contributions to ornithological research have been remarkable over the past two decades, and his scientific productivity is outstanding. He has published more than 250 papers in top journals, as well as book chapters, and, with colleagues, has

just completed a handbook on isotopes and migration. Hobson is internationally recognized for his expertise in isotope ecology and has received several major awards. He is frequently invited to give papers at international conferences, workshops, and universities, and has an impressive list of co-authors from around the world. Hobson is generous with his time in advising scientific colleagues and students and informing the general public of conservation issues. He is currently the Editor of *Waterbirds*.

Hobson's unique blend of strong analytical skills and appreciation and understanding of avian natural history has led to extremely insightful research and development of invaluable con-

servation tools. His internationally shared "weapons of conservation" have tremendously increased our understanding of migratory birds and their habitats and make Keith A. Hobson an eminently qualified recipient of the AOU's Elliott Coues Award for 2007.

*Award criteria.*—The Elliott Coues Award recognizes extraordinary contributions to ornithological research. There should be no limitation with respect to geographic area, subdiscipline(s) of ornithology, nor the time course over which the work was done. The award consists of a medal and an honorarium provided through the endowed Ralph W. Schreiber Fund of the American Ornithologists' Union.

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## WILLIAM BREWSTER MEMORIAL AWARD, 2007:

ALLAN J. BAKER



Allan J. Baker, July 2006. (Photograph by Oliver Haddrath.)

Allan J. Baker, a leading scholar in avian molecular evolution, is the Senior Curator of Ornithology and Head of the Department of Natural History at the Royal Ontario Museum. A hallmark of Baker's research program is its depth and breadth. His Ph.D. dissertation reconstructed the evolutionary history and historical biogeography of the world's oystercatchers. He was a leader in using allozyme electrophoresis to study geographic variation in birds, multivariate morphometrics, and the comparison of genetic and morphological data. He also helped pioneer the application of population genetics to the transmission of song memes in birds. Baker was among the first ornithologists to switch to analyses of mtDNA to investigate evolutionary questions within avian species, and his study of the Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) was a landmark paper in avian phylogeography. He incorporated modern DNA

sequencing methods and retroposon insertions both to answer questions in deep avian history and to investigate evolutionary processes at the population level. His systematic studies were at the forefront of the field, owing to his use of mitochondrial genomes. For example, his studies of ancient DNA from moas has provided a fascinating glimpse into this extinct part of avian evolutionary history, as well as important insights into the tempo and mode of moa evolution. Lately, his work has made fundamental contributions to our understanding of rates of avian molecular evolution.

Baker is co-chair of the All Birds Barcoding Initiative (ABBI) steering committee, which aims to identify the >10,000 species of birds in the world with unique DNA sequences from the COI gene. Another major research theme focuses on reconstructing the