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NED K. JOHNSON YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARD, 2013

Corey E. Tarwater



Corey E. Tarwater, near Parque Nacional San Lorenzo, Panama, March 2013.
(Photograph by J. Patrick Kelley.)

This award recognizes work by an ornithologist who, early in his or her career, shows distinct promise for future leadership in the profession. The award honors Ned K. Johnson, a lifelong supporter and former president (1996–1998) of the AOU. This year, the Ned K. Johnson Young Investigator Award was presented to Dr. Corey Tarwater, a postdoctoral scholar at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Corey started her academic career at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where she began her long-term study of the Black-crowned Antshrike (*Thamnophilus atrinucha*) in 2003 in Panama. Her M.S. work investigated parental care strategies in antshrikes. Corey discovered that antshrikes have strict brood division and that parents spatially segregate the offspring during the period of highest mortality after offspring leave the nest, highlighting the role of predation in parental care decisions. She continued to work on this species for her doctoral work, also with Jeff Brawn at Illinois.

Her dissertation research focused on postfledging parental care, dispersal, and survival of offspring until reproduction in the tropical rainforests of Panama, a period in the life cycle that is difficult to study because of the mobility of young birds. By following banded adults for multiple years and by tracking offspring for six to nine months after they left the nest, Corey was able to estimate pre-reproductive survival and its influence on life history, to understand the role of phenotypic traits in dispersal, and to examine parental care decisions and life history tradeoffs. Corey observed that family living is beneficial to offspring in terms of increased survival, highlighting that there may be adaptive benefits to delayed dispersal in species without helping behaviors. Offspring that delayed dispersal for longer had higher survival and dispersed shorter distances, and in different directions, than individuals that dispersed when younger. Corey found that antshrikes have higher pre-reproductive survival, delayed dispersal, delayed age at reproduction, and extended parental care compared with

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species in Northern Hemisphere regions. Her work supports the hypothesis that lowland tropical birds may exert more effort into fewer offspring, increasing offspring survival, compared with their temperate zone counterparts. Her graduate research alone has resulted in 10 publications thus far in peer-reviewed journals. She was first author of eight of these, and most appeared in top-tier journals, including *Ecology*, *Behavioral Ecology*, and *Animal Behaviour*.

Corey spent two years as a postdoctoral scholar in Steve Beissinger's lab at the University of California, Berkeley. Using Steve's 25-year field study of a parrot in Venezuela, Corey examined tradeoffs among life history traits by linking lifetime fitness and evolutionary change to environmental and individual variation. She found that individuals assess their natal environment and their own phenotype to make natal dispersal decisions, and they typically disperse in ways that increase lifetime reproductive success. By examining selection on timing of breeding, Corey examined how the optimal timing of breeding varies with individual and environmental conditions. This work resulted in publications in *Ecology Letters* and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. She is currently working as a postdoctoral scholar with Peter Arcese at the University of British Columbia, using Peter's 37-year study of a pedigreed population of Song Sparrows to address the role of individual and environmental heterogeneity in influencing life history tradeoffs and the consequences of variation in life history tactics.

Corey is a member of multiple societies and regularly attends their meetings, where she has served as session chair and judged student presentations. She places a high priority on mentorship, having mentored more than 25 research assistants from at least six countries, including many Latin American women.

Corey continues to pursue her interests in tropical birds. In addition to continuing her work in Panama following the same antshrike system, she has recently received Department of Defense funding with collaborators to examine the ability of nonnative vertebrate dispersers to maintain native plant communities in Hawaii. All told, Corey Tarwater has accomplished a tremendous amount in her young career, and the AOU is pleased and proud to name her as our Young Investigator of 2013.

Award criteria.—The Ned K. Johnson Young Investigator Award recognizes outstanding and promising work by a researcher early in his or her career in any field of ornithology. Candidates should excel in research and show distinct promise for leadership in ornithology within and beyond North America. Each candidate is required to have received a doctorate degree within 5 years of being nominated and must be a member of the AOU at the time of nomination. Candidates cannot have received the award previously. The award consists of a framed certificate and an honorarium provided through a gift to the endowment of the AOU honoring Ned K. Johnson, a lifelong supporter and former president (1996–1998) of the AOU. This award, presented for the first time in 2005, is funded by the Ned K. Johnson Fund of the AOU.

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