

## **William Brewster Memorial Award, 2012**

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### WILLIAM BREWSTER MEMORIAL AWARD, 2012

ROBERT C. FLEISCHER



Robert C. Fleischer in Stanley Park, Vancouver, British Columbia, July 2012.  
(Photograph by Susan Parker.)

The 2012 William Brewster Memorial Award is presented to Dr. Robert C. Fleischer, Head of the Center for Conservation and Evolutionary Genetics, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, National Zoological Park, and National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.

Rob began his professional training at the University of California (UC) Santa Barbara under the direction of Stephen Rothstein and continued his professional development at the University of Kansas with Richard F. Johnston. Following completion of his doctoral degree, he headed back to UC Santa Barbara for a postdoctoral stint with Rothstein and then moved to the University of Hawaii, which launched his career-long passion for Hawaiian birds. In 1991, Rob was hired to establish a laboratory of molecular genetics at the Smithsonian's National Zoo. He

developed the laboratory "from scratch" and made it into an internationally respected research center that is one of the top vertebrate genetics labs in the world.

The Smithsonian's Center for Conservation and Evolutionary Genetics has a broad research program but is particularly known for its work on the genetics of small avian populations, applications of genetic methods to understanding the breeding biology of Western Hemisphere birds, sequencing of ancient DNA, studies of avian malaria, the estimation of molecular substitution rates for studies of the "molecular clock," and studies of evolution in Hawaiian birds.

Perhaps Rob's most noteworthy contribution has been the pioneering work that he and his colleagues have carried out to describe and understand the spread of malaria in Hawaiian birds

and, subsequently, to develop vaccines to help ameliorate the problem. Many would have been satisfied to describe the problem, but Fleischer's dogged determination and creative use of molecular tools took this work into another realm, and it remains the classic case study for avian disease.

Rob currently ranks third worldwide in citations for avian genetics. His papers have appeared multiple times in *Science*, *Nature*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS), *The Auk*, and many other journals. Rob co-established the journal *Conservation Genetics*, has served on the editorial boards of three scientific journals (including *The Auk*), and has just completed a term on the AOU Council. Results of his work are frequently reported in print, online, and in film and television media, including recent reporting of the discovery of a new family of modern birds, the Mohidae.

Collaborative and cross-cutting projects are hallmarks of Rob's research. The extent and breadth of his lab's collaborations are astounding. More than 40 postdoctoral scholars, approximately half of them women, and many graduate students and interns have

worked or are working in the Fleischer lab. Nearly all of them have moved on to professional positions in academia, museums, or federal agencies. Rob's mandatory weekly lab meetings, his advice about research design, energy in seeking funding, and dedication to helping get the papers out and the recommendation letters written, have made the lab into a successful finishing school for recent Ph.D.'s seeking to establish themselves in his profession.

The AOU honors Dr. Robert Fleischer for his thorough and insightful body of work. We are proud to recognize a research scientist, teacher, and mentor who relentlessly works to further our knowledge of avian genetics and to bring new scientists to our profession.

*Award criteria.*—The William Brewster Memorial Award consists of a medal and an honorarium provided through the endowed William Brewster Memorial Award of the American Ornithologists' Union. It is given to the author or co-authors (not previously so honored) of the most meritorious body of work on birds of the Western Hemisphere published during the 10 calendar years preceding a given AOU meeting.

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## ELLIOTT COUES AWARD, 2012

F. GARY STILES

The 2012 Elliott Coues Award is presented to Dr. F. Gary Stiles for his outstanding contributions to ornithology through his very prolific work on hummingbirds and their interactions with the plants they visit, often as pollinators. Gary received a B.A. in Biology (Phi Beta Kappa) from Amherst College and an M.S. from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). His undergraduate honors thesis was entitled "Bird behavior and the evolution of Mullerian mimicry." He continued his education at UCLA, receiving a Ph.D. in Zoology and the Otto Scherbaum award for distinguished work by a graduate student. Following his Ph.D., he moved on to a Chapman-Naumberg postdoctoral fellowship at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He then served for 16 years on the faculty of the Universidad de Costa Rica and later moved to a faculty position with the Universidad Javeriana before settling into his current position as associate professor and curator of ornithology at the Instituto de Ciencias Naturales, Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Gary began his publishing career with his dissertation research, published in 1973 in *Science*. He has since continued a very active research program on hummingbirds, including a fruitful collaboration with Larry Wolf on lek behavior of the Western Long-tailed Hermit that was published as an *Ornithological Monograph* (no. 27, 1979). More recently, his collaborative efforts with Douglas Altshuler and Robert Dudley on hummingbird morphology and energetics was published in *The American Naturalist* in 2004. His work on hummingbirds has included significant

publications on systematics, ecology, evolution, morphology, and energetics. These papers combine exceptional field observations with laboratory and museum work. He has a keen mind for the conceptual significance of the results, and his colleagues consider him the most diverse and yet intensive worker on hummingbirds in the world.

Gary has published numerous papers on a broad array of Neotropical birds and their biogeography, migration, systematics, and conservation. He has described several new species and subspecies of birds and worked on taxonomic problems in a diverse set of birds. These studies have made significant contributions to the literature of the birds of Colombia and Costa Rica and place him among a very small group of ornithologists actively working in those areas.

Gary's third research interest is associated with plants of the Neotropics, especially those that are visited by hummingbirds. He has done ecological, evolutionary, and systematics studies of *Heliconia*, the general vegetation of several areas, and palms.

Gary is a superb field ornithologist and, with Alexander Skutch, co-authored an authoritative field guide to the birds of Costa Rica. He also has been actively training Neotropical science students in both Colombia and Costa Rica, including several master's and Ph.D. students. In Colombia, his exceptional talents as a teacher have been recognized four times with teaching awards.

For his outstanding contributions to Neotropical ornithology, especially his studies of hummingbirds, his continuing