

## **Ned K. Johnson Young Investigator Award, 2012**

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## NED K. JOHNSON YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARD, 2012

JAMES RIVER



James River, on the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska, October 2010.  
(Photograph by Cristina Orrico.)

The 2012 Ned K. Johnson Young Investigator Award goes to Dr. James W. River. Jim received his Ph.D. in 2008 from the University of California (UC) Santa Barbara and has a remarkable record of research and professional leadership for someone who is only four years past his doctorate degree. He received a master's degree from Kansas State in 1999 and was a Research Biologist with the Kansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit from 1999 to 2002, when he moved to UC Santa Barbara to begin his doctoral work.

Jim has diverse and extensive experience and is familiar with a wide range of research approaches. These include bird banding,

sound recording, nest finding, physiological work on fat metabolism, anatomical work on sperm storage by female birds, and ecological physiology and endocrinology. He has also worked in a diversity of habitats in North America, South America, and New Zealand, including wetland, grassland, coniferous forest, and montane cloud-forest ecosystems.

Jim has showed a great deal of creativity and rigor in designing his Ph.D. research on cowbirds and their hosts. Jim had the insight to realize that by studying begging behavior in cowbirds, he could shed light on questions related to signal honesty because

the fitness of nest mates is irrelevant to cowbird nestlings. He had to overcome several technical challenges to collect data on this topic but developed and used nest cameras with great success. His theoretical and methodological approaches are highly original, and the resulting publications have been important contributions to ornithology and behavioral ecology.

Jim's publications in behavioral ecology have covered other important conceptual issues, such as parental alarm calls, sperm storage, and competition. In addition to his theoretically oriented work in behavioral ecology, Jim has also published extensively on a number of management and applied topics involving quantitative population analyses, habitat preferences, and landscape-level processes. In his 2010 paper in *The Auk*, Jim compiled historical and modern data sets on nest parasitism to show long-term declines in rates of cowbird parasitism on grassland birds, which appear to be linked to rangeland management practices in eastern Kansas. Jim has also published on the population dynamics of a declining grassland bird species, the Dickcissel, to assess which factor(s) limit local populations and to determine the viability of alternative methods for assessing reproductive success.

To date, Jim has published 25 peer-reviewed papers, most of which have appeared in top-tier internationally significant journals such as *Animal Behaviour*, *The Auk*, *Behavioral Ecology*, *Evolution*, and *Journal of Avian Biology*. In recognition of his contributions to ornithology, Jim was named an Elective Member of the AOU in 2007 while still a graduate student, a rare honor.

Jim has been an organizer of four workshops and symposia, two at AOU meetings and two at other meetings. In his short career, Jim has served on six different AOU committees: local planning

committee for the 123rd annual meeting of the AOU (2003–2005); Professional Awards Task Force (2003–2004); Publications Committee (2004–present); Publications Task Force (2008–2009); Early Professionals Committee (2008–2009); Student Affairs Committee (2004–2007; chair, 2005–2007). Jim also served in 2005–2006 as co-chair of the Student Affairs Committee for the Fourth North American Ornithological Conference.

During his field work at the Konza Prairie Biological Station, Jim was a key mentor for several undergraduate students in the summer National Science Foundation Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) Site Program. He assisted students with field instruction on how to find and monitor nests and provided oversight and encouragement for student projects. During his time at UC Santa Barbara, he also worked with young precollege students from underrepresented groups in three different outreach programs.

*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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## RALPH W. SCHREIBER CONSERVATION AWARD, 2012

PAUL A. JOHNSGARD

The 2012 Ralph W. Schreiber Conservation Award is presented to Paul A. Johnsgard for his outstanding contributions to the conservation of the Great Plains of North America. Few living ornithologists have written as widely about birds, have been more instrumental in promoting awareness of birds generally and the Great Plains avifauna specifically, or have influenced the public more than Paul A. Johnsgard.

The Great Plains of North America is one of the most imperiled landscapes in the world. The birds that depend on these fragile habitats are being lost. Without the support of the public, policy-makers, local governments, and others, no conservation program can hope to be successful. This support can be garnered only through education, because people will conserve only what they understand and appreciate. Through his lifetime of writing, photography, drawing, lecturing, teaching, research, and television productions, Paul A. Johnsgard has

tirelessly presented a message of how important it is to understand, appreciate, and conserve the birds of the Great Plains and their habitats. Hardly any ornithologist alive today has reached as many readers with the important message that nature is exciting and that our rich natural heritage must be preserved for future generations.

Following an M.S. at Washington State University, Paul completed Ph.D. training at Cornell University with Charles Sibley (having a major role in the development of Sibley's pioneering work on the use of egg-white proteins for avian taxonomy), and later did a postdoctoral fellowship at the Wildfowl Trust in the United Kingdom. Paul's initial scientific interests were in the evolutionary relationships among waterfowl species, with a later focus on the ethology of pair formation behavior, especially in Mallards and Black Ducks. He also did work on eiders and various little-known Australian and South American ducks.