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WILLIAM BREWSTER MEMORIAL AWARD, 2013

J. V. ("Van") Remsen, Jr.



Van Remsen, Jr., near St. Gabriel, Louisiana, August 2013.
(Photograph by Amy C. Shutt.)

The 2013 William Brewster Memorial Award is presented to Dr. J. V. Remsen, Jr. Van is the John Stauffer McIlhenny Distinguished Professor of Natural Science and Curator of Birds at the Museum of Natural Science and a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Louisiana State University (LSU), Baton Rouge.

Van, a boyhood birder from Lakewood, Colorado, began his professional training as a summer employee at the Denver Wildlife Research Center in 1968. He attended Stanford University, graduating with both a B.A. and an M.A. in 1971. He then moved on to a Ph.D. at Berkeley under Frank Pitelka, graduating in 1978. While at Berkeley, he wrote a seminal paper titled "On taking field

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notes" for *American Birds* (1977) that greatly influenced countless field observers for decades. Although deeply immersed in the ornithology of the western United States through birding and a variety of part-time jobs, Van discovered his ultimate research passion, Neotropical birds, while working on kingfisher ecology in Colombia and Bolivia for his dissertation. Upon graduation from Berkeley, Van accepted a job as Curator of Birds at the LSU Museum of Natural Science and has been there ever since.

As a result of 40 years of research and teaching, Van is widely regarded as the world's premier authority on Neotropical ornithology. Among his early, and now classic, papers are his 1984 description of leapfrog evolutionary patterns in the Andes, his 1988 classification scheme of foraging behavior with Scott Robinson, and his 1983 paper on the importance of river habitats to species richness in South America with Ted Parker. Indeed, the Remsen–Parker duo produced a series of papers from 1980 through the early 1990s that are landmarks in Neotropical ornithology. In addition to research, Van's graduate teaching has continuously emphasized Neotropical ornithology; 18 of his 20 Ph.D. students, and 10 of his 15 M.S. students, have written theses on the Neotropics. Although closely guiding these students, Van rarely put his name on their dissertation publications. Thus, he is partly responsible for huge advances in Neotropical biology for which he gets little recognition. His students, however, have long understood his important contributions, and they named one of the more iconic Andean species, the Chestnut-bellied Cotinga (*Doliornis remseni*), in his honor in 1994. Most recently, Van has contributed literally thousands of species accounts on Neotropical birds to the *Howard & Moore* checklists (2003, 2013, and upcoming) and *The Handbook of the Birds of the World*.

Van has also contributed extensively to the infrastructure of ornithological research in the Western Hemisphere. Under his guidance, the LSU Museum of Natural Science has added 100,000 specimens to its collection, including several thousand of his own, and is now the most active university collection of birds in the world. He has been an integral force in the AOU Check-list Committee for 30 years, helping to produce the 1998 edition and dozens of supplements. He is the founder and chair of the South American Classification Committee, and the taxonomic and nomenclatural footnotes he has provided on its website are encyclopedic. He also oversees four list services for ornithologists. Finally, his students hold a remarkable number of academic positions in museums and universities in both North America and South America.

The AOU honors Dr. J. V. Remsen for his outstanding body of work on the ecology, systematics, and evolution of Neotropical birds. He has inspired generations of students and colleagues interested in tropical bird biology, and he has been a constant advocate for the value of museum collections to modern research in ornithology. His positive influence and energy pervade Neotropical ornithology and the museum community. We are proud to recognize a research scientist and teacher who has contributed so much to so many in the world of birds.

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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