



## **Elliott Coues Award, 2013**

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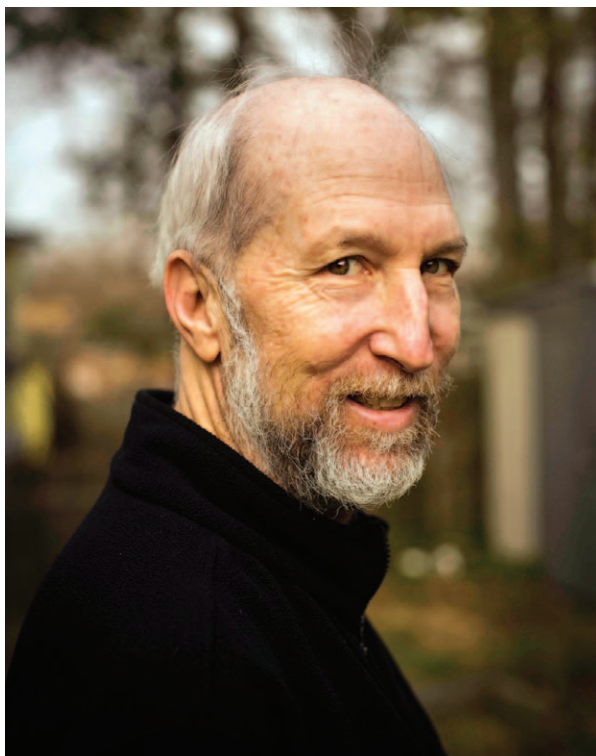
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## ELLIOTT COUES AWARD, 2013

RUSSELL GREENBERG



Russell Greenberg, in Washington, D.C., December 2012.  
(Photograph by Jeff MacMillan.)

The 2013 Elliott Coues Award was presented to Dr. Russell Greenberg (Director of the Migratory Bird Center, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, National Zoological Park) for innovative contributions to ornithology and to science more broadly.

Russ is a Californian from head to toe. Although his training as an ornithologist began at a very young age chasing birds from the coasts of Monterey to the ridge tops of the Sierra Nevadas, he began his professional training as an undergraduate at the University of California (UC), Santa Cruz. He went on to UC Berkeley to complete his B.A., and then Ph.D., under the direction of Frank Pitelka. Switching coasts, he next headed to Washington, D.C., for a postdoc with Eugene Morton at the Smithsonian, where he has been a keystone component of the Institution's science program.

Russ is a pioneer and innovative scientist in many ways. Perhaps most influential is his revolutionary work in the late 1970s and early 1980s on the evolutionary ecology and behavior of migratory and resident birds in tropical ecosystems. Russ's inventive thinking prompted the field to consider how

migratory and resident birds both adapt to novel ecosystems and coexist with other resident and migratory species. His research examined the interplay between morphological adaptation and foraging specialization. It was this line of inquiry, combined with his insatiable curiosity and savant-like skill at natural history, that led Russ as early as 1983 to begin blazing new trails into the proximate and behavioral mechanisms that underlie ecological plasticity in birds and other animals. Since then, his groundbreaking research on "neophobia" has become highly regarded as animal behaviorists focus on aspects of temperament and personality in ecological decision-making.

Contributing to basic science has always been a priority for Russ, but it was his deep commitment to the species and habitats threatened by tropical deforestation that led him to become one of the key scientists in the nascent field of conservation biology in the 1980s. Russ began studying birds and other animals in managed and disturbed habitats of coffee, acacia, and cacao. He was one of the first scientists to recognize that some crops could be

grown in ways that minimize the negative effects of agriculture on native ecosystems. Russ invented the idea of promoting shade-grown coffee as a bird-friendly product, applying his research in tropical ecosystems to the marketplace and thereby changing the coffee industry to benefit both birds and broader biodiversity. He developed a science-based set of criteria for shade-grown coffee, the Bird Friendly coffee certification program, now considered the gold standard for linking economics to conservation. Although the lion's share of his work on shaded agroecosystems in the tropics has been on coffee agroecosystems, he has also facilitated research in cacao and in California wine grape production—perhaps not an accident for someone who has a refined palate for wine as well as coffee and chocolate.

Russ's work on migrants in the tropics coalesced in 1989 when Chandler Robbins, John Sauer, Sam Droege, and he published a foundational and transformative paper titled "Population declines in North American birds that migrate to the Neotropics" in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. This paper sounded the alarm about migratory bird declines and kick-started an international conservation movement. Three years later, the U.S. Congress responded to the alarm and appropriated funds for Gene Morton and Russ to found the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (SMBC), with Russ appointed as director. One of the first public initiatives to come out of SMBC, and created by Russ, was Migratory Bird Day, which has since blossomed into International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), a celebration of migratory songbirds that now occurs annually at more than 700 venues throughout the Western Hemisphere. IMBD has become a focal opportunity for public education and outreach, spawning countless activities in schools and communities throughout the Americas. Much of SMBC's ability to play a leading role in studying the grand phenomenon of migration, and in providing the highest-quality science to scientists, policy makers, and the lay public, is attributable to Russ's leadership and efforts.

Never one to follow the crowd, Russ takes pride in his deep appreciation for the brown and drab birds of fringe habitats, particularly tidal marshes and boreal wetlands. These habitats sustain disproportionate amounts of biodiversity and are highly

threatened ecosystems globally. Their high degree of endemism makes them an ideal study system for Russ to continue investigating the early processes in the evolution of local adaptation and differentiation, and for continued conservation work. One species in particular, the Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*), an inhabitant of boreal swamps and bogs, has experienced a puzzling and startlingly sharp decline. Typical of Russ, in response to this decline, he promoted and now chairs the International Rusty Blackbird Technical Group.

Russ's innovative ideas and approaches to science keep catapulting the research forward in unexpected ways. His recent and thought-provoking papers on the bird bill as a heat radiator are but one example. This view of the bill as both a foraging structure and a heat radiator highlights the potentially widespread phenomenon of multiple selection pressures shaping traits.

Collaborative and cross-cutting projects are hallmarks of Russ's career and indicative of his open and generous nature. His work over the past 30+ years on the behavioral ecology of birds and conservation science includes more than 150 peer-reviewed publications and several books and edited volumes. A remarkable total of more than 70 postdoctoral scholars, graduate students, and research interns, many from developing countries, have studied with Russ. Over half were women or from other underrepresented groups, and nearly all have found research positions in academia, museums, or federal agencies both in the United States and abroad.

In summary, Russ Greenberg has made a significant mark on the ecology, evolution, and conservation of migratory and resident birds of the Western Hemisphere through his highly creative and innovative approaches to science. He is most deserving of the 2013 Elliott Coues Award.

*Award criteria.*—The Elliott Coues Award recognizes extraordinary contributions to ornithological research. The award is named in honor of Elliott Coues, a pioneering ornithologist of the western United States and a founding member of the AOU. There is no limitation with respect to geographic area, subdiscipline of ornithology, or 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 AOU.