

George
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AVIAN RESEARCH CENTER



The

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Disappearances in Palenque

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Cover: The Great Curassow has followed the Mayans into the history of Palenque. *Photography by* ©Patricio Robles Gil/VIREO. *Inset:* Rainforest shrouded in clouds looms behind the Temple of Inscriptions at the Mayan ruins of Palenque in Chiapas, Mexico. *Photography by* Brenda Smith-Patten.

So Goes the Forest, So Go the Birds

by Michael A. Patten

With increased human populations and subsequent pressure to develop or farm land, the rate of fragmentation of tropical rainforests has accelerated in the past several decades. How native organisms respond to such fragmentation has been the subject of intense study in temperate ecosystems and at several tropical sites in Central and South America, but there has been little study of this phenomenon in Mexico, the country bridging North America's tropical and temperate zones.

In an effort to determine to what extent forest losses have affected bird communities in southern Mexico, Héctor Gómez de Silva Garza of the Institute of Ecology at Mexico's National University in

Mexico City, Brenda D. Smith-Patten of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, and I gathered and analyzed qualitative data collected over the past half-century at Palenque, Chiapas, a popular destination for visiting birders.

As recently as the 1960s, Palenque's forest were contiguous with those of La Selva Lacandón, Middle America's largest remaining tract of rainforest. Now the protected area surrounding the famous ruins is a forested island. This loss of habitat is, sadly, on par with that elsewhere in Mexico, where average deforestation rates of 1.1–2.4% yield a minimum of 631,000 ha lost per year. In the Lacandón, including the Palenque region, deforestation rates rise to 3.5–12.4%, an alarming rate indeed. Factors contributing to forest loss include timber extraction, cattle ranching, agricultural clearing, growing human population, and road construction.

As a result of this habitat loss and fragmentation, the forest birds at Palenque have suffered to varying degrees. At least 30 species known to occur at Palenque (as a result of early studies dating back to May 1900) are now extirpated there. These species include large species such as the Crested Guan (*Penelope purpurascens*), Great Curassow (*Crax rubra*), King Vulture (*Sarcorampus papa*), and Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*), as well as smaller frugivores and insectivores such as the White-necked (*Notharchus macrorhynchos*) and White-whiskered Puffbirds (*Malacoptila panamensis*), Dot-winged Antwren (*Microrhopias quixensis*), Cinnamon Becard (*Pachyramphus cinnamomeus*), Tawny-crowned Greenlet (*Hylophilus ochraceiceps*), and Nightingale Wren (*Microcerculus philomela*). Thus, in general, as with comparable studies farther south at La Selva, Costa Rica, and on Barro Colorado Island, Panama, species lost at Palenque have been (1) large-bodied targets of hunt or capture, (2) small forest insectivores, and (3) mid-sized frugivores of forest interior.

In addition to these species, another dozen have declined significantly. By contrast, an equal number of birds have colonized Palenque since 1970, all of them species typical of savannah or scrubby second growth, including the Plain Wren (*Thryothorus modestus*), Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*), and Scrub Euphonia (*Euphonia affinis*). If loss of the rainforest continues unabated, then we can look forward to a tropical world filled with species tolerant of human disturbance but devoid of those that make the tropics what they are.



Colin Smith (newphoto@cox.net)

The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) is another species known to have colonized Palenque with the loss of surrounding rainforest..

2006 Bald Eagle Nesting Season

by M. Alan Jenkins

This will be a fairly short article because the Oklahoma Bald Eagle nesting population has not done anything different this year than many times before in breaking all new occupancy, activity, and productivity records. Not to sound blasé, but it does leave me running short of new ways to report the same annual results, and with little to write about. The minimum summary data are: 55 occupied nests (nests with adults present during the breeding season), 52 active pairs (pairs where at least one egg was laid), 41 productive pairs (pairs that reared one or more young eagles to fledging age), and a total of 62 young reared to fledging age. (Remember that these data are minimums. After the nesting season I received phone calls and e-mails about other nests that I could not confirm. So, there may be a few more nests than I can conservatively tally.)



White-tailed Ptarmigan hiding in rocks.
Photography by Don Wolfe.

Arctic valley near Anchorage.

The Wildlife Society meeting of 2006

by Don H. Wolfe

While attending a large scientific conference may not top the list of favorite things to do for some people, I have always looked forward to the opportunities I have had to attend the annual conferences of The Wildlife Society. What makes them special? It is difficult to say exactly. Is it the 500-600 oral and poster presentations? Is it the chance to rub elbows with nearly 2000 other professional wildlifers? Is it the trade show, where dozens of manufactures and vendors showcase the latest gadgetry that has become invaluable to our research? Is it seeing old friends and coworkers (there were five former "Suttonites" at the 2006 conference, two of whom were also presenters)? Is it presenting the results of our research and conservation efforts? Is it the social events, mostly planned to improve networking? Is it the plenary session that discusses, at length, important and relevant issues we are now or soon will be facing in our conservation efforts? The answer to all of these questions is "yes", but it is oftentimes more than that. This year, the location of the 13th annual T.W.S. Conference had its own appeal. The site chosen for this year's conference was Anchorage, Alaska. Since I had never been to Alaska before, I was eager to attend and planned my itinerary so that I would have a couple of extra days to see more of Alaska than downtown Anchorage. Of course, two extra days doesn't allow for much sight-seeing, but still better than none at all. Our presentation, a poster entitled "Lesser Prairie-Chicken habitat use: predator avoidance or thermoregulation?" was well visited and received. Being especially interested in grouse, I was eager to see or read the numerous grouse presentations, which were dominated by sage grouse papers. Likewise, I was eager to try to see some of the grouse found in Alaska. There are six species of grouse native to the area; Rock, Willow, and White-tailed Ptarmigan abound in the nearby mountains, Ruffed and Spruce Grouse in the forested areas, and Sharp-tailed Grouse can be found further inland. While I can not say that I am disappointed, I still can not believe that I did not see the Willow or Rock Ptarmigan; maybe a couple of more days would have made a difference. I did, however see a number of Spruce Grouse and White-tailed Ptarmigan, the latter of which were in transition between their summer and winter plumage. It is truly amazing how well, in this transitional phase, they blended into the recent patchy snow. Just as I have observed, when they are in summer plumage against rocks in the alpine, a ptarmigan that just sits still essentially cannot be seen. I often wonder how many I have walked past in Colorado, New Mexico, and now Alaska. And, to wrap things up, I will answer the one question that it seems everyone wants to ask: Yes, ptarmigan DO taste like chicken (prairie-chicken, that is).

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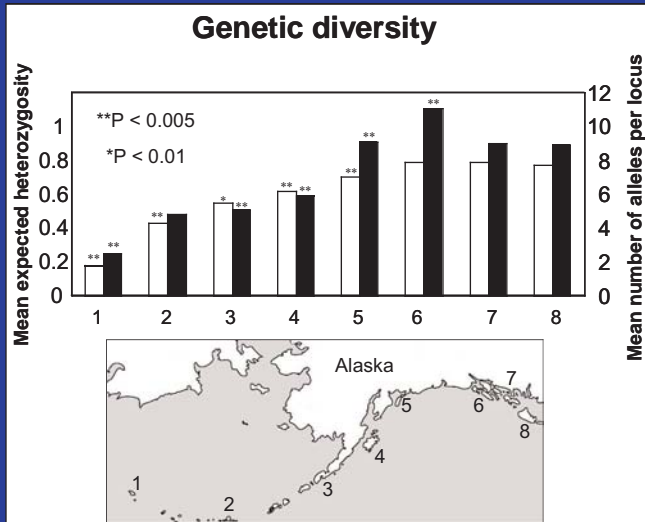
Last year's data for the same nesting categories as above are: 53, 49, 34, and 51 respectively. The previous record high counts for these categories, and the years in which they occurred are: 53 (2005), 49, (2005), 34 (2005), and 56 (2003).

There was a major hiccup in this year's survey: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which had been providing two aerial survey flights that covered the bulk of the Oklahoma Bald Eagle nesting range, re-assigned the air time (read, "money") to another, and more urgent, project. This meant that I had to survey all the eagle nests for productivity (the second of my two annual aerial counts) from the ground this year, and it appears that will be the case from here on out. It shouldn't have any effects on the project. It will only mean that it will take me longer to gather the data; however, there will be fewer chances to spot previously unknown nests that are sometimes found while in the air flying from one nest to another.

As you already know, the Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed that the Bald Eagle be downlisted from its current threatened status and taken completely off the Service's List of Endangered and Threatened Plants and Animals. We expect that to happen sooner rather than later, but we have no firm date. When it happens we will celebrate; we hope you will too.

The Giant Song Sparrows of Attu Island

by Christy L. Pruett



Top: Left to Right; Museum specimens of Song Sparrows from locations in Alaska, British Columbia, and the Eastern US. Photography by Christy Pruett. Bottom: Loss of genetic diversity in Pacific Northwest Song Sparrows, locations correspond to 1) Attu Island, 2) Adak Island, 3) Alaska Peninsula, 4) Kodiak Island, 5) Copper River Delta, 6) Alexander Archipelago, 7) Hyder, 8) Queen Charlotte Islands, BC.

as big as the birds seen in Oklahoma and are much darker in plumage. In addition, if you'd stopped off in British Columbia, southeast Alaska, mainland Alaska, and then Adak Island (about midway out to Attu) the Song Sparrows would have gotten progressively bigger the further away from British Columbia you traveled. Why is this so? I began to examine this question in my PhD research by using museum specimens and molecular genetic tools, i.e. DNA.

By using DNA markers, I was able to infer historical relationships among populations, changes in population size over time, and relative movements of individuals. Based on this research I found that the giant Song Sparrows of Attu Island are genetically different from other Song Sparrow populations in Alaska and that movement from or to Attu Island is very limited or non-existent. These are important findings from a conservation standpoint because this is a relatively small (~5,000 - 10,000 individuals) and isolated population that is unique. In addition, by studying the genetics of Attu Island Song Sparrows in relation to other populations I found a pattern of repetitive population bottlenecks (Pruett and Winker 2005, *Molecular Ecology* 14:1421-1434).

What is a population bottleneck? Think of it in relation to a bottle of wine. In the bottle there is a large amount of wine, but only a small amount can pass through the bottleneck at any given time. In biological terms a bottleneck occurs when a large population with many individuals (in the bottle) is reduced in size down to a few individuals (passing through the bottleneck). When this occurs it leaves a genetic imprint on the population of less genetic diversity. Losses in diversity are often measured in terms of heterozygosity and number of alleles per locus, with lower heterozygosity and fewer alleles per locus indicating lower genetic diversity of the population. In island populations, a genetic signature of a bottleneck is often caused by a few individuals colonizing the island from a large mainland source population. This is known as a founder event. If individuals from the source continue to colonize the island then a bottleneck pattern will not be found, but if the island is colonized only once or very rarely, then a genetic signature of a bottleneck will be apparent. In Alaska Song Sparrows there is a repeated pattern of

Attu Island is not a tropical paradise; it is cold, windy, and generally inhospitable. It lies at the end of the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, an archipelago that juts into the North Pacific Ocean. This high latitude geography makes Attu chilly year-round, but also makes it a North American birding hotspot. Attu lies about 400 miles from Asia, and in the spring and fall many birds migrating to and from Asia will make a stop on Attu. First North American records are not uncommon, and this draws the hardy birder to chase Asian rarities such as Spoonbill Sandpiper, Siberian Rubythroat, and Oriental Cuckoo. I have been to Attu Island twice and have seen many of these rarities, but my real reason for going was to study Attu's resident birds, the forgotten and underappreciated members of the Aleutian avifauna. Song Sparrows are the Rodney Dangerfield of Attu Island birds... they get no respect. For example, in the book *Attu: Birding on the Edge* (ABA, Colorado Springs, CO, 2003) Larry Balch states "...I had a start when I saw a dark, almost thrush-sized bird. Instead of being some Asian rarity, though, it was *just* Attu's version of a Song Sparrow"(italics added).

You might agree with Larry; after all, Song Sparrows are a ubiquitous North American passerine, so why are Attu Song Sparrows interesting? Let's say you are traveling west from New York City going on an around the world tour. When you stop on Attu, that is the last place you will see a Song Sparrow until you get back to New York. Attu is the end of the line for Song Sparrows in the west. When you hopped off the plane on Attu you would notice something very striking about these Song Sparrows. They are giants. The residents of Attu are about twice

The North American Ornithological Conference and the River of Raptors

by Dan L. Reinking

Most professional ornithological societies hold an annual meeting at which scientific papers and posters are presented, and at which society business takes place. Every few years beginning in the 1990s, several of these ornithological societies in North America hold a joint meeting called the North American Ornithological Conference (NAOC). The fourth of these joint conferences was held in Veracruz, Mexico, in early October, a date coinciding with one of the largest raptor migration events in the world. Hawks and vultures migrating south from the U.S. and Canada reach the Gulf Coast, and rather than flying across the water, they hug the east coast of Mexico, funneling into a narrowing of the gulf plain around Veracruz in what has been called a “Rio de Rapaces”, or “River of Raptors”. Consider these numbers: Some four million raptors, including two million Broad-winged Hawks, make their way through the Veracruz area each fall. Add another two million Turkey Vultures, and the scale of the migration is simply astounding. Sharp-eyed, official hawk counters are stationed at several observation points to record the daily tally, and birders from around the world converge to witness the spectacle. One of these observation sites is the roof of a hotel in downtown José Cardel (population about 30,000), an incongruous place to find a group of international birders with spotting scopes and tripods!

NAOC meetings are always well attended, but the lure of the raptor migration and the 700-plus species of birds to be found in the state of Veracruz drew over 1,700 ornithologists from around the world and made this meeting the largest ever. Despite the birding temptations, and despite having eight concurrent sessions to accommodate all of the research papers, each scientific session was busy and the evening poster sessions were very well attended. The Sutton Center contributed two scientific posters, one dealing with habitat features that affect the probability of a grassland bird nest being parasitized by the Brown-headed Cowbird, and the other showing changes in bird species composition that have occurred at Palenque, an important ancient Mayan site in Mexico, as the surrounding forests have been cut down (see article, page 2).



Note how the gulf coastal plain (shown in green) narrows just to the northwest of Veracruz, forcing what is normally a broad front of southward migrating raptors into a narrow area between the Gulf of Mexico and the mountains (shown in brown), creating the concentrated "River of Raptors" that makes hawk migration in Veracruz so astonishing.

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losses of genetic diversity with each step away from the likely source location on the mainland of North America. With each "founding step" more and more genetic diversity is lost until the last step to Attu Island. Attu Island Song Sparrows have very low genetic diversity, with measures equivalent to many critically endangered vertebrates.

The geographic location of Attu, its remote location at the end of the distribution of Song Sparrows, is likely to be the overriding factor in shaping the divergence of Attu Song Sparrows. Although there is not a direct link between genetic bottlenecks and increased body size, it is likely that losses in diversity coupled with the harsh weather conditions of the Aleutian Islands have caused the rapid evolution of this morphology. Bigger individuals are better able to withstand cold temperatures. In the coming years, research will evaluate this “bigger is better” hypothesis using genetics and breeding experiments. Whatever the outcomes of these studies, my research has convinced me that Attu Song Sparrows are the most interesting bird on Attu Island. If you are ever lucky enough to go to Attu, then spend a few seconds appreciating the lowly Song Sparrow before you run for that lifer... after all, you can always go to Europe to see a Hawfinch but you can only go to Attu to see a giant Attu Song Sparrow.

Wild Brew 2006

by Kim Shannon



The Sutton Center was the proud beneficiary and host of the 8th annual Wild Brew event on Saturday, August 12th, 2006. The Wild Brew committee and especially our Wild Brew co-chairs, Marilyn Morris and Lisa Riggs, worked diligently and tirelessly to make this event successful once again.

Our major sponsors this year included the Tulsa World, John Steele Zink Foundation, Arby's, H.A. and Mary K. Chapman Charitable Trust, F&M Bank and Trust Company, Riggs Abney Neal Turpen Orbison & Lewis law firm, Deisenroth Gas Products, SemGroup L.P., Walsh Associates, Class Act Party Rentals, Urban Tulsa Weekly, TravelHost Tulsa and Preview magazines, Ranch Acres Wine and Spirits, Toni's Flowers and Gifts, Tulsa Direct Mail, The Sneed Foundation, The Oxley Foundation, Riverbrook Animal Hospital, Frisco Title Corporation, Secrest, Hill and Butler, Summit Bank, APSCO Professional Service Co., HMT Inc., Sutton Board members Mr. John Brock, Steve and Vickie Adams, Harold Price, George and Marty Kamp, Lee Holcombe and many other generous individuals.

During our early "sponsors only" hour, we had the opportunity to show off one of the many talents of one of our education program birds, Merlin, the Moluccan Cockatoo. Ryan VanZant has trained Merlin to paint by holding a brush in his beak, selecting paint and then artistically applying it to paper. Steve Sherrod auctioned off a select group of Merlin's paintings (done in OU, OSU and TU colors) during our sponsor hour. The three paintings, which sold for \$150.00 each, were a hit with the Wild Brew guests!

One outstanding aspect of this and all Wild Brew events is the selection of beers presented to our guests. The combination of familiar, favorite and new beers gets better each year. One of the new and more popular beers this year was Cristal from Peru. The crowd favorites included Choc from Krebs, Oklahoma; Fosters of Australia; Boulevard from Kansas City; and the various Pyramid beer selections.

We also had some new restaurant participants this year including Brothers Pizza Depot, Bodean Seafood, Cosmo Café, Rib Crib, and Kal's Chop House. Some regular favorites such as In the Raw, Kilkennys, and Tekei's Asian cuisine shared a diverse variety of food at Wild Brew again this year. But there was one restaurant that served more food to more people than any other during our event this year: Cowboy Sharkie's. We are very grateful to Cowboy Sharkie's for their time, effort, and more than anything, their great barbeque! Their efforts to stay until the very end of Wild Brew were greatly appreciated by one and all!

On the evening of October 11th, the Sutton Center held a thank you dinner for the committee members and sponsors of Wild Brew 2006. The Wild Brew "left-overs" were iced down and ready for our guests as they started arriving around 6:15pm. Gary Neal (of Riggs Abney) and Board member, Jerry Parkhurst (of Mrs. DeHaven's Flower Shop and The Gadget Company), not only grilled steaks for the group of 55 or so but they also provided all the meal including a beautiful salad, marinated asparagus, bread, and a sinful chocolate and peanut dessert. After dinner, our educational bird trainers, Ryan and Cheryl, showed off some birds to our guests. All in all, it was an enjoyable evening and good to catch up with the Wild Brew committee. Many thanks to Gary Neal, Jerry Parkhurst, Kris Koepsel and others who delivered our Tulsa guests to the Sutton Center and returned them home safely.

The Sutton Center is greatly appreciative of the Wild Brew committee members, sponsors and dedicated volunteers that make our events, both large and small, such great successes. Another note of gratitude goes to all the Wild Brew guests who attend faithfully each year to support conservation efforts in Oklahoma and beyond.

We look forward to seeing you at Wild Brew 2007!



Dan Reinking



Dan Reinking



Dan Reinking



Dan Reinking



Dan Reinking

It's All About Birds!

The Sutton Center's educational program *It's All About Birds!* continues to captivate and excite adults and children alike. The following are excerpts from **Cyndie Browning's** email "When Timing is Everything", received Saturday, September 30th, 2006:

Hello, Oklahoma ~

I decided to run over to the Gilcrease Museum and pick up my tickets for Sunday's performance of "It's All About Birds!," the educational program developed by the Sutton Avian Research Center in Bartlesville.

Upon receiving my tickets, I was asking the lady at the counter where the auditorium was and about getting tickets for the Audubon exhibit itself, when a young woman walked up to the counter and volunteered that "we're practicing the show in the auditorium right now!" I asked if I could watch, and she said, "well, sure. We need some faces in the audience anyhow so the birds get used to the idea that people are there." So I followed her over to the auditorium, and boy, did I get a treat!!

"The audience" consisted of me, the young woman who'd invited me to watch the practice session, and one of the museum's security officers, and I listened with interest and amusement to the banter between the young man/trainer who conducts the show and his helpers backstage [while] they were still arranging and organizing the bird-cages backstage.

And so the walk-through began. The trainer made a few introductory remarks, and at the appropriate cue, Elbie the Red-shouldered Hawk was released from his holding cage at the back of the auditorium and flew down to the stage, landing neatly on the young man's gloved hand.

In due course, the trainer asked for "volunteers." My hand shot up quick as a flash!! and what do you know?! I got picked!! (That never happens in real life.) I walked down to the front of the auditorium and was invited to sit in a chair just below the stage, facing those holding cages in the back of the room. The trainer said, "pretend you're holding a video camera," so I did. A few minutes later, Banshee the Barn Owl was released from his holding cage and flew directly at my face!!! veering up over my head at the very last minute to land on the fake tree stump behind me and gobble up his treat. Well, I tell ya what: you haven't REAL-LLLLLY seen a Barn Owl until you've seen one coming directly at you!! What a Thrill!

Merlin the Cockatoo came out to show off his vocabulary of noises, words, and tricks. Lola the Black Vulture hopped out to get a few treats. Beaker the Abyssinian Ground Hornbill came out and gave the fake green snake in the box at the trainer's feet a couple of good shakes, getting a treat each time. Zephyr and Arroyo, the two Harris's Hawks, came out and each flew back and forth between the two trainers a few times. It was pure joy for me to watch Arroyo fly around the room in close quarters, where he never got out of naked-eye view (as opposed to trying to keep a flying bird in view through binoculars).

But for me, the treat of the day was when Russell the American Crow was introduced to "the audience." A few minutes before Russell came out, the trainer brought dollar bills to me and the other young woman in the audience to be used in the trick.

"What, you don't have a \$100 bill?" I asked when he handed the dollar to me.

"Hey, that's MY joke!" he answered with a laugh.

Then Russell came out from backstage and hopped up on the trainer's hand. The trainer told the young woman (who stood nearer the stage than I was) to stand up and hold her arm out to her side with the dollar bill folded in half in her fingers. She did so. The trainer sent Russell to the young woman to retrieve her dollar bill. Russell then flew back to the trainer and neatly dropped the dollar bill in the trainer's pocket, then just as neatly flew the dollar bill back to the young woman. Cute trick!

I LOVE BIRDS!! And yesterday, I had a Barn Owl (my FAVORITE owl!!) fly right at my face, little Banshee, and an American Crow named Russell landed on my hand, picked up the dollar bill I held and took it to the trainer, then brought it back to me. I held a real crow in my hand TWO times.

Yes, life IS good, but timing is everything!

You haven't REALLLLLLY seen a Barn Owl until you've seen one coming directly at you!!



Dan Reinking



Dan Reinking

It was pure joy for me to watch Arroyo fly around the room in close quarters....

Cyndie Browning

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Dr. Christin L. Pruett Joins Sutton Center Research Efforts

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Christy Pruett is now working diligently as part of the Sutton Center team in our postdoctoral research position. She is not exactly new to Sutton, as she was employed during our declining prairie songbirds studies in the early 90's as part of the MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) mistnetting effort. Most recently, Christy returns to Oklahoma from the University of Alaska in Fairbanks where she received her PhD and also worked as a research associate and affiliate studying the population genetics of birds as vectors of emerging infectious diseases. While in Fairbanks she also served as an adjunct faculty member while teaching ornithology. Her background is diverse, as prior to her experience in Alaska she was at Texas A&M where she studied population and conservation genetics of marine fish species using molecular markers.

Christy has extensive museum experience, too, as a curatorial assistant at the University of Alaska Museum where she had numerous responsibilities ranging from specimen preparation to maintenance of the frozen tissue collection (after all, this was in Alaska!). She has an extensive list of publications as well as numerous grants and awards, and she serves as a reviewer for several scientific journals. Not only does Christy like to play tennis, but she is also a serious backpacker who has hiked the Appalachian Trail as well the Pacific Crest Trail. We are delighted to welcome Christy as part of our staff.



Dan Reinking

During years spent at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, Christin Pruett became a skilled preparator of bird study skins. Here she puts the finishing touches on a Lazuli Bunting that died upon colliding with a window. Study skins provide valuable teaching and research opportunities, and the Sutton Center's small collection will benefit from Christy's attention.

Sutton Center Annual Picnic

by Kim A. Shannon

On Saturday, May 20th, 2006 the Sutton Center held its annual picnic in appreciation of all our supporters. It was an unusually hot day for May, but attendance was high and we think it turned out to be our best annual picnic yet!

This year we had many new activities to enjoy. First and foremost, we were proud to present to our guests an abbreviated version of our live, educational bird program, *It's All About Birds!* Members of the Sutton staff led many new activities including bird feeder construction, "Eagle nest" photos, and a nature walk. Established and favorite activities, such as the bird banding and falconry demonstrations, remained a big hit. There was one other new aspect to our annual picnic this year; the Sutton Center co-hosted the Oklahoma Falconers' Association annual meeting.

As noon approached, the music of Finnegans Awake entertained and soothed the hungry masses. But, as lunch was served, the show-stopper of the day was let loose on the lawn; a 24 foot long Reticulated Python belonging to Bob Clark of Oklahoma City! The crowd was amazed by the huge snake that weighed nearly 300 pounds!

Many thanks to the volunteers from the Riggs Abney Law Firm, ConocoPhillips, and friends and family who drove shuttle vans, cooked, sold our Breeding Bird Atlas and t-shirts, assisted with activities and helped in so many ways that day. We would also like to thank the Oklahoma Falconers' Association for their participation with their birds. The picnic would not have been such a success without you! From large corporations, foundations and trusts to the individual bird enthusiast, friends and family, we greatly appreciate your continued support and encouragement. We hope you will join us again for next year's picnic!

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M. Alan Jenkins



M. Alan Jenkins

Dan Reinking



Dan Reinking

A Few Words from the Executive Director...

I have been thinking about a trip to Wyoming within a few days with Ryan, a Sutton colleague, camping atop the high plains in freezing weather, warming with the shepherd's stove in my large, double-walled, Sherman tent, and hunting sage grouse with my falcon, something I have done most of the last 35 years. Not that we will catch many grouse, but we will hopefully catch some, taken in spectacular 250 mph stoops as the raptor hurtles from perhaps a thousand feet with a roaring through its feathers as the speedy grouse hug the ground and fly toward the safety of high sage along the rivers. And yes, we will eat any grouse caught, as did our predecessors, but it is not the meager number of grouse in the bag that count; it is the time with our birds, dogs, and friends, as well as the time in wild places that really make the experience so meaningful. And so it is in this vein that I think of the history of birds and man, and why our human species has been drawn to and linked so inextricably to these feathered creatures.

I recall the ancient, bird-figured petroglyphs and pictographs I observed on boulders in Russia and Kazakhstan and Tanzania as well as in the Oklahoma panhandle, the eagle-feathered war bonnets along with shields adorned with Prairie Falcon primaries of the Sioux, and the falcon-headed, human-torsoed god Horus, that represented the sun to the Egyptians. I think of the domestication of chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys for food as well as the market hunters' sneak boats sporting cannons that slaughtered great rafts of ducks in the first half of the last century. I think of the millions of birds that are kept as pets all over the world including pigeons, parrots, and mynahs. (My own childhood experiences of growing up with Inky the crow from the time I was three and in raising and caring for my Mourning Dove for two years when a bit older come to mind in the pet department. There were no laws prohibiting such activity in those days.) I am amazed that according to the latest survey results, some \$89.1 billion were spent in 2001 by wildlife watchers in the United States consisting primarily of birders to include the travels of serious life-listers, back yard bird feeder enthusiasts, binocular and photographic purchases, etc.; I am not surprised, however, that birding is the fastest growing outdoor activity or that it certainly contributes more significantly to the national economy than do most of the Fortune 500 companies.

I think of today's extensive, avian-oriented, scientific meetings such as that of the American Ornithological Society recently held in Mexico and attended by Sutton Director of Research Dr. Michael Patten and Sutton Senior Biologist Dan Reinking, both of whom were able to supplement their experience with some regional birding, or that of The Wildlife Society held in Alaska and attended by Sutton Senior Biologist Don Wolfe who was able to enjoy, in addition to the meeting, some local ptarmigan hunting.

I consider the efforts to prevent the decline or complete disappearance of individual bird species such as the successful program of the Sutton Center and our colleagues toward re-establishing the Bald Eagle in the contiguous U.S. or those of the Peregrine Fund and others toward helping the Aplomado Falcon or California Condor survive once again in the wilds of our nation. Similar challenges face the USFWS and other conservation groups with Attwater's Prairie-Chicken and numerous other avian species.

And I am delighted to hear from the parents of students who have been in the audience at our new, educational, free-flighted bird show and who, we are told, cannot stop talking about what they saw and learned. I am also happy to have received so many e-mails from those who are fascinated by what they learned this last year watching the Sutton Center's Bald Eagle nest cameras.

But, overall, the question is why? Why are we humans so interested in birds, so interested in wildlife in general? I think, really, it is more than birds; it is the big picture, the picture composed of living things. It is the wildness from which we have come, and the wild things in wild places that we still need to be part of as our natural heritage, our natural history. That is why people who are planning vacations, people who are seeking peace and relaxation head out of the neighborhoods to natural areas from mountains to prairies and from oceans to lakes and streams where wildlife exists in abundance; and why those same vacationers do not head to the concrete, the blacktop, the office, or the high rise to garner some relief from their artificial existence. But my ponderings must be in error, at least with regard to the will of most people, because as a society we continue to destroy daily the habitat associated with the former by covering it with more of the latter.

Please support the work of the Sutton Center in educating the country's next generation about the wonder of birds and the habitats that they need in order to survive, and help support our research and resulting conservation projects on which our education efforts are built. We need your help!



Steve Sherrod, Executive Director

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M. Alan Jenkins

M. Alan Jenkins

It's All About Birds! made an appearance at Bartlesville High School! On October 10th, 2006, over 800 students from Central and Madison Middle Schools watched with delight as birds flew over their heads, ran across the stage, and interacted with volunteers. We'd like to share with you some of the wonderful letters we received from Central Middle School students regarding the educational bird program. Thank you to Bartlesville High School for the use of the Performing Arts Center. Special thanks to Ricky Newkirk and her students for all of their help and hard work.

Thank you SO MUCH for letting us see your AWESOME show. I think we all enjoyed it. Your hard work and patience have payed off.

Sincerely,
Alexis [REDACTED]

I recently went to your program at the H School and was fascinated by the many birds. You showed us how animals cope with man-made products.

Sincerely,
Royce [REDACTED]

I think you guys should come and do it again next year. All of us 7th graders were so fascinated by the birds. When everyone got back they were all talking about it. Well, its cool to know what animals are endangered, that way we can help. The more people know it is killing the animals. The more they'll try to keep the contry clean. The birds were awesome.

Sincerely,
Christin [REDACTED]

I also thought it was interesting to hear that almost half of the prarie chickens that die die from flying into barbed wire fences.

Thank you so much again for coming. It was awesome to see the bald eagle.

with much appreciation,
Tim [REDACTED]

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- 10 The Sutton Newsletter** *Continued on page 11*

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