

Newsletter pieces:

From the Executive Director

I hope you are having a wonderful summer!

Welcome to the second edition of our newsletter, and to an update on the programs and current projects of the WFVZ. As some of you may already have noted, we now have an updated brochure, which describes the 4 primary emphases of the WFVZ: Specimen Acquisition and Preservation, Information-sharing, Education, and Field Research. In each of these programs we are growing and expanding, and in this issue of the newsletter the staff is pleased to share some details of the changes.

The next Annual Open House at the Foundation is scheduled for October 23rd, from 2-4 pm. I encourage those of you who have never visited the WFVZ to come see it... It really is a great place. Also, for those of you who have been here before, I encourage you to come back, meet with friends, and swap stories. We now have more than 85 members of the WFVZ, and we expect many of them to be with us at the Party!

Best wishes,
Dr. Linnea S. Hall

Our Education Program

The WFVZ has expanded its *Education Program* over the past few years. For example, from 1999 to 2004, our tours for classes increased by more than four times, tours for civic and other public groups increased by more than three times, and presentations and workshops at events outside the Foundation increased by six times. Currently, school tours are given on a by-appointment basis for students from 4th grade through college. Information presented on tours dovetails with California Science Standards so that teachers can make it fit effectively into their education requirements. Covered subjects include bird biology, biodiversity, and conservation (and of course, info about the biggest and smallest birds and eggs of the world!). The WFVZ's teaching collection materials, such as the live mounts, are always popular with kids and adults and are key to informing the public about our natural world. All tours are conducted free of charge.

Staff of the WFVZ also take teaching materials to select presentations and workshops, and they are always popular. For example, early in 2004 the Foundation had booths at the Ventura County Science Fair and the Earth Day Fair at the new, local California State University (CSU) Channel Islands. Hundreds of visitors attended these events, including many low-income minority families. Events such as these are a great way to educate youth about the natural world, the biological sciences, and the need for conservation of natural resources.

The Foundation also makes teaching material loans, for free, to local educators, and has lesson plans to accompany them. We offer training in study skin preparation and have internships for upper-division college undergraduate and graduate students. We also want to begin offering classes in ornithology, oology and nidology, and museum curation techniques to local college students, and a summer natural history class for local high school youth.

We hope to teach these classes in our own “multi-purpose room” at the Foundation, which we are currently raising funds for now. If you would like more information about our education outreach, and would like to participate, please contact Linnea at (805) 388-9944 or linnea@wfvz.org.

Our Field Research Program

As you may recall from our last newsletter (and if you have visited our website recently [www.wfvz.org]), starting in 2001, René Corado, Collections Manager of the WFVZ, initiated a long-term research program with the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC) and the Museo de Historia Natural de Guatemala (Natural History Museum of Guatemala) to document Guatemalan birds, nests, and eggs in areas where native vegetation was being rapidly cleared for agriculture, cattle grazing, and other land development. Another important objective was to teach Guatemalan biology students, residents, government resource managers, and natural history museum staff about the diversity of the birds of Guatemala, and about techniques for proper curation of museum specimens.

Starting in 2004, staff from the WFVZ began working with other Universities in Guatemala, including the Universidad del Valle, and with a USAC project to teach elementary school teachers in central Guatemala about the flora and fauna of the region. In addition, this spring we began expanding our fieldwork to include long-term population monitoring (banding and point counts of birds) in arid central Guatemala, and we formed partnerships with other conservation organizations working in the same region, e.g., The Nature Conservancy and Fundación Defensores de la Naturaleza (Defenders of Natural Areas). These partners are already working in the higher elevations of the watershed of the Rio Motagua, where we will be conducting monitoring, and are similarly very interested in documenting changes in animal and plant populations occurring in the dry thorn-scrub vegetation of the valleys. We are proud to have the opportunity to work with such great organizations, especially since our projects are also being designed to help improve the socio-economic status of Guatemalan people who live in the harsh central-Guatemala region.

Our Specimen Acquisition and Preservation Program

From 2002 to 2004, the Western Foundation was fortunate to receive a collection of endangered native birds and eggs from Hawaii to prepare as specimens. The birds had

been part of a captive breeding program at the Maui and Keahou Bird Conservation Centers in Hawaii. Because of their rarity and endangered status, some of these birds are new additions to the Foundation's collections. The specimens include Palila (*Psittirostra bailleui*), 'I'iwi (*Vestiaria coccinea*), Hawai'i 'Amakihi (*Loxops virens*), and Hawaiian Goose or Nene (*Branta sandvicensis*), as well as eggs from the Hawaiian Crow or 'Alala (*Corvus tropicus*), and the Small Kauai Thrush (*Phaeornis palmeri*).

Many of these endemic species are on the brink of extinction. Habitat loss on the Hawaiian Islands as well as diseases and predators from the mainland (e.g., rats, mongoose, and domestic cats) constantly threaten these isolated populations. By 2002, the last wild pair of Hawaiian Crows ('Alala) had stopped breeding and they are now extinct in the wild. Introduced feral pigs and cattle have destroyed much of the 'ie'ie (*Freycinetia arborea*), a native vine that is a major source of food and habitat for 'Alala. There are only 50 'Alala left in the world, all retained for the captive breeding program. With luck, birds hatched and raised in captivity will start being released back into the wild in 2008. The Western Foundation received 25 'Alala eggs in 2003, which now represents the second largest egg collection in the world for this species.

The importance and value of these specimens to research, conservation, and education is immeasurable. For example, the specimens from Hawaii can serve to inform researchers about the quality of the quality of the eggs of captive versus wild birds; whether there is any chemical contamination of the eggs; and whether captive birds have the same physical characteristics as wild birds. Eggs from other species in the WFVZ's collections have been used for chemical analysis of pesticide levels such as DDT for species like the Brown Pelican (*Pelicanus occidentalis*) and Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), and have assisted in their recovery. Since some of our specimens date as far back as the early 1800s, and are useful in monitoring changes in the chemical or physical makeup of a species' eggs over time. DNA samples taken from study skin specimens can help determine taxonomic relationships between species as well as genetic changes in species or subspecies over time. Feathers are also now being used to help identify migratory patterns based on isotope ratios.

Thus, avian specimens play a vital role in the conservation of wild bird species. Without them, researchers would be extremely limited in their ability to rehabilitate species and restore their habitats. The Western Foundation is proud to be a repository for this kind of information, and to assist researchers in their efforts towards conservation of bird species around the world.

Needs of the WFVZ

Our biggest projects right now are to build our multi-purpose room, to add cabinets to the collection range, and to replace two old computers with new ones. If you are interested in supporting these needs, please contact us!

Also, the Museo de Historia Natural de Guatemala is in desperate need of two specimen cabinets and a freezer to adequately take care of their teaching and research collections.

The Museum provides outreach to thousands of Guatemalan students every year, educating them about ecology and biodiversity, and the specimens they receive are vital for their educational displays. However, high humidity and heat, coupled with many insects, is threatening their specimens. The materials they need will cost only \$1,500, and we are hoping to raise them by December, when René returns to Guatemala to conduct fieldwork for the WFVZ. If you would like to contribute to the “Museo Fund”, please contact René at 805/388-9944 or rene@wfvz.org.

Scholarship Fund

As a tribute to Ed N. Harrison, founder of the WFVZ, the Foundation will provide two \$300 scholarships annually to graduate students conducting field research projects on the breeding biology of birds. Projects should investigate questions that directly relate to the conservation of threatened or endangered species in Central or South America. Scholarships will be awarded for use toward field equipment and travel. Applications are due 15 October 2004, and awards will be made in November 2004. Please contact Linnea for more information. Please note that all donations to this fund will go toward the student scholarships, and that any donations made to the fund are tax-deductible.