

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTARY

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The Neotropical Ornithological Society (NOS) enters its 21st year in 2008. Founded in 1987, the NOS was formed with the objective of promoting the scientific study of Neotropical birds and their habitats. This objective was to be realized by facilitating the exchange of scientific information and by facilitating the study of birds in Latin America and the Caribbean by members and affiliated groups. One way the society meets this objective is through publication of the society's journal *Ornitología Neotropical*, which was initiated in 1990. The journal accepts papers dealing with studies on Neotropical birds conducted by resident and non-resident ornithologists of the region, but it also accepts papers dealing with any of kind of birds provided that the study has been conducted by an ornithologist residing in the Neotropical region. This journal plays an important role in disseminating scientific information on Neotropical birds and is the only international scientific journal devoted to bird studies in the region. Our journal is published four times a year with approximately 660 pages per volume, a marked increase from biannual publication and approximately 140 pages per volume in the journal's early years. Not only has the journal grown in terms of the number of articles published per year, but the proportion of articles written by ornithologists native to and resident in the Neotropics has also grown to the point where recently over half of the authors publishing in the journal are now from the region..

As a means of furthering the exchange of scientific information related to the study of Neotropical birds, the NOS has sponsored eight Neotropical ornithological congresses held at four-year intervals throughout the region and plans to hold its ninth congress in Peru in 2011. The most recent congress held in May 2007 in Maturín, Venezuela, was co-sponsored by the Venezuelan Union of Ornithologists and illustrates how far interest in ornithology has grown in the region. For instance, this recent congress was attended by 388 registered participants, of which 72% were from Latin America and the Caribbean. The largest delegations from the region were from Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina; others came from North America (the United States had the largest delegation in attendance), Europe, Africa, and Australia. Most gratifying to the NOS and congress organizers, however, was the participation of 166 students (43% of the congress registrants). Eighty-two of these students competed successfully for travel awards provided by the organizers and NOS that allowed the students to partially finance their congress attendance. The high proportion of student participants in the recent congress bodes well for the future of ornithology in the Neotropics.

To increase the ability of students from the region to study Neotropical birds the Francois Vuilleumier Fund for Research on Neotropical Birds was established by the NOS in 2004 to provide small research grants to graduate students from Latin America and the Caribbean. Seed money for the fund's endowment was provided by an initial donation of \$10,000, which has grown to approximately \$47,000, mostly through continued donations. The fund's investments are to be managed as an endowment and only interest and dividends are to be used for annual

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awards, which are approximately \$500 each. These grants are awarded annually on a competitive basis, with proposals evaluated by an international committee of ornithologists. The first student grants were provided in 2005 to three of seven applicants followed by a grant to one of six applicants in 2006, and two of five applicants in 2007. This year, ten students have applied to the fund for support. Further information regarding the fund can be found on the NOS web site at: <http://www.ibiologia.unam.mx/links/neo/neo.html>, or by contacting the chair of the fund, Dr. John Blake at: John_Blake@umsl.edu. Despite the fund's success to date however, there is still a critical need to enlarge the fund's endowment to enable the NOS to insure adequate funding on an annual basis for all qualified student applicants, many of whom we are currently unable to assist fully or even partially. Therefore we encourage contributions to the fund's endowment to enable the society to increase its ability to support graduate research in the region.

The growth of Neotropical ornithology and especially the increase in studies by ornithologists born in the region and their increased contributions to the society's journal as well as active participation in its congresses was especially gratifying to the society's founder and first President, Dr. Mario A. Ramos Olmos. The NOS in its recent congress paid tribute to Mario for his many contributions to ornithology and conservation in the Neotropics, especially in his homeland of Mexico (see Rappole 2007, *Auk* 124:1093-1095 for a complete memorandum). A conservation fund, in memory of Mario who passed way last year, has been established by the NOS and information can be found at NOS web site and donations to the fund are encouraged. The society continues Mario's vision to promote Neotropical ornithology by facilitating the exchange of scientific information related to Neotropical birds and by increasing the ability of its members and associated groups to study the birds of the region. To continue this positive momentum, we encourage those who are not members of the Neotropical Ornithological Society to join the society and assist in fostering the growth of ornithology in the Neotropics. Membership information is available on the society's web site or via communication with the Treasurer, Dr. Catherine Lindell, lindellc@msu.edu.