William Brewster Memorial Award, 1988

Robert B. Payne

Robert B. Payne's research is imaginative, consistently of the highest quality, and of the kind that characterizes the best ornithological work. It is concerned with song relationships and choice of mate, breeding strategies, clutch sizes and brood parasitism, and analyses of speciation and evolutionary relationships.

In his studies of bird song, Payne has handraised young Indigo Buntings in different social and song environments, compared the songs of related birds in wild populations, and observed changes in the songs of wild adult birds over many bird lifetimes. This work is highly original in the field of animal behavior. There are no previous studies comparing the songs that birds develop to both their genetic and social relationships, either in experiments or in natural populations. Payne's ten-year work with Indigo Buntings has compared the survival and lifetime success of individuals in relation to their song behavior, in a test of the biological significance of alternative behaviors.

Payne's ecological work has ranged from evolutionary studies on brood parasitism to studies of dispersal and mating systems. Although this award is in recognition of studies conducted in the Western Hemisphere, it is noted that Payne's work on the parasitic African Village Indigobird is the outstanding study done in the Old World tropics on the social organization of any polygynous species. The study is important for its theoretical contribution in the field of sexual selection. Payne's application of both phenetic and cladistic techniques to an analysis of the Family Ardeidae is an important comparison of various analytic techniques.

Robert B. Payne has continued to produce major publications in ornithology over the past 27 years. It is with great respect that we honor him with the highest award of the American Ornithologists' Union, the William Brewster Memorial Award.