Birds have long inspired artists, and the walls of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology are graced by the works of Louis Agassiz Fuertes, George M. Sutton, Charley Harper, Roger Tory Peterson, and others. In the last decade, those classic works have been joined by paintings produced here at the Cornell Lab, by artists working in an unusually productive partnership, the Bartels Science Illustration Internship program. The rotating internships allow illustrating moments to start building their skills and portfolios by working on projects that help the Lab achieve its mission. The artists are so skilled, and the projects so focused, that interns’ projects often end up being published. In return, the Cornell Lab gains exquisite illustrations tailor-made for our needs.

We do not teach our interns how to draw birds, but instead offer the opportunity to collaborate with scientists, designers, and writers to create working art. Interns work in the Lab’s staff lounge and have access to the many resources at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Cornell University Museum of Vertebrates, and the Cornell University library system. They can study preserved specimens, make daily contact with world-renowned scientists, and surround themselves daily with our collection of original bird art. Increasingly their work hangs alongside the masterworks on our walls.

Since 2007, the Cornell Lab has welcomed as many as three Bartels science illustration interns each year. Their art brings to life our educational and outreach materials, videos, and scientific work—if you are a member of a citizen-science project or a regular reader of BirdScope, chances are you’ve seen their work before.

The examples below trace the development of the internship program. To learn more about Bartels Science Illustration Internships please visit www.birds.cornell.edu/artinterns or contact design director Diane Tessaglia-Hymes at dianneth@cornell.edu.

Meet the artists

2003
Evan Barbour
Project: Birds of Sapsucker Woods
Currently: Artist and teacher in San Francisco

2004
Katherine A. Smith
Project: Autumn trail guide to Sapsucker Woods
Currently: Artist and writer in Japan

2007–2008
Pedro Fernandes
Project: Nesting birds posters for NestWatch
Currently: Illustrator and teacher in Lisbon, Portugal

2009
Natasha Kay Koscal
Project: “Four Keys to Identifying Birds,” BirdScope Spring 2009
Currently: Medical illustrator student at Johns Hopkins University

2009
Megan Gnekow
Project: Hummingbirds poster for Project FeederWatch
Currently: Freelance illustrator in San Francisco

2009
Fritzi Hodes
Currently: Communications specialist at Cornell University

2009
Sabine Freiermuth
Project: Brochure and flyer for Celebrate Urban Birds
Currently: Graphic designer in Zurich, Switzerland

2010–2012
Evaristo Hernandez-Fernandez
Project: Cover of Auk Autumn 2011; portraits of many species
Currently: Artist-in-residence at the Cornell Lab

2010
Laura Hines
Project: Habitat game for BirdScope
Currently: Freelance illustrator in San Francisco

2010–2011
Jane Kim
Project: “This Land is Their Land,” BirdScope Summer 2011; illustrations for Handbook of Bird Biology
Currently: Freelance illustrator in California

2011-2012
Ann-Kathrin (“Fritzi”) Wirth
Project: Art and Illustrations for Golden-winged Warbler Status Assessment and Conservation Action Plan
Currently: Bartels intern at the Cornell Lab

A lost bird becomes a cover model

Most of our interns come to us from programs in art or science illustration, but Evaristo Hernandez-Fernandez is a trained biologist and a completely self-taught artist. His careful painting style and familiarity with western Mexico ecosystems made him the ideal person to paint the Imperil Woodpecker for the cover of The Auk. Evaristo has taken on many projects during his time here, including illustrations for BirdScope and paintings of seven species of manakins for use in a video.

A focus on habitat enhances a government report

By 2011, the Bartels internship was well enough known that we received 82 applications for 2 openings. The intense competition puts us in the lucky position of attracting talented people such as Luxembourg artist Fritzi Wirth. As an artist, Fritzi strives to share her fascination with birding and the natural world, and also to promote awareness and concern for endangered species. Fritzi lent her talents to an interagency report about Golden-winged Warbler conservation. Her cover art and interior illustrations, informed by a field visit to Golden-winged Warbler habitat, add life and beauty to an important conservation document.

Humming into citizen science

Our citizen-science projects have a great need for illustrations that participants can use for reference. The Bartels internship program allows us to develop beautiful, detailed posters in a variety of styles. Our 2009 intern Megan Gnekow used a delicate watercolor style to create a new poster about hummingbirds for Project FeederWatch. She spent many hours studying hummingbird skins, sketching their iridescent gorgets until she had perfected the way each species caught the light. Megan also painted a series of 12 common garden birds for future use as greeting cards.

An intern creates an internship

Art internships didn’t exist at the Cornell Lab in 2003, but that didn’t stop Evan Barbour from writing to us with hopes of arranging one. We decided to give him a try, and asked Evan to illustrate a field guide to the birds of Sapsucker Woods. Evan took this mammoth assignment and ran with it, working with our identification experts to eventually paint more than 100 birds for the book. Without him, our thriving internship program might not exist at all.

A unique style inspires a donor

In 2007, the unique style of Portuguese artist Pedro Fernandes caught the eye of Philip and Susan Bartels. They provided the funding to turn periodic visits from volunteer interns into recurring, paid positions. The Bartels Science Illustration Internship was born. We were amazed at Pedro’s knack for detail and skill in painting bird behavior. For his internship project, he worked in his own unique style of drawing on translucent paper, painting over it with gouache; and then adding detail on the other side in colored pencil. In all, Pedro created 75 drawings for two posters that are included in NestWatch project materials.