



The **Cornell** Lab 
of Ornithology

**Annual Report
to Members 2009**

Connect

A Message from John Fitzpatrick

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a dynamic hub—a place where more than 250 scientists, staff, and students converge each day to pour energy, passion, and expertise into the study and conservation of nature.

Here inside the Johnson Center for Birds and Biodiversity, people explore the intricacies of DNA, delve into the world's largest archive of animal sounds and videos, teach hands-on research techniques to students, engineer new technologies to study wildlife, analyze hundreds of thousands of data-records from citizen-science participants, and create websites to share the beauty and scientific knowledge of birds with millions of people.

What matters most, though, is what we do beyond these walls. Our impact extends all over the world, into classrooms, homes, libraries—into urban neighborhoods and remote wilderness from Papua New Guinea, to Peru, to the depths of the oceans. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's family includes millions of bird watchers, 200,000 citizen-science participants, and 45,000 donors. We collaborate with partners and students of all ages, all around the world—people bound by love of birds and nature, and by commitment to do everything possible to keep nature intact amidst an onslaught of environmental challenges.

This annual report highlights ways in which the Cornell Lab of Ornithology connects science, education, and conservation with people and wildlife across the world—work that continues despite the challenging economic times that we and all nonprofit organizations faced this year. We have carefully managed our resources and, remarkably, membership in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology actually increased by 8% during the past year. This is a testament to widespread public commitment to wildlife—and recognition of the Cornell Lab as a trusted, effective organization that turns your support into real benefits for birds as well as for people. Thank you for your continued support in making our far-reaching work possible.

Sincerely,



John W. Fitzpatrick

Louis Agassiz Fuertes Director



TIM LAMAN

Above: A King Bird-of-Paradise in New Guinea. During courtship, the male raises the green “disks” of his tail above his head and swishes them from side to side.

Right: Ian Fein (at left) and Eric Liner record science in action to raise awareness of New Guinea's unique birds-of-paradise.

Cover: In a New Guinea rainforest, a male Lesser Bird-of-Paradise courts females watching nearby. Seven bird-of-paradise species were recorded on a recent expedition led by Ed Scholes of the Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library, and rainforest biologist/ photojournalist Tim Laman, in their ongoing effort to document all of New Guinea's birds-of-paradise. Photos by Tim Laman.



Connect: Find common ground to protect wildlife

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology advances conservation through international leadership, backed by science.

Trusted by conservation groups, government, and industry alike, we made significant strides in protecting birds, elephants, and whales using critical scientific data.

Working with groups that are often on opposing sides of environmental issues, we offer innovative solutions that benefit people, our shared wildlife, and our environment.



ROGER ERIKSSON

◀ International Cooperation for Golden-wings

Cornell Lab conservationists worked with international partners to reverse precipitous declines of Golden-winged Warblers, which have been extirpated from many areas because of habitat loss and hybridization with Blue-winged Warblers.



CHRISTOPHER TESSAGLIA-HYMES

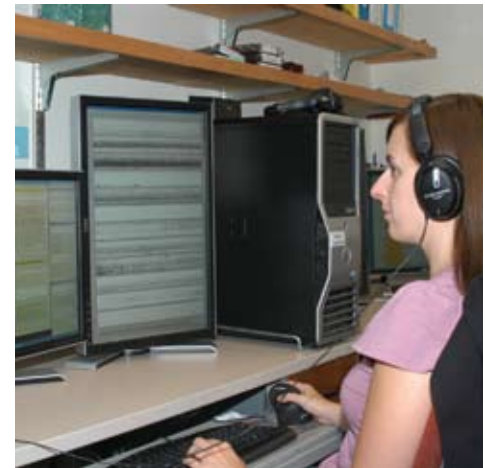
◀ Safe Passage

The Cornell Lab brought together an unprecedented coalition of conservation groups, governmental agencies, universities, and the wind energy industry to agree on and implement key research to minimize the mortality of birds and bats from wind turbines. The symposium was sponsored by the Johnson Foundation at Wingspread.



◀ Saving the Sierra Madre Sparrow

One of the world's most endangered birds, the Sierra Madre Sparrow clings to existence near Mexico City. Working with Mexican government agencies, communities, and landowners, the Cornell Lab helped create a plan to secure some of the last remaining habitat and to empower communities to manage land for natural resources and wildlife.



SUSAN SPEAR

◀ Sound Technology

With funding from the Leon Levy Foundation, Cornell Lab engineers are developing new applications to monitor the nighttime sounds of migratory birds. These data will assist decision-makers in siting wind turbines.

"We bring the voice of conservation to discussions about how the earth's resources are to be used. More and more, companies are turning to us for advice because of our commitment to biodiversity and our expertise in listening in on the world's creatures—monitoring animals on land and in the seas."

—Christopher W. Clark, director, Bioacoustics Research Program

◀ Protecting Life in the Seas

As energy companies drill for energy beneath the ocean, they turn to the Cornell Lab to help them minimize harm to wildlife. At left, our acoustic technology monitors marine mammals, minimizing disruption and mortality to bowhead whales, beluga whales, and walrus in areas proposed for drilling, and helping ships prevent collisions with endangered right whales.

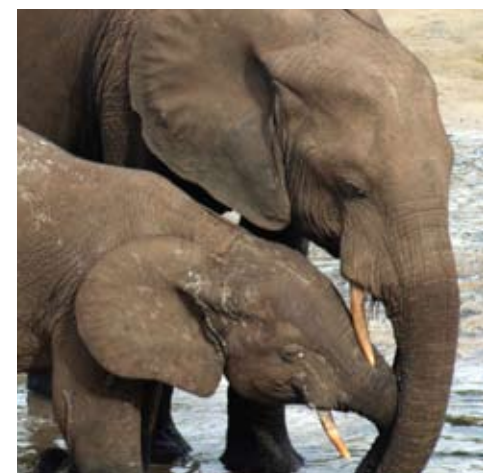
CHRISTOPHER TESSAGLIA-HYMES



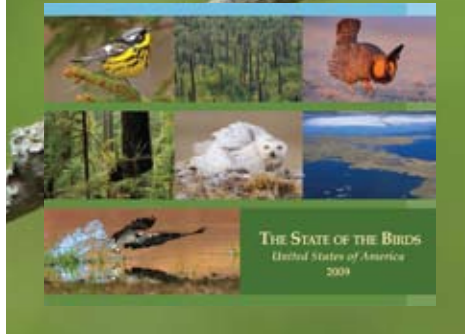
◀ Keeping Elephants Alive

To save the lives of endangered forest elephants, Cornell Lab scientists are collaborating with the Wildlife Conservation Society, government agencies in Gabon, and the logging industry to control illegal poaching in forests. The Cornell Lab's acoustic system monitors the sounds of elephants and human activity such as trespassing and gunshots.

ANDREA TURKALO



GERRIT VAN



◀ The State of the Birds

Produced by the Cornell Lab and partners, the 2009 State of the Birds report raised national awareness of the plight of birds and resulted in the U.S. Senate's recommendation to increase funding for endangered birds such as the Akohekohe pictured below.

Conservation Impact

Percentage of U.S. bird species found by the State of the Birds report to be endangered, threatened, or of conservation concern

31%

Increase in funding for endangered and threatened species recommended by U.S. Senate in response to the State of the Birds report

\$3 million

Country with the largest installed wind generation capacity in the world in 2008

United States

Number of birds and bats affected by existing wind turbines

Unknown

Percentage decline in Sierra Madre Sparrows during the last decade

80 percent

Number of hectares recommended for Sierra Madre Sparrow conservation

250,000-500,000

Number of sounds of endangered right whales detected in Massachusetts Bay, used to avert ship strikes in the past 12 months

18,311

JACK JEFFREY



Connect: Teach students of all ages to explore and protect

Lifelong learning.

It happens in schoolyards across the country as students investigate birds with the Cornell Lab's curricula. In university labs, lecture halls, and in the field, Cornell students work with our scientists, gaining the skills to become leaders in science and conservation. Through workshops and distance-learning courses, we teach biologists, educators, and bird enthusiasts around the world.

This year, we broadened and deepened our educational impact, connecting with people from all walks of life to increase the understanding and protection of nature.



Laura Erickson

▲ **Scientists in Training** Cornell undergraduate Carolyn Sedgwick examines a chickadee for her study investigating behavioral differences between male and female chickadees at feeders.

David O. Brown

◀ **Students Cross Boundaries** The new Crossing Boundaries program engages students in using GIS and Google Earth to analyze biodiversity conservation issues in Brazil, Mexico, Kenya, and New York—and to envision career possibilities.

▶ **Exploration and Discovery** In late 2008, three recent Cornell graduates and a Peruvian colleague mounted an expedition to a remote area of Peru, returning with notes on nearly 400 bird species from 43 families, including one that may be new to science.



Glenn Seeholzer



"We connect students and the public with current research and citizen science. Our goal is to transform the way people learn, inspiring children through adults to care about birds and the critical issues facing our environment today."

-Nancy Trautmann, director, Education

Education Impact

Number of high school, undergraduate, and graduate students engaged in research at the Lab in 2008-09

99

Number of scientific papers authored or coauthored by Cornell Lab students in 2008-09

>30

Number of students in the Home Study Course in Bird Biology since 1972

>15,000

Number of countries with students in the Home Study Course

60

Number of teachers who have attended the Cornell Lab's professional development workshops

600



Bird Art and Science: As part of the Cornell Lab's BirdSleuth program, students at Tualatin Valley Junior Academy in Oregon created stunning portraits of birds exhibited at the Lab this fall. Above, Blackburnian Warbler painted by Kim, a 9th-grader.

◀ Building a Better Place for Birds

Students build a nest box for the Cornell Lab's "Home Tweet Home" partnership with Nature and PBS. Students design, install, and maintain nest-box trails at schools, sharing the fun and scientific discovery with 13 million television viewers.



▲ Learning by Doing Citizen-science projects generate useful data—and a recent analysis of 10 citizen-science projects also shows that they also increase participants' science-related skills. The analysis was published by the Center for Advancement of Informal Science Education.

▼ Costa Rica's BirdSleuths Graduate student Lilly Briggs (below, at right) helped to translate and adapt the Cornell Lab's BirdSleuth curriculum and tested it with Costa Rican students in 12 classrooms and outdoors.



TAMMY SANDERS

MICHAEL HARVEY

COURTESY OF LILLY BRIGGS



▲ Unraveling a Global Mystery Graduate student Nathan Senner banded Hudsonian Godwits in Chile last winter. He met up with them in Canada and Alaska this June, retrieving data loggers that had for the first time ever traced the route the birds took. Support from the Faucett Family Foundation and Charles and Jessie Price helped make the work possible.

Connect: *See through the eyes of bird watchers*

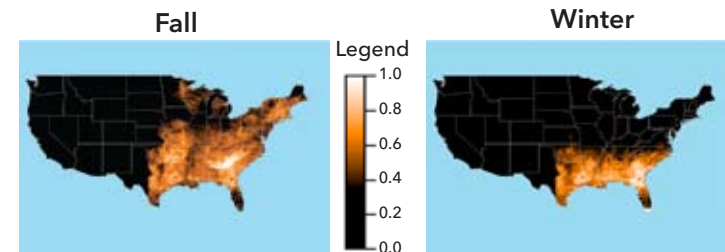
Whizzing across the Internet, thousands of reports from bird watchers pour into the Cornell Lab each day.

Our interactive websites enable bird watchers and scientists to see, explore, and analyze these data. This year, hundreds of thousands of citizen-science participants helped Cornell Lab researchers connect the birds in their own backyards to reveal the larger picture of bird movements across the hemisphere—and to show striking changes through time.



▲ **Neotropical Birds** The new Neotropical Birds website creates a much-needed, centralized resource about birds from Mexico to South America. The website gathers bird species information from experts and showcases images contributed by bird watchers via the Neotropical Birds Flickr group. Visit www.neotropical.birds.cornell.edu.

▲ **eBird: Sweeping Views of Continent's Birdlife** Scientists are analyzing millions of records from eBird to reveal patterns in the continent's birdlife. The maps below show the relative abundance of Eastern Phoebes in fall (left) and winter (right) using eBird reports, remotely-sensed habitat information, and variation in detection rates.



"Citizen science is a multifaceted and exciting way to bring people and birds together for conservation. We collect critical data on birds—and form communities of learners intent on using their passion to discover how birds are affected by environmental change and what we might do about it."

—Janis Dickinson, director, Citizen Science

Citizen Science Impact

Number of scientific papers using citizen-science data from the Cornell Lab since 1997
>60

Record-breaking number of Great Backyard Bird Count checklists in 2009
93,629

Number of bird nesting attempts reported to the Cornell Lab since 1997
96,140

Number of NestCam images sorted and labeled by CamClickr participants
293,865

Number of citizen-science participants in Cornell Lab projects
200,000

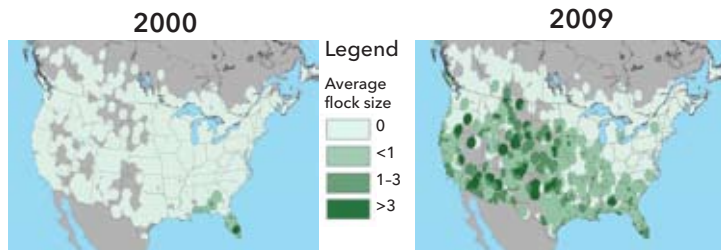
Average number of bird observations reported to eBird each month
1,000,000

Number of bird observations in the Avian Knowledge Network
65,717,586

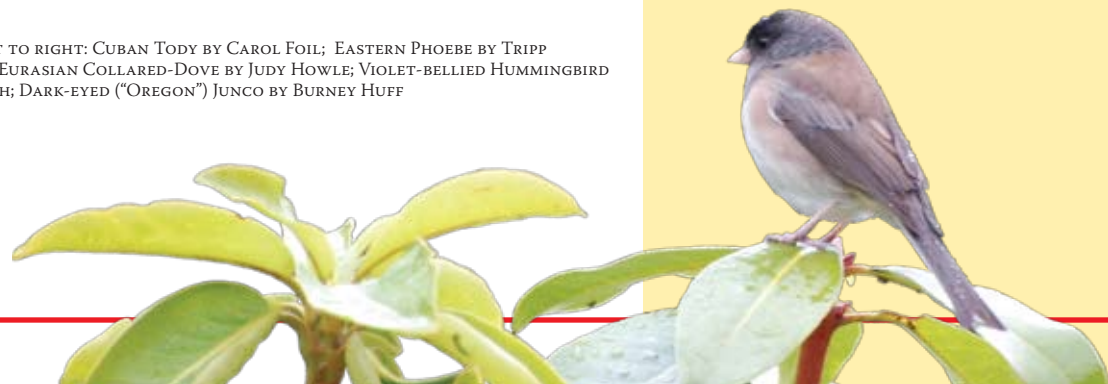


▲ **FeederWatchers Document Changes Through Time** Data from Project FeederWatch participants show that an introduced species, the Eurasian Collared-Dove, spread from Florida to British Columbia in just seven years, an unprecedented rate. An upcoming article in the journal *Ecography* examines habitat preferences and effects on native doves.

▲ **BirdShare: A Wealth of Bird Photos** More than 900 people contributed more than 24,000 photos to Birdshare, the Cornell Lab's photo-sharing group on Flickr. Many of the images appear on our websites and species profiles, including on All About Birds.



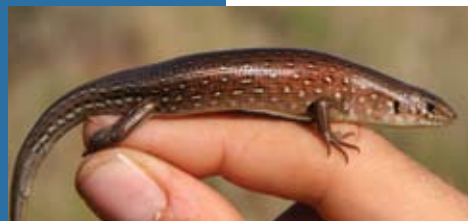
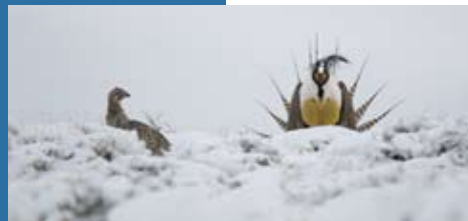
PHOTOS, LEFT TO RIGHT: CUBAN TODY BY CAROL FOIL; EASTERN PHOEBE BY TRIPP DAVENPORT; EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE BY JUDY HOWLE; VIOLET-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD BY BILL LYNCH; DARK-EYED ("OREGON") JUNCO BY BURNEY HUFF



Connect: *Bridge the unknown*

In the quest to understand nature, Cornell Lab scientists use cutting-edge technology to reveal secrets hidden in DNA, document rare wildlife, discover how animals communicate, and understand the impact of human activities on our environment.

This year, from the forests of Papua New Guinea to the underwater world off New York City, they brought exciting new discoveries to light.



◀ **Recordings Unravel Bird Duets** In a Costa Rican forest, postdoctoral researcher Daniel Mennill used an array of microphones to record duets between Rufous-and-white Wrens simultaneously onto separate channels of a sound file. Mennill and Cornell Lab scientist Sandra Vehrencamp published results deciphering the complex vocal interactions between male and female wrens.

◀ **Expedition Yields Rare Footage of Birds-of-Paradise** On a recent New Guinea expedition, Macaulay Library video curator Edwin Scholes, photojournalist Tim Laman, and the Cornell Lab's multimedia crew captured new sounds and images of several spectacular birds-of-paradise. These recordings along with Scholes's research will help scientists understand how these unique birds evolved.

◀ **Documenting Behaviors of an Imperiled Species** A Cornell Lab team recorded rare high-definition video and surround-sound of Gunnison Sage-Grouse in Colorado. Fewer than 4,000 of these birds remain. The recordings will aid researchers and educators in studying, protecting, and raising awareness of this imperiled species.

◀ **Whip-poor-will Sounds by Moonlight** This year, Cornell Lab scientists developed sophisticated software enabling them to collect the most detailed data ever obtained on how Whip-poor-will activity varies in response to moonlight. The technology can be used to monitor Whip-poor-wills and other elusive nocturnal species.

◀ **Biodiversity through Time** Researcher Dan Rabosky and his colleagues at the Cornell Lab have combined math and genetic analyses to trace the way diverse groups such as Australian skinks, diatoms, and warblers have evolved through time.

"Birds have always been spectacular subjects for scientific study, but now we have the tools to explore the full breadth of their wondrous biology, from their underlying genomes to their amazing physiological adaptations to their most bizarre behaviors."

-Irby Lovette, director, Evolutionary Biology Program

Research Impact

Grants and contracts awarded to the Cornell Lab in 2008-09

\$7,216,947

Number of scientific publications in 2008-09

>130

Number of digital recordings of animals in the Macaulay Library archive

94,000

Records that can be analyzed using new information science techniques

**1,200 environmental variables,
50,000 locations,
50 million observations**

Hours of marine recordings collected in 2008-09

474,552

Number of years considered in biodiversity study of diatoms

40 million

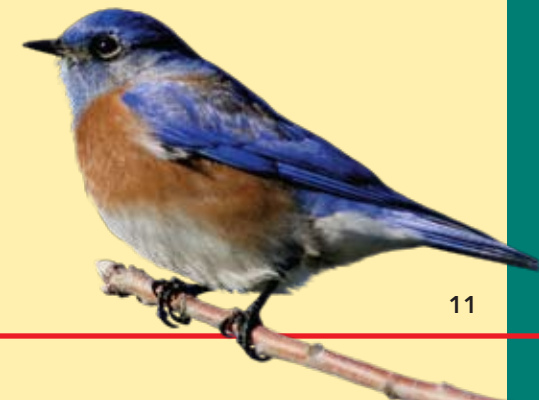
◀ **Computational Sustainability** Cornell Lab scientists are helping to advance analyses of biodiversity data using machine learning and statistical techniques to discover patterns in datasets of tens of millions of bird observations. The effort is part of a national collaboration funded by NSF to use computational methods for balancing environmental, economic, and societal needs for a sustainable future.

◀ **Using Science to Help Save a Species** Work on the Florida Scrub-Jay completed its 40th year, with hundreds of individual jays banded and their pedigrees documented many generations back. Cornell Lab scientists are studying the role of wildfire in sustaining critical habitat, and they are investigating how disease, including West Nile virus and encephalitis, influences the population trajectory of this threatened species.

◀ **Mercury Contamination and Birds** Many people may know that mercury levels are high in fish-eating birds, but mercury rains down upon forests as well. With support from the Leon Levy Foundation, Cornell Lab scientists are developing a model of mercury contamination in New York forests and identifying regions and birds at high risk, including Wood Thrushes and Red-eyed Vireos.

◀ **New Twist in Finch Disease Story** With the help of citizen-science participants, Cornell Lab scientists have studied the dynamics of House Finch eye disease since its emergence 15 years ago. In a new twist, they recently found that American Goldfinches play a role by transmitting the disease to House Finches, even when the goldfinches show no symptoms.

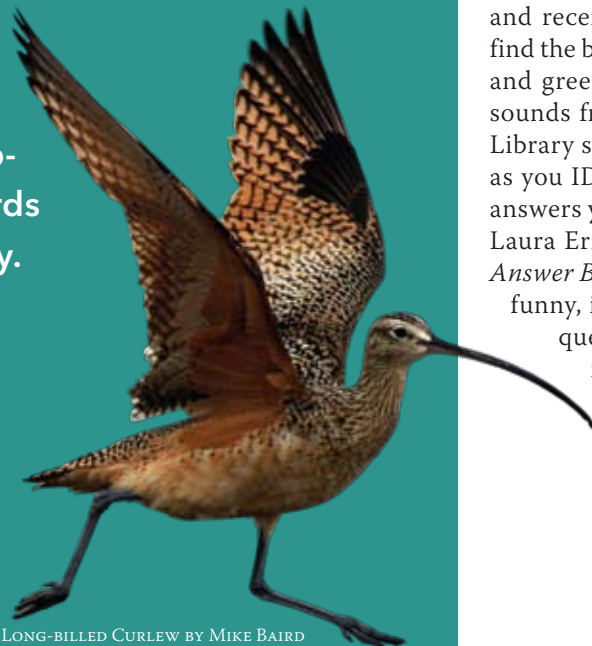
◀ **Revealing the Lives of Urban Whales** In the first ever marine acoustic study off the coast of New York State, Cornell Lab scientists detected a blue whale, fin whales, humpback whales, and right whales near New York City. This project will provide crucial information on the use of these very busy waters by endangered marine mammals so regulators can make informed decisions about the human uses of these areas.



Connect: Share the knowledge and wonder of birds

Beautiful and fascinating, birds connect people with nature in every part of the world.

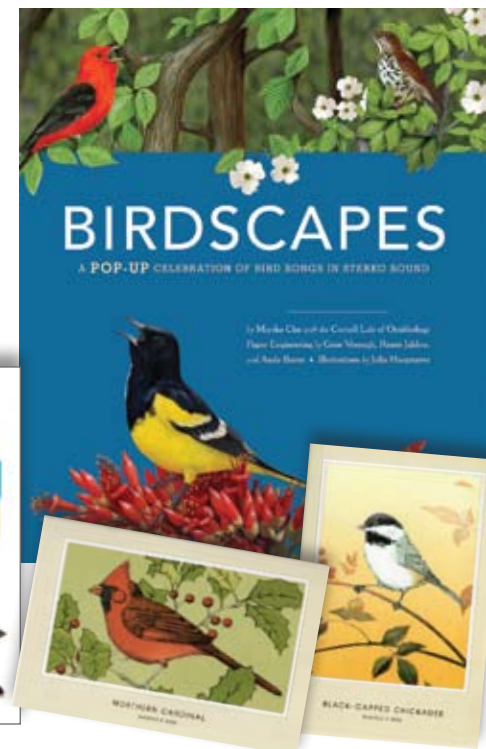
Your support enables us to share the scientific knowledge and wonder of birds with millions of people. Whether they peruse our updated All About Birds website, watch our new “Inside Birding” video series, or hear the sounds of birds in our “singing books,” we hope that each experience leads to a greater understanding and appreciation of birds and biodiversity.



LONG-BILLED CURLEW BY MIKE BAIRD

► **All About Birds, a Wealth of Sights, Sounds, and Expertise Online** The Cornell Lab’s new All About Birds website is packed with bird photos, sounds, video, and advice from our experts. Watch our “Inside Birding” video series. Read Round Robin, the Cornell Blog of Ornithology. Send a question to science editor Laura Erickson. Or browse *Living Bird* multimedia, our popular “Building Skills” section, and more than 500 bird species profiles.

► **New Gadgets Find Birds, Explain Birds, Sing Like Birds** The “BirdsEye” Apple iPhone and iPod touch application uses Cornell Lab sounds, Google maps, and recent eBird reports to help people find the birds they want to see. New books and greeting cards open up to play bird sounds from the Cornell Lab’s Macaulay Library so you can see and hear the birds as you ID them. Our latest book literally answers your questions. *BirdScope* editor Laura Erickson wrote the *Bird Watching Answer Book* to address some of the most funny, intriguing, and frequently asked questions we have received from members and citizen-science participants via email and the All About Birds website.



"Birds are nature's most enjoyable and accessible window into how she works. Our passion at the Lab of Ornithology is to share this window with everyone and anyone, of whatever age or profession, who cares to stop for a moment and take a look."

—John Fitzpatrick, director, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Outreach Impact

Number of media articles about the Cornell Lab's work in 2008-09

>1,600

Number of visitors to Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary in 2008

64,547

Number of requests for Celebrate Urban Birds kits

70,000

Percentage of Celebrate Urban Birds participants who are ethnically/culturally underrepresented or economically disadvantaged

80%

Number of books sold in Cornell Lab's Bird Songs series

>250,000

Number of IP addresses with access to The Birds of North America Online

15,940,000

Number of Cornell Lab web page views in 2008

>52 million



◀ **Reaching Communities Far and Wide** This year, we reached out to our local community with more bird walks, events, and exhibits. In our first-ever Young Birders event, we also brought 10 teenagers from around the country to connect with our researchers and staff and get a hands-on view of careers in science, conservation, and education. Our Celebrate Urban Birds program connected with communities around the nation through mini-grants, enabling them to offer meaningful activities to youth groups, rehabilitation groups, seniors, and others. Our staff and scientists collaborated with Maya Lin, creator of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, on her new sculpture, "What is Missing?" The sculpture features sounds and video of endangered animals from the Macaulay Library to raise awareness of the extinction crisis and opportunities for habitat conservation. The sculpture, unveiled at the California Academy of Sciences, is the first installment in a series that will reach people around the globe.

At left (clockwise from top), International Migratory Bird Day; bird art by participants in Celebrate Urban Birds; 2009 Young Birders event; Maya Lin's sculpture, "What is Missing?"

◀ **Cornell Lab Buzz** The Cornell Lab's work for birds and biodiversity was covered by thousands of articles, radio shows, television stations, and websites worldwide this year. Our scientists are always willing to give their voice on behalf of wildlife, helping to raise awareness among the general public about the most pressing conservation issues—as well as the thrill of scientific discovery and exploration of nature.

At left, Bob Simon from CBS's "60 Minutes" interviews researcher Mya Thompson about the Cornell Lab's Elephant Listening Project.

PHOTO CREDITS: TOP COLLAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP), SUSAN SPEAR; BIRD ART COURTESY OF CELEBRATE URBAN BIRDS; ELLEN SHERSHOW PEÑA; TIM LENZ. BOTTOM LEFT PHOTO, DIANE TESSAGLIA-HYMES. BOTTOM RIGHT PHOTO, LEWIS'S WOODPECKER BY PAM KOCH.

The Cornell Lab Connects with Members

Despite the challenging times in our country, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's membership prospered and grew over the past year. When faced with the worst financial crisis of our times, you reaffirmed your connections with us—your love for birds, your commitment to science, and your belief in education. On behalf of all of my colleagues, thank you for being a special supporter of a unique and important organization.

Since my arrival last year, we have tried many ways of connecting with you. We have held small and large events across the country, spoken with donors on a daily basis, and created new surveys to learn the hopes and interests of our newest members. (We will be launching membership surveys soon as well—please watch for them by email or postal mail.)

We also launched a monthly member eNewsletter this year, and provided new online donation forms. If you haven't been receiving Cornell Lab eNews with bird song recordings, videos, and program updates, you can subscribe for free simply by entering your email address in the box on our home page at www.birds.cornell.edu. As always, we also listen to and respond to thousands of members who contact us by sending email to cornellbirds@cornell.edu.

Recently we launched a new Golden-wing Society for donors and a new travel program to respond to your requests for more engagement and birding opportunities. Your support allows the Cornell Lab to flourish—thank you.

Sincerely,



Sean Scanlon

Senior Director, Development and Philanthropy
(607) 254-1105; sbs259@cornell.edu



GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER BY SABINE FREIERMUTH

Estate Planning: A Lasting Legacy

It's easy to include the Lab of Ornithology in your estate plans, especially through a bequest or life income agreement. To make a bequest through your will, simply include the following language: "I give and bequeath the sum of \$___ (or ___ % of my residuary estate) to Cornell University for the Lab of Ornithology to be used in support of its charitable purposes." Doing so can perpetuate your interest in birds and support of the Lab forever.

We would be honored to talk with you about these important issues, enabling you to fulfill your commitments to your family, bird study, and conservation. To learn more about estate planning opportunities to benefit you and the Lab of Ornithology, please call Scott Sutcliffe at **607-254-2424** or Sean Scanlon at **607-254-1105**. The Lab is pleased to acknowledge such friends as members of the Sapsucker Woods Society (see list on page 21).

"I support the Cornell Lab because I can see the results: More people connecting with science and nature, whether through citizen-science involvement, curricula for children, or emotionally powerful art exhibits, such as the recent collaboration with Maya Lin to raise the awareness of extinction and opportunities for conservation."

-Joan Brenchley-Jackson, Cornell Lab member

From left to right, Lab member Joan Brenchley-Jackson, artist Maya Lin, and Lab director John Fitzpatrick sitting at the edge of Lin's sculpture, "What is Missing?" after its unveiling at the California Academy of Sciences. Behind them, in the tip of the cone, sounds and video of endangered wildlife from the Lab's Macaulay Library play out. As the sounds reverberate and distort along the passageway, they evoke the dimming hopes for endangered species as well as the fact that they're not yet entirely out of our reach.



Administrative board, program directors, and faculty

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Michael Webster*, Director, Macaulay Library and Robert G. Engel
Professor of Ornithology, Neurobiology and Behavior

* Cornell University Faculty



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\$5 million+

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\$1,000,000 to \$4,999,999

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Mr. and Mrs. James B. Smith Jr.

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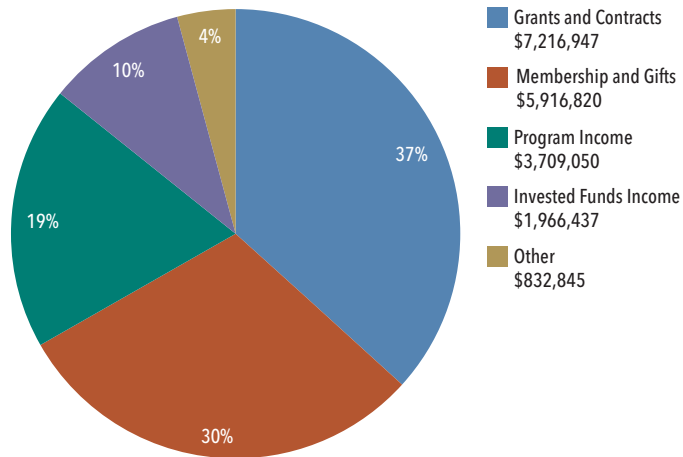


TUFTED TITMOUSE BY MEGAN GNEKOW



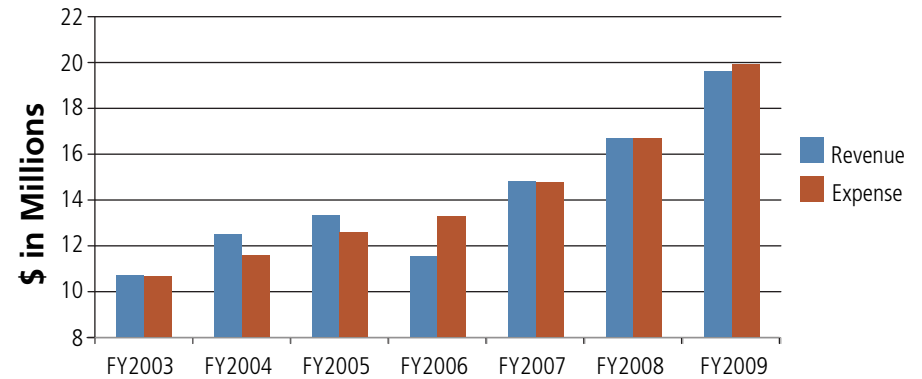
Financial report (through June 30, 2009)

FY09 Revenues (through June 30, 2009)



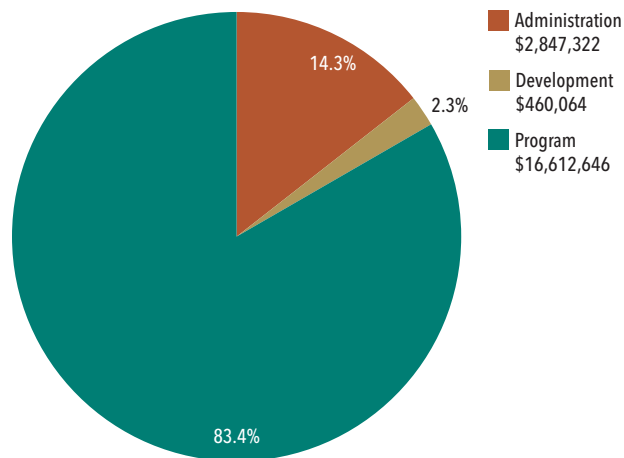
Total Revenue = \$19,642,099

Fiscal Growth 2002 through 2009



The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is proud of its careful stewardship of resources over the past year. The Lab's revenue and expenses have grown consistently during the past seven years as programs have begun to mature and have a greater impact in the world. Even in a difficult fiscal year, the Lab was thankful to have a broad and generous base of financial support from members through annual, capital, and planned giving, while continuing to keep administrative and fundraising expenses low. Thank you for trusting us with your gifts. We will continue to work hard so that these gifts result in positive impacts for birds and biodiversity.

FY09 Expenditures



Total Expenditures = \$19,920,032

FSC logo

Environmental
Benefits
Statement



LAYSAN ALBATROSSES BY CLIFF BEITTEL