



DISCOVER

The **Cornell** Lab 

CENTENNIAL  
CAMPAIGN

ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS  
**2014**

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\* Cornell University Faculty

## ALAN FRIEDMAN (1942-2014)

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology lost a good friend and supporter in board member **Alan Friedman** this past year. Alan served on a National Science Foundation review panel in the 1990s and recommended funding for the Cornell Lab's first NSF informal science education grant. He joined the Cornell Lab's board of directors in 2010, after retiring as director of the New York Hall of Science. He was a true asset to the board with his deep insight into the culture of science and science education, his vast knowledge of a wide range of topics in science and art, his great storytelling skills, and his courtly manner. In four short years Alan played a major role in helping to build the Cornell Lab's science education programs, particularly in building connections with private foundations. Everybody who knew and worked with Alan will miss him dearly.

PHOTO COURTESY NEW YORK HALL OF SCIENCE



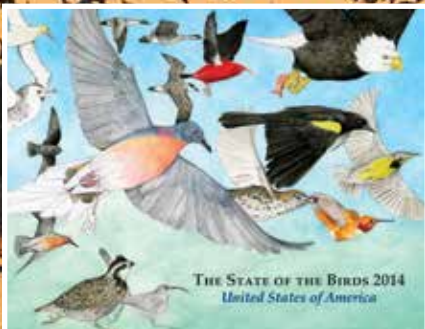
FRONT COVER: LAYSAN ALBATROSS AND CHICK BY BENJAMIN M. CLOCK  
OPPOSITE PAGE: DUNLIN FLOCKS IN FLOODED RICE FIELDS BY DREW KELLY FOR THE NATURE CONSERVANCY;  
INSET BY STEF DEN RIDDER



# ***"Our grandchildren deserve ...***

*to be amazed by nature not just in its presence, but in its multitudes."*

— 2014 STATE OF THE BIRDS REPORT



This year the Cornell Lab and partners published the fifth State of the Birds report ([www.stateofthebirds.org](http://www.stateofthebirds.org)), an annual assessment of the health of our nation's bird populations. This year's report spotlighted an alarming trend among long-distance migrant shorebirds—a 50% decline since 1974. One of those declining shorebird species, Dunlins (above), benefitted greatly from another partnership project between the Cornell Lab and The Nature Conservancy that flooded rice fields in California to provide wet habitat during a period of excruciating drought. Read more about the project on page 14.

a message from  
**JOHN FITZPATRICK**



PHOTO BY JASON KOSKI

**NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO LET UP.**

That's the sum of everything we've learned as the Cornell Lab of Ornithology approaches its 100th anniversary next year. So we won't be devoting a lot of resources to planning the pomp and circumstance of a grand centennial celebration. Instead, we will re-strategize and reinvest. We will redouble our efforts.

The Discover Campaign is a \$125 million effort to bolster and grow the Cornell Lab's capacity. It's the boldest capital initiative we've ever launched, raising about six times our annual revenue in one campaign. Why such a big goal? Because our aim is higher than just being around to celebrate a bicentennial. We are striving to garner and mobilize the necessary resources to play a vital role in conquering the great challenge of this 21st century—finding that global balance where humans live side by side with stable, fully functioning natural systems.

It may seem strange for an ornithological institution to be concerned with the fate of the world, but it's not, because birds are the warning lights that tell us our natural systems are stressed out. In the West, where our nation is increasingly drawing more and more energy, sage-grouse populations are plummeting. Several seabird species are declining due to human use of our oceans (such as overfishing), as reported in the recent State of the Birds 2014 report. As you'll read in this annual





*With a centennial anniversary approaching, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's leadership is preparing for new challenges in the next 100 years. Wood Thrushes, for example, are steeply declining without much public notice or scientific inquiry. With additional resources mustered through the Discover Campaign, the Cornell Lab is launching an international Wood Thrush alliance to foster a recovery. Photos by Jason Koski (left) and Kelly Colgan Azar (right).*

report, even on remote tropical mountaintops where people rarely go, the cascading effects of climate change are threatening birds with extinction.

Birds also supply the ability to make people realize and care about what's happening, and they make people want to change things for the better. In short, birds are powerful beings. The Discover Campaign is a strategic effort to make sure the Cornell Lab is structured, positioned, and has the resources to use the powers of birds in the great global cause of our time.

While this annual report recounts the past year's accomplishments, it will also give you insight into our five focal areas of growth as we look ahead into the future: Discover, Innovate, Teach, Inspire, and Act. You'll read about the new things we learn about the world as we study birds, and how new

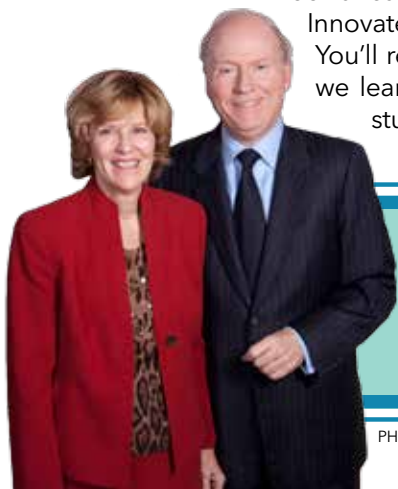
advances in bird monitoring are opening up a whole new realm of listening to the planet's heartbeat. You'll read about the special ability of birds as a teaching tool that unites young and old, and the powerful inspiration birds provide—how the sight of an albatross chick coughing up plastic bits on one of our Bird Cams elicited several pledges on social media to reduce and reuse plastics. Finally, you'll read about birds as a vital tool in actionable science, that is, science that makes a positive difference on the ground. After a decade of investments in computer science and eBird, the Cornell Lab is igniting a big-data revolution in conservation, with the first signs being precious wet spots for shorebirds within California's drought-parched Central Valley.

Back in 2002, eBird itself was an audacious idea, the notion that humans can act as biological sensors through bird watching. Today, with more than 200 million observations and data

points, eBird is the biggest biological database in existence, and it's acting as a real-time monitor of ecosystem health around the world.

But we need to do more. That's what the Discover Campaign is about. After 100 years of scientific excellence, of gaining credibility and authority, of stockpiling and using knowledge about how natural systems work, we must now capitalize on our standing to be an effective contributor to addressing the greatest challenge of our time.

How do we do that? How do we go from the present-day to a world where people and natural systems live harmoniously side by side, where the future isn't marked by diminishing returns in nature but by stability and growth? The Discover Campaign will put us in position to be able to take that path, and we know this...birds will show us the way.



*"The Cornell Lab is an amazing place that is using science, technology, and innovation to make a better world for birds, and for all of us. Now the world needs the Cornell Lab to do more. The Discover campaign is about conquering the bigger challenges of tomorrow. We need your support."*

*—Linda Macaulay, Cornell Lab Administrative Board Chairman*

PHOTO BY DIANE TESSAGLIA-HYMES

John W. Fitzpatrick  
Louis Agassiz Fuertes Director



BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER  
BY GERRIT VYN

*The vast treasure trove of eBird data gave Cornell Lab researcher Frank La Sorte a unique perspective on bird migration. By being able to see where birders were spotting Blackburnian Warblers day by day, he could detect the advancing front of their migrations and see looping patterns in their travels between breeding grounds and wintering areas.*

# DISCOVER

Each new discovery about **BIRDS** tells us more about the world we call home.

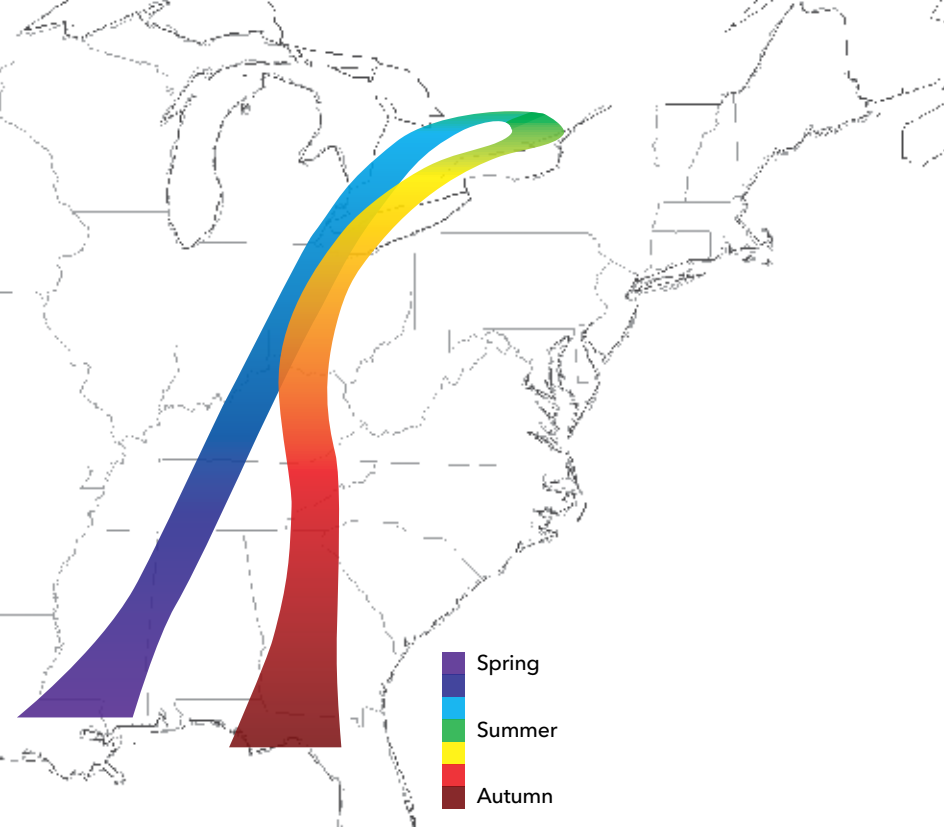
## BIRDS REVEAL NATURAL WONDERS IN TIME AND SPACE.

What if we could appreciate nature at its full scale...not just in one place and point in time, such as a blooming spring meadow, but the bigger global workings going on around us? What if we could see across the continent and across time? eBird, and its global database of bird observations, allowed Cornell Lab researcher Frank La Sorte to do just that.

In two papers published in *Ecology* and the *Journal of Biogeography*, La Sorte described patterns of seasonal migration in songbirds that were far more complex and mercurial than the simple, linear flyways that have been described for waterfowl. His research showed birds that ride the wind, surfing strong south-erlies in spring and seeking weaker head-winds as they make their way back south in

the autumn. He showed several species that launch themselves off the Atlantic Coast to pick up tail gusts that carry them all the way to the Caribbean. He showed mass, synchronized movements of thousands or millions of birds at once, such as the population of Bobolinks moving toward South America at a rate of 43 miles per day.

The biggest finding: songbirds don't travel back and forth along the same defined flyways like trucks on an interstate. Rather, they move in clockwise, elliptical patterns, rarely traveling the same route in spring and fall. The findings have on-the-ground importance in conservation planning, as migratory songbird habitat will need to take these travel patterns into account.





## BIRDS SHOW US THE FOOTPRINTS OF HUMAN ACTIVITY, EVEN IN PLACES WHERE PEOPLE RARELY GO.

Fifty years ago, scientist-explorer Jared Diamond conducted landmark biological expeditions across remote mountaintops in New Guinea. Maybe a dozen people—maybe none—had been up to these high peaks of the rainforests since. In February 2014 two Cornell Lab researchers published results in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* from a series of return trips, where they found ripple effects of climate change.

In retracing Diamond's steps, Cornell Ph.D. student Ben Freeman and his wife Dr. Alexandra Class Freeman (who works in the Education department at the Cornell Lab) had a baseline comparison for measuring what's happened with New Guinea's mountain birds in the intervening half-century. In their survey transects, they found that birds were moving higher as

annual mean temperatures got warmer: more than 70% of species had shifted their ranges upslope by about 400 feet or more (or as high as a 40-story building).

Most startling, four birds in the Freemans' study appear to be headed for localized extinction, as they had reached the mountain peaks in their upslope movements and had nowhere else to go as temperatures continue to rise. "Our research demonstrates that no matter where you are on earth, even a tropical wilderness island in the South Pacific, climate change is happening and having tangible impacts," said Class Freeman. "We can't build more high-elevation tropical forests, so the best thing we can do to help these birds is tackle climate change."

*Cornell Lab research published in 2014 described an "escalator to extinction," as some tropical rainforest birds have reached the mountain peaks in their range shifts upslope to escape warming temperatures, with nowhere else to go.*



MAGNIFICENT BIRD-OF-PARADISE AND VIEW FROM MT. KARIMUI BY BEN FREEMAN

## What Happens to Birds When We Turn Night Into Day?

Light pollution is often considered an impediment to stargazing, but our well-lit night skies can also affect the circadian rhythms of wildlife. This year the Cornell Lab launched a research project to document effects from the nighttime halo glow of cities, industrial plants, and airports on Barn Swallows, using the citizen-science network of 25,000 participants in NestWatch.

"Specifically, we're hoping to learn if the artificial light has an effect—good or bad—on what we call the 'pace of life,'" says Cornell Lab researcher Caren Cooper. "Is the pace of life for Barn Swallows increasing if they live in areas where the days seem even longer due to artificial lights?"

Discoveries from these data may bolster the case for including light pollution in conservation strategies for aerial insectivores and considering night-lighting impacts in environmental assessments.



BARN SWALLOWS BY ANNE ELLIOTT

# INNOVATE

A culture of innovation breeds big ideas and new technologies.

## VISITOR CENTER GARDEN: 06/19/14

#	TIME	DETECTOR
13902	16:22:15 GMT	BLUE JAY
13900	16:20:11 GMT	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD
13899	16:11:19 GMT	BLUE JAY
13898	16:05:51 GMT	BLUE JAY
13895	14:35:34 GMT	BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE
13894	14:35:14 GMT	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD
13893	14:35:08 GMT	BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE
13892	14:35:02 GMT	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD
13891	13:30:47 GMT	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD
13890	13:30:43 GMT	BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

*BRP launched a prototype of its new remote real-time acoustic monitoring unit in Sapsucker Woods this year. Built with open-source consumer-grade parts, the unit instantly recognized and recorded three species from the feeder garden at the Cornell Lab in beta testing for four months. Final product development could revolutionize the way biological surveys are conducted. BRP is seeking new start-up funds to support the further development and rollout of the real-time terrestrial acoustic monitoring project after beta testing.*

## INVENTING A NEW FRONTIER—COMPUTERS LISTENING ACROSS LANDSCAPES.

The power of acoustic monitoring is in detection. An audio recorder can hear and record far more birds than someone with binoculars. (Think of how many birds you hear on a morning walk versus how many you actually see.)

The bottleneck, however, has been data processing. A human being with headphones can only listen to so many hours of audio recordings in one day. Computers are much faster at analyzing thousands of hours of sound, but they don't have the human ear for identifying birds.

Last year, engineers in the Cornell Lab's Bio-

acoustics Research Program offered up a game-changing idea to bridge the gap—a real-time terrestrial acoustic monitoring system, with a recording device in the field that could listen continuously 24 hours a day, connected to a computer program that could instantly recognize and categorize vocalizations of targeted species. When the engineers brought their idea to BRP's new director, Aaron Rice, he jumped on it and challenged them to come up with a working prototype in six weeks.

Rice told his team that to be successful, the whole system had to be inexpensive and scal-



PHOTO BY MATT MACGILLIVRAY



able, so multiple units could be deployed to survey birds and other vocalizing animals across a landscape.

The BRP team didn't flinch. Using off-the-shelf parts from Amazon.com, they built the prototype for under \$200 and launched a pilot project in the Cornell Lab's own backyard at Sapsucker Woods. Blue Jays, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Black-capped Chickadees called from among the trees, and all three species were recognized and tallied in real-time on the Internet.

Beta testing will continue through 2014 with the first field deployments possibly in 2015. In the future, the possibilities are exciting. These automated audio recording-and-recognition units could produce real-time maps, similar to weather radar, of bird, amphibian, and

mammal vocalizations, where a red-hot cluster could indicate calling Whip-poor-wills or howling wolves.

Some day, backyard birders might place one of these automated recording units next to their bird feeder, with a real-time link to their home computer to tally birds heard behind the house—and another link to eBird that could grow the world's largest database of millions of bird observations into billions of birds heard.

"This technology really represents a turning-point for both BRP and the bioacoustic scientific community," says Rice. "Up until now, real-time recording technology was too cost-prohibitive to make it usable for large-scale surveys. Now, we can blanket an area with recorders, and visualize a diversity of singing animals in real time. This is tremendously exciting."

## WHAT IF ANYBODY WITH A SMARTPHONE COULD BE A BIRDER?

This year the Cornell Lab launched Merlin, a revolutionary bird ID app available for free for Apple and Android smartphone users.

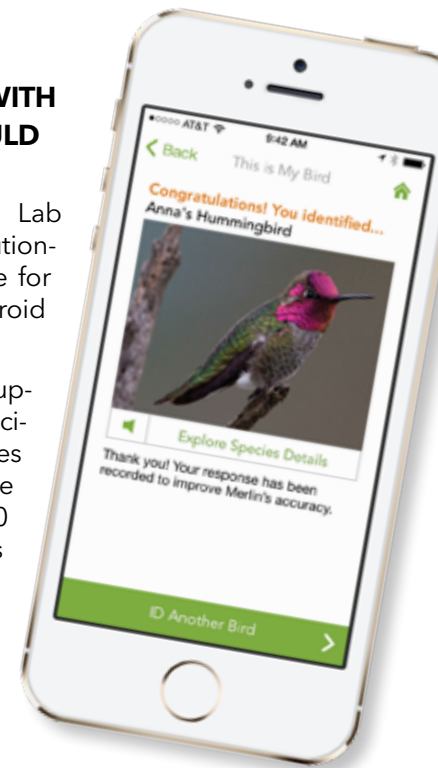
Merlin, created with support from the National Science Foundation, makes identifying a bird as simple as playing a game of 20 questions: "What color is your bird?" "Where did you see it?"

The computer engineering behind the app blends intuitive usability with GPS-targeted customization that taps into eBird observations from roughly a 30-mile radius of the user's location.

Put simply, there's never been more computer-science firepower put into helping someone figure out, "What's that bird?"

In the first six months of 2014, people used Merlin more than 2 million times to identify birds. The development team is now collaborating with researchers at Cornell NYC Tech and Caltech to enable Merlin to recognize birds based on photos.

Imagine if you could identify a bird just by snapping its picture. Someday, thanks to Merlin, you might.



## A Proven Track Record of Innovation

The Cornell Lab's Bioacoustics Research Program has a history of inventing new acoustic technologies that revolutionize the way animals are surveyed.

Since 2000, BRP's Elephant Listening Project has had terrestrial recording units deployed in 10 key areas of Central Africa to listen for the occurrence and movements of endangered and reclusive forest elephants. Since 2005, BRP has deployed and maintained networks of floating buoys with real-time marine acoustic recording in the Arctic and Atlantic oceans to listen for whale activity. BRP's whale-listening network made possible the creation of an alert service for ship captains to warn them when endangered whale species are heard in an area.


Generous gifts from the Kenneth L. Harder Trust and Scott and Karen (Cornell '81) Harder family has provided support for BRP to develop the next generation of archival recording devices for both land and sea.



COURTESY NOAA PHOTO LIBRARY

# TEACH

Education creates leaders and ambassadors for the world's birds.



*The Cornell Lab hosted educational webinars this year that attracted learners from around the world and across the generational spectrum, from 11-year-olds to a student just shy of his 100th birthday.*

PHOTO BY ANNE B. CLARK

## NEW WEBINARS SPAN CONTINENTS AND GENERATIONS.

Online education breaks down barriers of distance and time. This year the Cornell Lab debuted a series of educational webinars—in waterfowl ID, shorebird ID, and crow biology—that attracted thousands of learners from all 50 states and six other countries into a virtual classroom to learn about birds. Two of those learners in the waterfowl ID webinars came from opposite ends of the generational spec-

trum, 99-year-old John Clement and 11-year-old Sam Mroz.

Clement, a Cornell graduate from the class of 1938, enrolled online as a way to continue engaging his love of birds, as he doesn't go outside much anymore. Mroz logged on from Massachusetts eager to connect with other birders, as he doesn't know any other birders like him in his hometown. In the webinar, he

was mentored by professional ornithologists and encouraged by adults who knew what it was like to feel like the only birder at school.

In the coming year, the Cornell Lab will offer the waterfowl and shorebird webinars again and introduce a new raptor ID webinar series—creating more opportunities for learners young and old, everywhere, to gather communally and become better birders.





## HUBBARD BROOK: A TRAINING GROUND FOR GROUND-BREAKING SCIENCE.

Part of the advantage of attending a world-class research university is the opportunity to participate in ground-breaking research. The Cornell Lab's involvement in ongoing research at the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest in New Hampshire's White Mountains is creating opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students alike.

Ph.D. candidate Sara Kaiser spent seven years studying the breeding behaviors of more than 1,000 Black-throated Blue Warblers at Hubbard Brook. This past year she successfully defended her thesis, which contained some of the first-ever published research of a Neotropical migrant songbird demonstrating the

*Cornell Lab research on Black-throated Blue Warblers (left) at the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest in New Hampshire (above) has revealed their behavioral adaptability. Photo courtesy Alisa Muniz.*

behavioral flexibility to adapt to rapid environmental change (perhaps a positive sign for the bird's ability to cope with climate change).

Over the course of her research, Kaiser enlisted seven Cornell students to work as assistants. One of those students, Cornell junior Dominique Hellmich, is getting the opportunity to conduct her own independent study on how stress (created by broadcasting the vocalizations of nest predators such as chipmunks through speakers) affects Black-throated Blue Warbler nesting activities.

Like Kaiser's research, Hellmich's findings will be some of the first of their kind. "By working with partners like Hubbard Brook, we are able to give our students at the Cornell Lab first-hand, in-depth, boots-on-the-ground training in field ornithology," says Mike Webster, a research director at the Cornell Lab. "You can't teach those research skills in a classroom."

## BUILDING A PIPELINE OF ORNITHOLOGICAL TALENT.

For any championship-caliber college athletics program, recruiting is the key to success. The big win for the Redheads—the Cornell Lab's undergrad birding team—at the World Series of Birding this year goes back to the very first Young Birders Event at Sapsucker Woods.



THE REDHEADS, PHOTO BY TINA GIAIMO

The event began in 2009 as a way to reach out to enterprising young birders across the nation and stoke their ornithological ambitions, while also introducing them to Cornell University. Two members of the championship Redheads team, Andy Johnson and Hope Batcheller, first came to Ithaca for that weekend five years ago.

Over their undergrad careers at Cornell, the two enjoyed field expeditions and experiences many ornithologists don't get until grad school. Hope spent two summers in Ecuador conducting research on antbirds, while Andy studied Whimbrels in far northern Canada. Both travelled from Alaska to Chile to China on their way to a bachelor's degree in biology from Cornell in May.

This July a new class arrived in Ithaca for the Young Birders Event. Perhaps there were a few future Redheads among them—and a continued tradition of bringing the best young birders to Cornell.



ANDY JOHNSON, PHOTO BY JOHANNA PERZ



# INSPIRE

Birds inspire the best in people.



PHOTO COURTESY CORNELL LAB BIRD CAMS

## BROADCASTING A REAL-LIFE LESSON IN THE GARBAGE PATCH.

The Cornell Lab's Bird Cams program celebrated its third year by passing a major milestone—1 billion total minutes of live-streaming video viewership of birds from across the country.

New cams this year followed the lives of Barred Owls in Indiana, Barn Owls in Texas, Laysan Albatrosses in Hawaii, and Snowy Owls in Alaska. Altogether, more than 5 million people from 200 countries have logged on to watch the Cornell Lab's Bird Cams.

Beyond entertainment and fascination, the cams serve an important role in communicating about the threats birds face in the world. In June an albatross chick coughed up some odd-looking debris. Hundreds watched live online as a volunteer from the Kauai Albatross Network found bright red and blue fragments of plastic amid the contents that had been in the chick's stomach—and a syringe still containing some kind of orange liquid.

*Bird Cam viewers of Kaloakulua, an albatross chick on Kauai, got an up-close look at the effects of plastic pollution in the Pacific Ocean. Hundreds watched live as a volunteer from the Kauai Albatross Network picked through an assortment of plastics that the chick had coughed up from its stomach. Photo by Jeanine Meyers.*



"The most important thing I learned from watching the Bird Cams was ... seeing the contents of the albatross chick's stomach!!!" wrote one Bird Cams viewer. "It has literally changed my life finding out about the plastic pollution problem in our oceans!"





*The Sapsuckers competed in two birding competitions this spring—one in the Southwest as part of the annual Cornell Lab Big Day fundraiser, and another in Israel for an international birding race that brought attention to the problem of poaching in the Mediterranean. Photo by Tom Johnson.*

## BIG DAY BIRDING BECOMES A VEHICLE FOR CONSERVATION AWARENESS.

The Sapsuckers, the Cornell Lab's top birding team, have a storied history in competitions—three World Series of Birding Championships, and three times they have set the North American Big Day record (most recently in 2013 with 294 species in 24 hours in Texas). This past spring, the Sapsuckers gained accolades for bringing the Big Day spotlight to the American Southwest, one of the fastest changing landscapes on earth.

Leaving Texas for the first time in three years, the Sapsuckers birded a route from Arizona to the Salton Sea to the California coast, in the process communicating to hundreds of thousands of online followers about this region where bird habitat is facing critical threats

from climate change, water use, and urban sprawl. "Great strategy for conservation! Congrats to all," wrote one Facebook commenter.

The Sapsuckers also travelled to Israel to compete in the Champions of the Flyway event, an international birding race in Israel along a major migration route for songbirds and raptors moving from Europe around the Mediterranean to Africa and Asia. In addition to attracting the top birding teams from Europe and the United States, the event also raises awareness about geo-political issues in wildlife management and the massive problem of poaching along this flyway (where an estimated 10,000 raptors are killed illegally every year). The Sapsuckers again held the championship cup at the end of the day, this time in partnership with a team of Israeli and Palestinian birders.

## A DOCUMENTARY PROJECT TO REVIVE PRIDE IN A PHILIPPINE NATIONAL ICON.

The majestic Philippine Eagle is a symbol of national pride—an icon that has been featured on coins and stamps. But in the wild, the eagles are fast on their way to extinction, as more than 95 percent of the Philippines' rainforests have been cut.

Last fall the Cornell Lab's multimedia team launched into a partnership with the Philippine Eagle Foundation and premier wildlife cinematographer Neil Rettig on a series of filming expeditions to document these eagles—from nesting to fledging a new generation of eaglets—on the remote Philippine island of Mindanao. Work conditions in the wet rainforest have been challenging, and getting the right shots required building camera blinds 110 feet high in the tree canopy. The efforts are

paying off, though, with stunning footage in ultra HD video that provides an intimate portrait of these spectacular eagles.

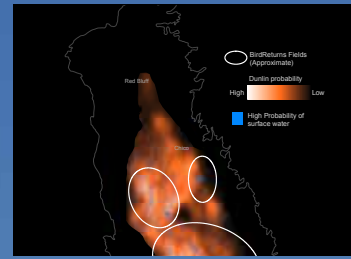
Next year the project will culminate in an hour-long documentary broadcast on Philippine national television, as part of a social media, public service announcements, and educational campaign to alert Filipinos to the plight of their national bird. This unprecedented, international collaboration will take the film and multimedia campaign to American and international media markets, all in hope of rallying Filipino and global efforts to make the Philippine Eagle a living symbol of the country's bright future, not a memory of its past.

*The Cornell Lab's multimedia team travelled to the Philippines several times in the last year for a Philippine Eagle documentary filming project. Produced with stunning ultra HD video quality, the film will be the centerpiece of a global effort to rally conservation efforts for this majestic, and fast dwindling, eagle. Photo by Kike Arnal.*



# ACT

Actionable science makes a long-term difference on the ground and creates a better future.



*A big-data conservation partnership between eBird and The Nature Conservancy resulted in critical migratory stopover habitat at a crucial point in the Pacific Flyway. More than 20,000 Dunlins (left) were counted on the project's flooded rice fields. eBird data resulted in maps of shorebird occurrence (center) that showed where wet habitat was needed most in California's Central Valley. TNC migratory bird scientist Mark Reynolds and Cornell Lab information science director Steve Kelling (right) surveyed the project's results firsthand at a flooded rice field in the Central Valley last February. Dunlin photo by Mark Eden, map courtesy TNC.*

## TURNING BIG DATA ON BIRDS INTO DYNAMIC HABITAT.

With more than 200 million recorded bird sightings, eBird has snowballed into the biggest biodiversity database in the world. Since its launch in 2002, eBird has become the de facto means of bird checklisting for more than 200,000 birders, and it's now on track to double the previous decade's worth of data submissions in just the next two years.

All these data are being put to good use on the ground, as advanced, predictive computer modeling fueled by eBird is providing crucial information for a big-data conservation partnership with The Nature Conservancy in California's Central Valley.

In a pilot project last spring, Cornell Lab computer scientists and TNC biologists worked together to identify the most important areas for

migratory shorebirds. TNC then offered rice farmers in those areas a contract to flood their fields temporarily to provide stopover habitat.

The project represented a brand new approach to conservation science, linking the volunteer citizen-science data in eBird with NASA satellite imagery to provide dynamic habitat when it is needed most by birds. Cornell Lab statisticians Daniel Fink and Alison Johnston (who is on a postdoctoral fellowship from the British Trust for Ornithology) used big-data computational techniques to develop STEM models of shorebird species occurrence and abundance in the Central Valley, scaled down to 3-kilometer grids and depicted at week-by-week intervals. "The better data allows us to be more efficient and pre-

cise in conservation," said TNC economist Eric Hallstein, one of the leaders on the project.

Bird surveys in the project area last spring showed tremendous success. The flooded rice fields held an average of 45 birds per acre, while most of the neighboring dry rice fields held none. As it happened, the project piloted in the middle of an epic California drought, which made the wet habitat across a dried-up landscape even more important.

"Most of the Central Valley has been dry as a bone," said rice farmer Doug Thomas, whose family enrolled 160 acres of their land in the program. "For most of these birds, the flooded rice fields have been just about the only game in town."



## DOCUMENTING POACHING IN CHINA.

Last year, Cornell Lab multimedia producer Gerit Vyn investigated reports of illegal mist netting while working on a conservation media project about the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Dangling in nets were the remains of several shorebirds, including many threatened species. The total toll from netting could be thousands each month.



Cornell Lab multimedia footage of illegal bird netting in China led to a government crackdown on poaching along the Yellow Sea coast.

The Cornell Lab turned the video over to Chinese Central TV, which broadcast the footage as part of an hour-long news documentary seen by more than 3.7 million viewers.

"After the program ... I received several responses from the local governor," wrote the program's news director in an email. "I am glad to tell you that the local government ... have been working several days fighting against the mistnetting activity. So we are successful in the first step."

## AUDIO MONITORING FOR MEXICAN SEABIRD CONSERVATION.

Birds speak a language that transcends international boundaries, and so the Cornell Lab's expertise in bird audio recording and monitoring translates well in other countries, where the transfer of knowledge and skills can empower local conservation efforts. Last spring a team from the Cornell Lab's Neotropical Conservation Initiative and Macaulay Library travelled to Mexico's Baja peninsula for a week of training workshops on acoustic techniques for biodiversity monitoring.

The workshop was the latest in a series of partnership events between the Cornell Lab and the *Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas, A.C. (GEIC)* in the Bahía de Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico. Playback of audio recordings of active seabird breeding colonies is a proven method for enticing birds to new or former breeding colony sites. A recording made during the workshop at a colony of Brandt's Cormorants—a species of international conserva-

*Last March, U.S. State Department General Consul Andrew Erickson travelled to the Pacific seabird island of Todos Santos off the coast of Mexico to present Macaulay Library curator Greg Budney (left) and Cornell Lab Neotropical Conservation Initiative coordinator Eduardo E. Iñigo-Elias with a medal for binational scientific collaboration.*

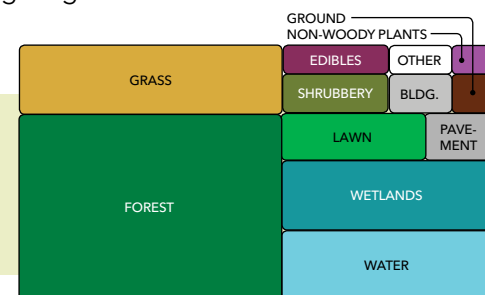


PHOTO BY EDUARDO IÑIGO-ELIAS

tion concern—has already been edited by the Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library and is now in the hands of GEIC biologists. Playback of the recordings will be used in attempts to attract cormorants to islands to repopulate their former breeding range.

## yardmap

Over its first two years, YardMap—a citizen-science project to promote bird-friendly landscaping—has resulted in almost 25,000 acres of habitat created in backyards, parks, and urban areas across the country.



# a letter to **OUR DONORS**

## **DISCOVER—YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN IN AN HISTORIC EFFORT**

In a \$125 million capital campaign, there's room for everybody to get involved.

The success of the Discover Campaign will ride on the strength of our membership. It's a big ask, an additional gift on top of your annual contribution. But we've got a special opportunity here, and we believe it could be a game-changing moment in the evolution of the Cornell Lab—the chance to tap into the power of birds in ways that will create a better future for the biological diversity of our planet.

As you can see from this annual report, these are exciting times at the Cornell Lab. We're hitting key breakthroughs in science and technology, training more young scientists than ever before, communicating with more people (more than 11 million people visited our AllAboutBirds website last year), and we're building a global community of people who care about birds (eBirders are now uploading checklists from every country in the world).

Birds remind us of the interconnectedness of all living things. An oriole that arrives at your feeder one spring day may have been living on a banana plantation in the tropics just a few weeks earlier, and instantly there's a link between your backyard and Costa Rica. It's in that spirit of interconnectedness that we're asking all our members to join in an extra effort this year—the Discover Campaign—to strengthen and grow the Cornell Lab's capacity for the challenges of the next 100 years.

Every contribution is meaningful, as it could be multiplied by 50,000 of your fellow Cornell Lab members. It could be as simple as joining the Golden-wing Society or a monthly gift through our Discovery Partners program this year. Or, it could be the act of writing the Cornell Lab into your estate plan. (If you do, be sure to send us a note and be counted among the Discover contributors.) This campaign is about the long term. It's about using birds as our compass to chart a path toward sustainability. It's about your grandkids and your great-grandkids—preserving the beauty of birdsong and the spectacle of migration for future generations.

Please watch for more news about the Discover Campaign this winter and into 2015. Hopefully by this time next year, I'll be writing to you about the success we achieved together, this historic effort to launch a Cornell Lab for the 21st century. Thank you so much for being a vital part of the lab, and as always, deep thanks for your generosity and commitment.

Sincerely,



Sean Scanlon  
Senior Director,  
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(607) 254-1105; sbs259@cornell.edu

**DISCOVER**  
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## MAKE BIRDS YOUR LEGACY

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER BY GERRIT VYN

### **It's easy to include the Cornell Lab in your estate plans—**

and participate in the Discover Campaign's vision to sustain the study and conservation of birds for generations to come. To make a bequest through your will, simply include the language: "I give and bequeath the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ (or \_\_\_\_\_% of my residuary estate) to Cornell University, an educational institution in Ithaca, NY, for the Lab of Ornithology to be used in support of its charitable purposes." To learn more about estate planning opportunities that benefit you and the Lab, please call Scott Sutcliffe at **(607) 254-2424**. The Lab is pleased to acknowledge such friends in perpetuity as members of the Sapsucker Woods Society.



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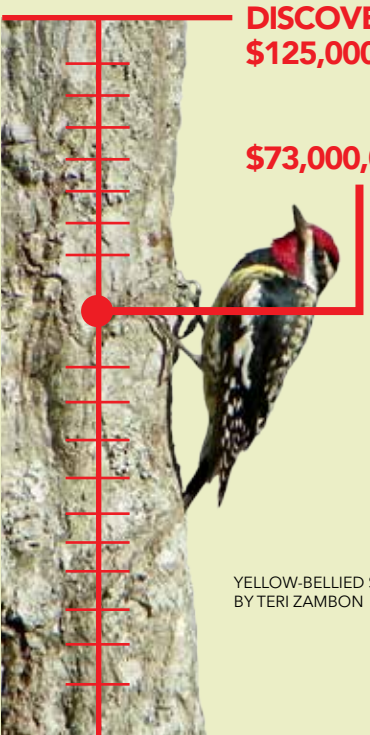
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Mrs. Kris Finley  
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Mr. Deryk V. Regelman  
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**Edmund Swigart**  
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Ms. Lois Goelz  
Mr. Fritz Page  
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Ms. Victoria Dennis and  
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**Joseph Marshall  
Thomas**  
Mr. Sidney R. Okes, Jr.  
Mr. John Ruthven  
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Ms. Elizabeth Pague  
Jack and Judy Krebs

**John (Tad) Johnson**  
Mr. William L. Thompson

**Mrs. Nancy J. Tolti**  
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**Emil Urban**  
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**Ernest Weidl**  
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Mr. and Mrs. Peter Randall  
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Mr. Joe Diandrea  
Mr. Charles Trautmann  
Ms. Michelle E. Watkins  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordy Burton  
Ms. Jennifer Mattei  
Mrs. Ruth Morton  
Ms. Jennifer Fee  
Mrs. Margi Power  
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Ames  
Ms. Roberta Palmiotto  
Miss Jennifer Martinson  
Mr. Timot Felker Lamarre and  
Ms. Judith Lamarre

Mr. Jim Hutchinson  
Robin Gage  
Ms. Betsey Taft  
Mr. David McNellis and  
Ms. Erica Richter  
Ms. Alice Gomez  
Miss Barbara Sullivan  
Gina Bartlewski  
Ms. Joanna Grosodonia  
Ms. Vicki Kelley  
Ms. Jane Goold-Caulfield

**LeRoy A. Winters**  
Ms. Renee Davie



# 2014 FISCAL YEAR FINANCIAL REPORT

July 1, 2013–June 30, 2014

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology takes great care to steward your gifts wisely.

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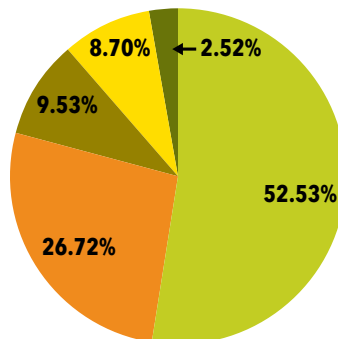
Through your passion and unwavering intellectual and financial support, you make it possible for the Cornell Lab to be an institute of exploration, fueled by curiosity and determination to better understand how nature works in habitats around the world—in the air, on land, and at sea.

Thank you for your generous support.

*Back cover: In March the Cornell Lab unveiled a 120-by-40-foot mural of the simple black silhouettes of 170 birds from North and South America. This masterpiece—artist James Prosek's tribute to Roger Tory Peterson's 1934 "A Field Guide to the Birds"—now greets visitors to the Imogene Powers Johnson Center for Birds and Biodiversity at Sapsucker Woods. "I want [visitors] to look at the wall first and try to enjoy the diversity of shapes and forms of these creatures without needing to know [their] name, because knowing the name of something isn't necessarily knowing what it is," Prosek said. A key to bird IDs is available for visitors at the front desk.*

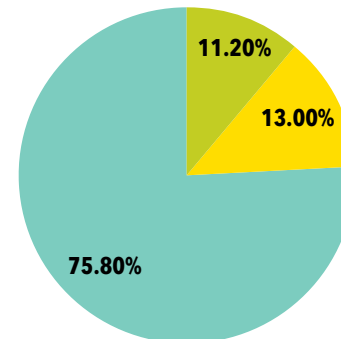
BACK COVER: PHOTO BY KAREN RODRIGUEZ  
ANNUAL REPORT GRAPHIC DESIGN BY JOANNE AVILA

## FY14 REVENUES



Membership and Gifts.....	\$12,479,980
Grants and Contracts.....	\$6,347,449
Program Income.....	\$2,264,722
Invested Funds Income.....	\$2,067,705
Other .....	\$599,432
<b>TOTAL REVENUE.....</b>	<b>\$23,759,288</b>

## FY14 EXPENDITURES



Administration .....	\$2,597,738
Development.....	\$3,013,178
Program .....	\$17,635,693
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES .....</b>	<b>\$23,246,609</b>

## Annual Operating Revenue and Expense, 2005-2014

