

# 2017 Jamie Smith Memorial Award for Mentoring

## *Gary Kaiser*

The Jamie Smith Memorial Award for Mentoring is one of the top honours bestowed by SCO-SOC. It is awarded to individuals who are committed to the training and development of the next generation of Canadian ornithologists. I am pleased to announce that this year's award was presented to Gary Kaiser.

Gary is especially deserving of this award because he shares so many of the values and passions held by Jamie Smith: a sincere love for scientific discovery, the natural world, and birds, and also a passion for turning that love into conservation. Gary is probably best known to SCO members as the leader of the very successful Canadian Wildlife Service effort, during the 1980s, to map and census all the seabird colonies on the coast of British Columbia. Later, in the 1990s, he was instrumental in creating the floating mist-net array



technique that began the mass banding of Marbled Murrelets. This technology ushered in the extensive work of Simon Fraser University teams which studied the species at Desolation Sound, a study with which he was associated for many years. Gary also suggested that the restoration funds from the Nestucca oil spill be used to remove rats from what was once Pacific Canada's largest seabird colony, Langara Island, an effort that he led and eventually resulted in the eradication of rats and re-establishment of the seabird colony. In later years, he studied fossil birds, including naming a species of pterosaur and writing a book "The Inner Bird."

Perhaps less known than his seabird studies, is Gary's role in mentoring young people in ornithology, both in Canada and in Latin America. In the process of studying shorebird migration, he trained many high school students to catch and band sandpipers (1978 - 1982) by taking a dozen interested students out to Boundary Bay or Roberts Bank every day for high tide. It was the middle of the Western Sandpiper migration and they captured 10,000 birds, including several recoveries from Alaska. The success of using these, initially untrained, youngsters encouraged him to try the same approach in Latin America, using funds from the CWS Latin America program.

During the 1980s and 1990s, he took a number of trips to Colombia and Peru. These visits involved 25-day field programs in remote areas, for 20-25 students at a time. He introduced the students to mist-netting, bird-banding, and bird survey techniques. In Peru, he had had to start from scratch, but in Colombia the student organizers were already very skilled. However, Gary's presence was the catalyst for much more activity than would have happened otherwise, as he provides dozens of mist-nets, headlamps, notebooks, and binoculars from earlier CWS projects. Under encouragement from Arturo Mejia, a Professor at Universidad de los Andes, who strongly believed in fieldwork as an essential part of his students' education, Gary helped educate students in Colombia, but also helped keen students get experience in temperate ecosystems. The students paid for their travel to Canada and Gary provided food and accommodation, both in Vancouver when they arrived, and in the field camps. In practice, they camped in his house in Vancouver and filled it with boxes of photocopied papers from the UBC library. The idea of open stacks astounded them. The Latin America projects were one of Gary's main contributions to ornithology, fostering an entire generation of Colombian ornithologists, both by bringing Canadian expertise to Colombia and teaching Colombians how to band birds and engage in ornithology, and also by bringing Colombians to Canada. Almost a dozen of those Colombian students now work as ornithologists at universities across North America, and many more continue to work in Latin America.

In short, Gary invested in Latin American ornithology before it was 'sexy' to do so, and played an important role in fostering connections between Canada and Colombia. Although, in many ways, Colombia has much more to offer ornithology than Canada, Colombia had produced far fewer ornithologists than Canada at that point. Gary played a seminal role in showing those students what ornithology could be, an influence that has now permeated much of Colombian ornithology. Gary says, of his successes, "I just happen to be lucky that so many of the Colombians and Peruvians have turned out to be either very successful academics or important conservationists."

Gary Kaiser truly embodies the spirit of the Jamie Smith Mentoring Award in Ornithology, both as a mentor and in creating a lasting legacy of mentorship. On behalf of the award committee, I would like to congratulate Gary on his achievements and encourage others to consider nominating their mentor for next year's award.

*Kyle Elliot, Chair of the Award Committee*