

# Distinguished Ornithologists Erica Dunn and David Hussell

*Erica Nol*



Erica Nol (centre) presenting the Distinguished Ornithologist Award to Erica Dunn and David Hussell at the OFO Annual Convention in Port Dover on 25 September 2010. *Photo: Jean Iron*

I am very pleased to present this citation for the Ontario Field Ornithologists Distinguished Ornithologist Award to Drs. Erica (Ricky) Dunn and David Hussell. I met the two in 1976, when I came to Long Point Bird Observatory (LPBO), for my first job in ornithology. I was hired to work with Ricky on the ecology of Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*) in the marshes of Long Point Bay (and as a bit of coincidence, to be an employee, at least on paper, of Trent University). David was the Executive Director and Ricky was

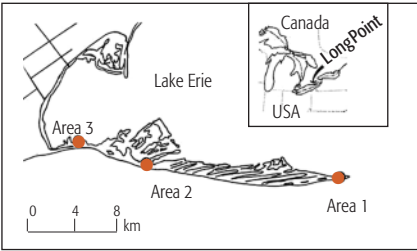
commuting from Peterborough where she worked for two years. It was an impressionable period of my life: launching the canoe at Old Cut (before Old Cut was the familiar Old Cut of BSC today) while Ricky showed me the basics of tying knots, handling bird eggs, and becoming a more organized person. I also learned how to extract and band birds and much about the secret life of Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*), with David's always thoughtful and patient approach to the science of bird banding.

Ricky and Dave were excellent mentors, and I learned a tremendous amount about ornithology during that year, including the basics of how to analyse data, and tips for the presentation of my first paper at a scientific meeting (at the old Ontario Field Ornithologists meetings that some OFO members might remember). Most importantly, the intellectual stimulation at LPBO, often occurring over a cup of tea, shaped and provided the impetus to my own career.

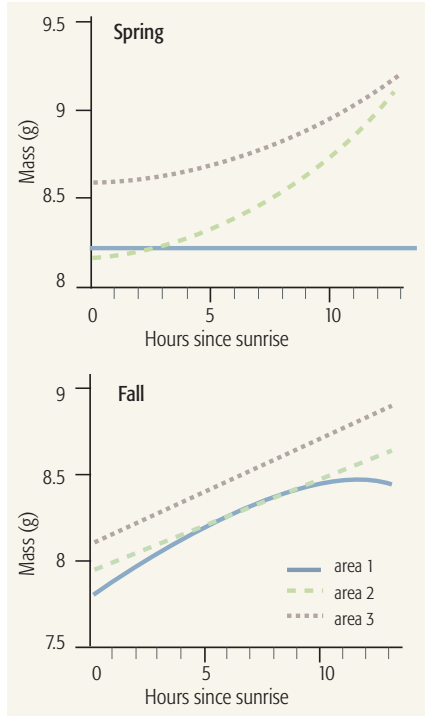
Ricky and Dave met at the University of Michigan when they were graduate students in the Zoology Department. Ricky had spent two years at the Wooster College in Ohio, then went on to Michigan for the remainder of her undergraduate and graduate work, while Dave was there conducting his PhD work, after a short career as a concrete engineer for the Ontario government. Dave is originally from England but emigrated here in 1957 to work as an engineer. Ricky conducted her Ph.D on the physiology of Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), at a field site off the Isle of Shoals, New Hampshire. Dave pursued his dissertation work on the ecology and life histories of arctic passerines (as a result of having caught a severe case of 'arctic disease' in the early and mid 1960s, travelling from Churchill, Manitoba, in the sub-Arctic, eventually to Devon Island, where the main body of his work was conducted). Judging from Dave's numerous returns to the arctic (and recently in the company of Ricky) and his recent field project on Northern Wheatears (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) on Baffin Island, he has yet to shake the symptoms of that disease.

In the published literature, David and Ricky have had a profound influence, in their lasting approach to shaping the science behind volunteer-based surveys, both here in Ontario and across North America. As the first Executive Director in the 1970s, of the oldest bird observatory in North America, the Long Point Bird Observatory, David started North America's (and I think the world's) first ever Birdathon, which, in very short time, made birding across this continent a major fund-raising activity for non-profit organizations interested in conserving and studying birds. Coupled with Ricky's substantial organizational skills, these first years brought together a large and enthusiastic collection of interested amateur volunteers. Influenced, from his life in the United Kingdom, by the rich and useful information obtained by volunteer-based surveys coordinated by the British Trust for Ornithology, David and Ricky then initiated several Ontario-wide volunteer based surveys. These included the Great Lakes Beached Bird Survey, the Great Blue Heron Survey and the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey. The latter, in 1987, became part of Project FeederWatch, conducted across North America with over 7,000 participants; a survey organized and coordinated by Ricky through the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This work led to Ricky's book, the highly accessible 'Birds at My Feeder' first published in 1999. Dave was also instrumental in getting the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas going in the 1980s, sitting on the management committee and chairing the technical committee and the data review committee, where he reviewed thousands of records.

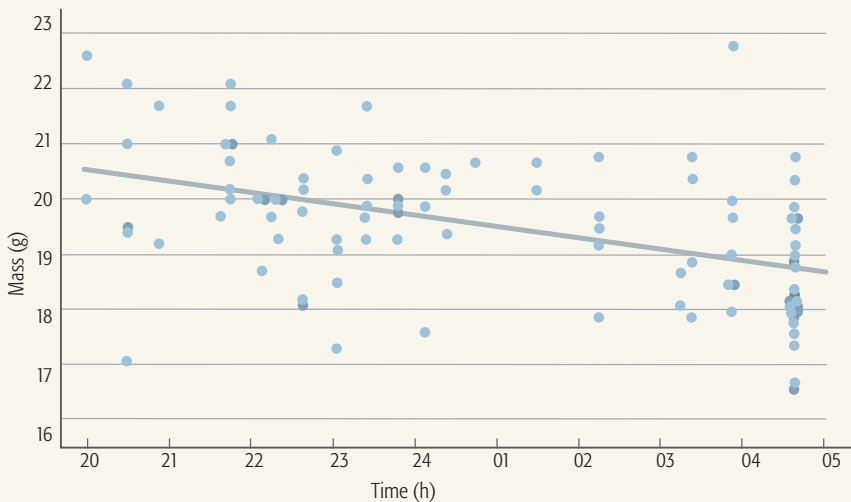
Think how many members of OFO have participated in these various surveys and how much poorer we would know our environment if not for their early effort starting them. Through the deep appreciation of the value of migration data collected at Long Point since the early 1960s, David and Ricky started to use these accumulating data in innovative and influential ways. I have two examples, both of which I use in my ornithology class at Trent University.



From: Dunn, EH. 2000. Figs 1 and 4. AUK 117:12-21.



**Lighthouse kills: Ovenbirds at Long Point -0.2 g/h**



**Time of Capture at Long Point Lighthouse.** From: Hussell, DJT. 1969. Weight loss of birds during nocturnal migration. AUK 86: 75-83

When David left LPBO in 1982, he went to work at the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), ostensibly to analyse deer hunt data. He was able to convince the powers that be, that analysing hawk migration data was at least as important. He began his extremely helpful move towards analysing data available on hawk migration from Beam-er Point Conservation Area, at Grimsby, Ontario. From there he moved to the large amounts of North American data, particularly from Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania. He used these data to refine methods that he had used on data from passerine migration to detect trends in numbers. At this time, although Ricky was only working part-time because their two boys were still quite young, her organizational skills were used to excellent advantage as she helped Dr. Charlie MacInnes take data from early studies of Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) out of file drawers. In very short order she published, with Charlie, six important papers on Canada goose laying dates, factors affecting clutch size, gosling growth, adult body size variation and the effects of neckbands on survival. If we could all have such incredibly efficient research associates!

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Not surprisingly, not long after, Ricky was hired as a research scientist with the Canadian Wildlife Service. Dave retired and they moved to Ottawa where they lived until Ricky's retirement in 2005.

While in Ottawa, among other accomplishments, Ricky introduced the very influential concept of 'responsibility' for a species, the outline of which was published in a 1999 issue of Biological Conservation. The concept is simply, that a species should be considered for careful management, not only if it is rare or endangered, but also if the range where it is most abundant (breeding, wintering or migratory) falls within a single or a small number of political jurisdictions, making it particularly vulnerable to unwise land-use decisions.

Between these two outstanding scientists, they have published 132 peer-reviewed publications, as well as numerous other printed contributions that I am sure most of you have encountered. In providing some context, many university scientists need to publish or we do indeed perish, and so, as a consequence, have long CVs full of publications. Many of these publications are co-authored by graduate students who often do the physical field work, the data analysis, and if we are so lucky, also provide much of the intellectual component of those publications. I would venture that for most senior university scientists only about 20% of their publications are first authored.

By contrast, in their combined list of publications, about 70% are first or single authored papers, not benefitting from a cadre of graduate students. Combined citations in the scientific literature of these papers total nearly 2400, and most of those citations are for papers not involving the work that I have mentioned that makes use of volunteer surveys.

Thus, Dave and Ricky have also profoundly influenced the basic research end of ornithology. A few examples include: David's seminal paper on clutch size variation in arctic passerines has been cited by other authors over 350 times, whereas Ricky's collection of papers on energy allocation in altricial birds has been cited nearly 200 times. I wonder how many OFO members know of this 'other life' of these two exceptional individuals.

I must also mention the prominent service to the broader ornithological community by David and Ricky that has been sustained for nearly four decades. Although not an exhaustive list, Ricky has served on at least 16 committees of the American Ornithologists' Union (from endowment, to chairing a committee on Birds of North America online), and then became President from 2006-2008. Additionally, she has served as president and councilor for the Society of Canadian Ornithologists; she was a councilor of the Association of Field Ornithologists, a member of both the COSEWIC Bird Subcommittee, and the Technical Committee of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network and a long-time member of the Partners in Flight Technical Committee. Dave has served on the Board of Directors of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, was the Chair of the first Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Technical Committee, a trustee on the North American Loon Fund, scientific advisor to four different bird observatories, he sat on the advisory council to the Hawk Migration Association of North America and was co-chair of the Canadian Migration Monitoring

Network Steering Committee. Thus, they have spread their influence, across amateur and professional ornithology throughout our continent.

With this long list of accomplishments, you will no doubt not be surprised that Dave and Ricky have received many other honours including, jointly, the Doris Huestis Speirs award for outstanding contributions to Canadian Ornithology, and the Eugene Eisenmann Medal for excellence in ornithology and encouragement of the amateur. Ricky has been awarded the Partners in Flight Award for Outstanding Contributions to Bird Conservation and the Janette Dean Award of the Ontario Bird Banding Association for contributions to bird banding (with David Brewer) among others. David has received the Hawk Migration Association of North America's Maurice Broun Award for deep personal commitment and outstanding service to advance raptor migration study and conservation and the Janette Dean Award.

I have no doubt that I have convinced you of the worthiness of your selection of David Hussell and Erica Dunn for this most prestigious award of the Ontario Field Ornithologists.

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*Erica Nol*, Biology Department,  
Trent University, Peterborough,  
ON. K9J 7B8