

## THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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At the VIth Neotropical Ornithological Congress (NOC) in Monterrey, Mexico, I was elected President of The Neotropical Ornithological Society (NOS). This is a great honor. It is thus with both pleasure and pride, but also with some trepidation, that I accept this important task. As President I will do all that is in my power and ability to promote and disseminate scientific research in Neotropical ornithology to a new level, and to make the voice of Neotropical ornithologists heard even louder throughout the world.

My job will be made relatively easy because I do not step into a vacuum, but instead start with the benefit acquired from the vast experience transmitted to me by my predecessor in this position, past-President Mario A. Ramos, who has assumed this responsibility superbly for twenty years, from 1979 to 1999. His outstanding style of presidency will certainly be a hard act to follow. On behalf of all members of the Society, and personally, I wish to thank him most warmly for all he has done, mostly behind the scenes, not only to keep the Society going through hard times, but also to keep improving its image as the torch-bearer of ornithology as a science in the Neotropics. Later in this piece I will indicate some of the new initiatives that will begin with my presidency. First, however, a bit of history and some reflections are in order.

A little over twenty years ago, from 25 November to 1 December 1979, the Asociación Ornitológica del Plata hosted the "1er Congreso Iberoamericano de Ornitología" in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This seminal meeting took place largely thanks to the initiative of Juan Daciuk, who several years previous to the event itself had been planting the seeds for such an encounter, having noted the necessity "de organizar una reunión científica con miras a iniciar una época de mayor comunicación y acercamiento entre los ornitólogos de América latina..., pues hay intereses y necesidades científicas comunes..." (Hornero, No. Extraordinario: 1, 1983; this special, 313-page issue of *Hornero* contains the proceedings of that meeting). I do not believe that Daciuk realized then that he had started a major movement in the arena of Neotropical ornithology. I do believe that it is accurate to state and to recognize that Juan Daciuk was the founding father of our present Society.

At the Buenos Aires meeting of 1979 an Executive Committee was elected, with Mario Ramos as President and John H. Rappole as Assistant Treasurer. The decision was made to hold the next meeting in Mexico. This event (the II<sup>nd</sup> Neotropical Congress) took place in Xalapa in 1983, under the genial chairmanship of Mario Ramos. From then on, the ball started rolling, and going faster and faster.

The Neotropical Ornithological Society was officially founded at a subsequent meeting (the III<sup>rd</sup>) in Cali, Colombia, on 4 December 1987, where Mario Ramos was elected President of the NOS and where Karl-L. Schuchmann accepted the onerous task of editing a new journal, to be named "Ornitología Neotropical." Less than three years later, in October 1990, Volume 1 of "Ornitología Neotropical" was published. Few people other than Karl Schuchmann can realize how much labor it was to start the journal, and then not only to keep it going and but also

growing and improving. To him go my profound thanks for his incredibly effective work.

It is very gratifying to see how much progress has taken place since these early years. For example, whereas 192 ornithologists from 17 countries (including 7 Latin American countries) attended the first meeting in Buenos Aires in 1979, where they gave 72 papers, at the last (VIth) Neotropical Ornithological Congress from 2–10 October in Monterrey, Mexico, a total of about 420 registered participants from 25 countries (including about 300 participants from 17 Latin American countries) delivered about 320 papers, showed about 105 posters, and gave over 100 additional presentations in 10 symposia and 15 round tables. Similarly, whereas the first volume of "Ornitología Neotropical" was a thin double issue of only 32 pages including both No. 1 and No. 2, the latest volume (vol. 10, 1999, 2 issues) included 244 pages. But the evolution of Neotropical ornithology cannot be reflected only by some simple statistics. Indeed, not only does "Ornitología Neotropical" have more pages now than early on, but, and more importantly, the quality of its papers has enormously improved.

As a result of elections held among the NOS membership prior to the Monterrey Congress, the new Executive Board of the NOS is now composed of President François Vuilleumier, Vice-President Roberto Cavalcanti, Treasurer J. Michael Meyers, Secretary Robert Beason, Editor Raymond McNeil, and Council Members Mary Victoria McDonald, Eugene S. Morton, and Edwin O. Willis. The various Committees of the NOS and their respective Chairpersons are listed in the Congress Report, published in this issue, and co-signed by Ernesto C. Enkerlin, Chairman of the Monterrey Local Committee Chairman, and myself.

Several individuals were singled out at the Monterrey Congress and nominated as Honorary Members of the NOS in recognition of their work. They are (in alphabetical order) Humberto Álvarez (Chairman of the IIIrd NOC in Cali), Juan Daciuk (Chairman of the Ist NOC in Buenos Aires and initiator of the NOCs and, ultimately, of the NOS), Ernesto C. Enkerlin (Chairman of the VIth NOC in Monterrey), Jürgen Haffer (for his scientific contributions to Neotropical ornithology), Nancy Hilgert de Benavides (Chairwoman of the IVth NOC in Quito, Ecuador), Nancy López de Kochalka (Chairwoman of the Vth NOC in Asunción, Paraguay), Allan R. Phillips (posthumously, for his contributions to Mexican ornithology), Mario A. Ramos (Chairman of the IInd NOC in Xalapa and initiator and first President of the NOS), John H. Rappole (past Secretary and Treasurer of the NOS), and Karl-L. Schuchmann (past Managing Editor of *Ornitología Neotropical*).

At the Monterrey Congress I suggested that the first decade of the new century should be called "The Decade of Neotropical Ornithology." Several new initiatives, started immediately, should help to move The Neotropical Ornithological Society in the right direction.

A first initiative is the granting of \$5000 by Mr. and Mrs. Robert G. Goelet of New York City, to be used as seed money for a Student Fund. The purpose of this fund is to help students from Latin America to attend and present a paper or poster at the next Neotropical Ornithological Congress, which will be held in Chile in 2003. Grant support was available for 54 students to attend the VIth Neotropical Congress in Monterrey in 1999. Let us aim to provide funds to double or treble this number in Chile in 2003. Mr. Goelet, who has already generously provided several grants to the Society in the past, was elected a Patron of the Neotropical Society in Monterrey to recognize his substantial contributions. I urge all members of the Society to make donations at the time they pay their annual dues, in order to greatly increase this fund in the year 2000 and in years to come. The fact that our Society is now a tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code of the United States is a significant new development here. This new tax

status also means, and this is very important for Latin American members of the Society, that dues and donations can now be made by credit card. For these developments as well as for so many other financial and other tasks, I wish to acknowledge here John Rappole's uniquely lasting contribution to the well-being of the Society, as its Treasurer, doubling as a Secretary, for twenty years.

A second initiative is the recruitment of new members. Although the Society is well and healthy at the beginning of the new century, we need to increase our membership considerably in order to establish a totally secure financial footing, in order to make the Society a truly significant voice in world ornithology and to make "Ornitología Neotropical" an even better organ for the diffusion of this science. In addition to forthcoming membership drives and advertising campaigns, I therefore urge each present member to recruit at least one new member, and if possible even two or more, in the year 2000: simply doubling our membership would go a long way toward these goals.

A third initiative is the establishment of a Research Fund. Seed money for this fund will be obtained from the sale of an original painting of a new hummingbird subspecies, described earlier in "Ornitología Neotropical," and donated anonymously. Further details of this event will be announced at a later date.

A fourth initiative is the increase in the number of issues of "Ornitología Neotropical," from the current two per year to four, starting in 2000. Thus the journal will align itself on other world-class ornithological journals that also publish on a quarterly basis. More pages in four issues per year will mean a faster turnover rate from subscription time to publication time. More pages in four issues will also mean an improved possibility of obtaining grants, because granting organizations are especially interested in scientific societies that have a steady record of excellence in publication, as shown, on a quantitative basis, by quarterly publication rates. Our new Editor, Raymond McNeil, picking up the job after a ten-year stint from Karl Schuchmann, has been able to move the journal in this important new direction quite rapidly, and we must congratulate him for this achievement.

A fifth initiative is the goal of hosting the 25th International Ornithological Congress in a country of the Neotropical Region in 2010, which will be the culmination of "The Decade of Neotropical Ornithology." It seems clear, on the basis of intensive discussions held at the VIth Neotropical Congress in Monterrey in October 1999, that several Latin American countries have the logistic capacity, the will, and the leadership necessary for this job. Two or three of them have expressed clear interest in this matter, and, as President of the NOS, I will help them to the degree that I can. You will hear more about this item in the future.

I close this first President's Page with a call to all ornithologists working on Neotropical birds, but especially to those living in the Neotropical Region, to participate actively in the affairs of the Neotropical Ornithological Society. My e-mail address ([vuill@amnh.org](mailto:vuill@amnh.org)) is available to all of you who wish to make suggestions or to offer your skills as a volunteer.

