



Loye and Alden Miller Research Award 2016, to Walter D. Koenig

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SOCIETY AWARD

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The Miller Award Committee of the Cooper Ornithological Society is pleased to honor Walt Koenig as the recipient of the Loye and Alden Miller Research Award for 2016. This award is presented for lifetime achievement in ornithological research.

Walter (Walt) Koenig attended Stanford University, where he majored in biology. Walt then moved across the San Francisco Bay to obtain his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, where he was a student of Frank Pitelka (himself a former Miller Research Awardee). It was during this time that Walt inaugurated his studies of Acorn Woodpeckers as the subject of his dissertation. He remained at Berkeley as a postdoctoral fellow, moved on briefly to a faculty position at Occidental College, and returned to Berkeley as a research zoologist based at the Hastings Natural History Reserve, a position he held for more than a quarter-century. In 2008, Walt moved to Cornell University as a senior scientist at the Lab of Ornithology and the Department of Neurobiology and Behavior. He retired from Cornell in 2016 but remains fully active in research at Hastings and on his many projects elsewhere.



Walter D. Koenig. Photo credit: Bruce Lyon

Walt is a broad thinker with a love for rigorous, hypothesis-driven science that is deeply informed by astute observations of natural history. His scientific output includes more than 200 peer-reviewed papers and four scholarly books on cooperative breeding—one per decade—that each help set the agenda for research on animal sociality for successive cohorts of behavioral ecologists worldwide. He has also written many general articles for both scientific and popular audiences. Walt has mentored and inspired dozens of undergraduate students through his field internships at Hastings, and he has held many service and leadership roles in professional societies such as the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) and the International Society for Behavioral Ecology. His many such contributions to the Cooper Ornithological Society include his editorship of *The Condor* from 1995 to 2000. Walt is a Fellow of both the AOU and the California Academy of Sciences, the 1999 recipient of the Brewster Memorial Award from the AOU, and an Honorary Member of the Cooper Ornithological Society.

Throughout his career, Walt has made foundational contributions to ornithology, ecology, and behavioral ecology, often uniting these and related disciplines through his integrative, interdisciplinary investigations of birds and their environments. Many of Walt's insights have been sparked by his long-term study of Acorn Woodpeckers at the Hasting Reserve in the beautiful hills of Monterey County, California. This investigation, which he continues to lead after more than four decades of continual investigation, is among the most influential of such studies, in part because it has continued to evolve as new generations of field and lab techniques have provided opportunities to ask new questions at all levels of biological organization, from proximate to ultimate. Grounded in Walt's intimate knowledge of Acorn Woodpeckers and the organisms with which they interact, his work has elucidated intimate details of the behavioral ecology and sociobiology of these birds, and has opened doors to understanding the ecological and evolutionary forces that have molded other animal societies. This work remains a touchstone for all researchers interested in avian sociality and cooperative breeding.

Walt's studies of woodpeckers inspired a complementary series of seminal studies of annual cycles in a wide range

of other organisms. Although this work may be less familiar to many ornithologists, Walt has made important theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of masting cycles in oaks and other plants, of periodicity in cicadas, and of similar spatial and temporal reproductive cycles in other groups. He is the founder and leader of a volunteer-based program, the California Acorn Survey, that annually censuses the acorn crop of oak species at 19 sites across California. In addition to his studies of woodpeckers, Walt has also worked broadly on

other birds, with many papers on topics related to dispersal and migration, disease ecology, sexual selection, and population ecology. In each of these areas, one hallmark of Walt's contributions is his generation of both original research papers and synthetic reviews that help frame these broader topics.

It is for the above and other lasting contributions made in a long, productive, and continuing career that the Cooper Ornithological Society is honored to present the 2016 Miller Research Award to Walter D. Koenig.