



CFO AWARDS

Ron Ryder Award Recipient: Tony Leukering

Rachel Hopper

Tony Leukering, the 2008 recipient of the Colorado Field Ornithologists' Ron Ryder Award, is well known to birders in Colorado and throughout the United States. Among his many accomplishments, one of the most important is that through his work in the state, he has vastly improved our knowledge of the status and distribution of Colorado birds. He is one of Colorado's most knowledgeable birders and best writers, and he is certainly our local grammar expert.

Tony was born on the Fort Carson Army Base and spent six months in the state before leaving. His family moved around a lot when he was a child, living in Connecticut, New York, and Baghdad. With his mom and brother, Tony eventually settled in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he did most of his schooling.

He took up birding in 1977, when he was 17, and was immediately hooked. His college career began at Michigan State University, where he was a Fisheries and Wildlife student for two years, but he couldn't seem to go to class all that often if birding was an available option. After deciding to get some field experience and return to school when he was more settled, he began working.

After a few field jobs, he took a full-time position with the National Audubon Society at its New York headquarters as the Christmas Bird Count Editor. He stayed for two years in NYC before heading back to the field. From 1989 to 1994 he racked up an amazing resume of field jobs, working at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory and at Cape May Bird Observatory as a hawk counter, passerine bander, and seabird counter; surveying birds at Dartmouth College; conducting winter point counts in Athens, Georgia for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; banding dispersing Kirtland's Warblers in central Michigan; studying the effects of Red-cockaded Woodpecker management on breeding neotropical migrants in Florida and Georgia; conducting bird transects in the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains; and assisting with studies of nesting Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Willow Flycatchers, and Song Sparrows at California's Kern River Research Center.

On his way home to Ohio in August of 1994, Tony decided to stop in Colorado to see an old friend, Susan Craig. Susan mentioned that there was a fall banding job open at Colorado Bird Observatory (CBO), now Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO). Wanting some western bird experience, Tony applied for and got the seasonal job, planning to return home in November. That idea did not work out as planned. During his 13 years at RMBO, Tony's work included running the "Monitoring Colorado's Birds" program, participating in the Dinosaur Ridge Hawkwatch, overseeing all banding operations, and conducting long-term research on aspens, aspen cavities, and cavity-nesting birds in the elk-wintering area in eastern Rocky Mountain National Park.

Tony finally left RMBO in July of 2007. Since then, he has spent time working for Point Reyes Bird Observatory trapping Burrowing Owls (and also doing various and sundry other tasks) on Southeast Farallon Island. Since January 2008, has worked in the private sector for the first time with Geo-Marine, Inc., conducting at-sea bird transects in New Jersey and Delaware waters.

The Ron Ryder award is given to individuals who meet three criteria: distinguished service to Colorado Field Ornithologists and its goals; scholarly contributions to Colorado field ornithology; and the sharing of knowledge with the Colorado field ornithology community. Tony has an exceptional history in all three areas. In the category of distinguished service to CFO, he has served on the CFO board of directors, served on the Colorado Bird Records Committee as a member and as chair, helped pioneer the development of the CBRC's on-line documentation system, and served numerous times as a CFO field trip leader for both the annual convention and other regularly scheduled trips. Furthermore, Tony is the volunteer quizmaster of CFO's weekly photo quiz, where he posts difficult bird photos and then writes advanced and very educational short articles on the identification of each species. Tony's long-lasting commitment to the CFO photo quiz has been a remarkable effort on his part. Everyone that participates in or just reads the quizzes cannot help but become a better birder with an increased understanding of bird identification.

In the category of scholarly contributions, Tony has authored or co-authored over 40 articles since 1999, including "Ageing Green-tailed Towhees (*Pipilo chlorurus*) by eye color" in *North American Bird Bander* (25), "Comments on counting techniques for estimating landbird abundance" in *The Auk* (119), and "Black Phoebe breeding range expansion into Colorado" in *Western Birds* (36). In addition, he was an author for the *National Geographic Complete Guide to the Birds of North America* and currently serves as a "News from the Field" editor for *North American Birds*.

Finally, in the category of sharing knowledge with the birding community in Colorado, Tony worked on the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas I project and was the initial coordinator for Colorado's Breeding Bird Atlas II project, developing the Breeding Codes Manual, Field Worker's Handbook, and Daily Field Cards; conducting presentations; getting agency interest and support; and rallying the troops to get involved. He writes the "In the Scope" column for this journal. And he is an active participant on COBirds, where he not only reports birds but, more importantly, offers very educational and insightful comments about their identification, their biology, and frequently the spelling of their names.

I'm sure that I have missed some of Tony's accomplishments and contributions, but I think it is obvious that he is a vital and important part of Colorado birding. CFO is deeply grateful to Tony for all of the contributions he has made to the organization as well as for the advances he has made in Colorado's field ornithology. I am honored to call him a friend and was truly privileged to present the Ron Ryder Award to him at the 2008 CFO Convention in Cañon City.

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