

About the authors

After completing a Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree from the University of Melbourne in 1980, Les Christidis undertook a PhD at the Australian National University where he focused on the evolutionary genetics of Australian finches. He was one of the first to apply genetic-based approaches to understanding the evolution of Australian birds. He went on to conduct research on the origins of Australia's songbirds, first as a CSIRO Post-doctoral Fellow and then as the recipient of Queen Elizabeth II Fellowship. During this period he was able to demonstrate that Australia was the centre of origin for the world's 4500 songbirds. Before this, it was thought that the northern hemisphere was the original source for songbirds. From 1987 to 1996, Les was the Senior Curator of Ornithology at Museum Victoria and in 1997 he became the Science Program Director and later Head of the Department of Sciences. During this time (1997–2004) he led teams that produced major exhibitions for Melbourne Museum and the development of Australia's first Digital Planetarium at ScienceWorks. Les Christidis has published over 90 scientific papers including *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories*. Apart from the systematics and evolutionary genetics of birds, he has also published articles on the evolution of bats, marsupials and marine bryozoans. Les Christidis has supervised numerous Honours and PhD students and is an Associate Professor in Genetics at the University of Melbourne. He sits on several national and international committees including the Global Biodiversity Information Facility Science Subcommittee. In 2005 he was a recipient of the inaugural *W. Roy Wheeler Medallion for Excellence in Field Ornithology*. Since 2004, he has been Head of the Division of Research and Collections, and Assistant Director of the Australian Museum in Sydney.

Walter Boles graduated from Emporia State University in Kansas in 1974 and soon afterwards joined the Australian Museum, where he is now a Scientific Officer in Ornithology and Collection Manager of Birds. Among his research interests are the evolution, systematic and biogeography of Australian birds, particularly songbirds. This is not restricted to living birds – in 2000 he was awarded his PhD from the University of New South Wales of his study on the Tertiary avifauna of Australia. Walter has written over 100 papers and articles on Australian birds, as well as family accounts for the *Handbook of Birds of the World* and several books, including the National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife's *The Robins and Flycatchers of Australia*. In addition to being a co-describer of the Eungella Honeyeater in 1983, Walter has named several other new genera and species of living and fossil Australian birds, and published articles on the earliest known fossil songbirds in the world. In 1990, he was part of a team that discovered a dead Night Parrot – the first positive record in more than 70 years. Walter is an Australian representative on the International Ornithological Committee and is on the executive council of the Society of Avian Paleontology and Evolution. He has also been an honorary Teaching Associate or Adjunct Lecturer at University of Sydney, University of New South Wales and Charles Sturt University. In 2000, he was selected by Emporia State University as a Distinguished Alumni.