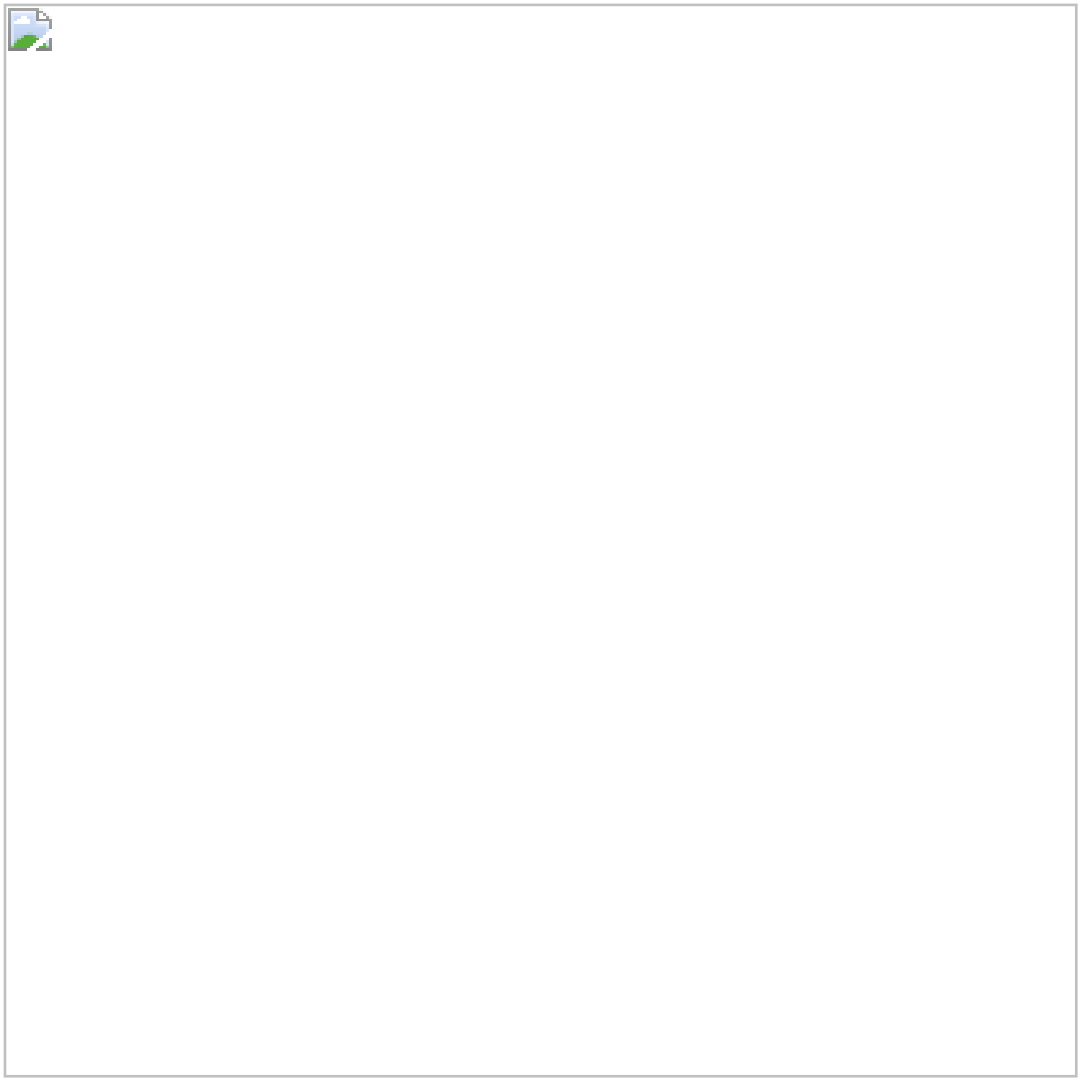

Young Professional Awards 2014, to Conor Taff and Mary Caswell Stoddard

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AWARDS

Young Professional Awards 2014, to Conor Taff and Mary Caswell Stoddard

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The Cooper Ornithological Society (COS) is pleased to recognize Conor Taff and Mary Caswell Stoddard as the 2014 recipients of the Young Professional Award. First awarded in 2009, the Young Professional Award recognizes early-career researchers for their outstanding scientific research and contributions to the ornithological profession. Two awardees are selected from applicants to deliver presentations at the Young Professional Plenary session held at each annual meeting and are given 30 minutes each to present their research to the entire conference body. The two awardees each receive a cash prize and a travel award and are honored at a reception attended by the COS officers, board of directors, and members of the Young Professional Award committee. Candidates for the Young Professional Award must be COS members and must be in the final phase of their graduate studies (last nine months) or have graduated within three years of the previous meeting. More information is available under the awards and grants section on the COS website: http://www.cooper.org.

Young Professional Award winner (2014) Conor Taff. Photo credit: Gail Patricelli

Conor Taff's research is aimed at understanding the causes and consequences of individual variation in life-history traits, including sexual signaling, senescence, social behavior, and immunocompetence. His projects combine measurements of fundamental cellular processes, such as telomere erosion and oxidative damage, with observed patterns at the level of whole organisms or populations, such as reproductive success and age-related changes in signal production. To establish these connections, Conor combines field and lab work with natural-history observations and experimental manipulations of both physiological parameters and the environment that birds experience. His dissertation research focused on multimodal signaling in a population of individually marked Common Yellowthroats (*Geothlypis trichas*). This work investigated the way that proximate and ultimate factors create links between the physiology of signal production and selection on signaling traits. His analyses of signal production and survival—coupled with oxidative stress and telomere dynamics—demonstrate that signal expression is connected to life-history evolution and senescence. Conor received his B.A. in Environmental Sciences from Skidmore College in 2005 and his Ph.D. in Animal Behavior from the Department of Evolution and Ecology at the University of California–Davis in 2013, where he was advised by Gail Patricelli. Currently, Conor is a USDA NIFA postdoctoral fellow in the Wildlife, Fisheries, and Conservation Biology department at UC Davis. For his postdoctoral research, he is studying the interactions between disease transmission, immunocompetence, and social behavior in American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*). Conor would like to thank the collaborators, assistants, and funding sources that have made his research possible and the Cooper Ornithological Society for his award and for providing the opportunity to present his research at the annual meeting.

Young Professional Award winner (2014) Mary Caswell Stoddard. Photo credit: Caroleen Verly

Mary Caswell Stoddard uses a multidisciplinary approach to explore key questions in evolution, behavior, and sensory systems, with an emphasis on avian vision and communication. As an undergraduate at Yale University, Mary investigated avian color vision and the evolution of diverse plumage signals, projects for which she worked to create a color-quantification tool called "TetraColorSpace." Mary was awarded a Marshall Scholarship to conduct her graduate studies at the University of Cambridge. For her Ph.D. research in the Cambridge Department of Zoology, she combined techniques from sensory ecology, computer science, and engineering to study the evolution of avian egg coloration and structure. Much of her work has focused on the Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), a brood parasite that lays its eggs in the nests of unrelated species. To trick hosts into accepting foreign eggs, Common Cuckoos have evolved the ability to mimic the appearance of host eggs. With colleagues, she developed new methods for quantifying pattern and color mimicry from the visual perspective of a host bird. Her work demonstrated that cuckoos have evolved the most effective mimicry in response to hosts that actively identify and reject foreign eggs. Next, Mary and colleagues devised a novel pattern-recognition tool, "NaturePatternMatch," which they applied to the question of how host birds recognize their own distinctive egg patterns. Mary is currently a junior fellow in the Harvard Society of Fellows, where she is pursuing interdisciplinary work on the genomic and structural basis of eggshell evolution. She is a member of Scott Edwards's lab and works closely with colleagues at the Harvard Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering and at Shoals Marine Laboratory (Appledore Island, Maine). At Harvard, she has been actively engaged in outreach and education programs at the Harvard Museum of Natural History, where she has helped design new classes for adults and teachers in the community. Mary is very grateful to the members of the Cooper Ornithological Society for their enthusiastic support of young researchers. Mary would also like to thank her mentors and colleagues for their wisdom and encouragement.