

D. L. Serventy Medal 2015: Citation

STEPHEN J. S. DEBUS

The D. L. Serventy Medal is an award of BirdLife Australia (previously Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union) that honours members who have made outstanding contributions to publications in the science of ornithology in the Australasian region.

Stephen Debus is one of Australia's foremost experts on our unique diurnal and nocturnal raptors, having published extensively on the topic, based on his many hours in the field and encyclopaedic knowledge. His role over 32 years as editor, occasional 'ghostwriter' and mentor to young or reluctant writers has also marked his extensive contribution to research and publication in Australian ornithology.

In 1994, Stephen completed his MSc at the University of New England (UNE), studying threatened owls in north-eastern NSW. However, his publishing career began in the early 1980s, with numerous journal articles on the ecology of raptors, followed by species accounts for the authoritative *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* and *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, and, more recently, the popular field guides *The Owls of Australia: A Field Guide to Australian Night Birds* and the Whitley Award-winning *Birds of Prey of Australia: A Field Guide*. He has published over 135 journal articles and book chapters, six books and over 50 book reviews.

In 2004, Stephen completed a PhD (also at UNE, with which he has been associated for 30 years) on the breeding biology of robins in remnant woodland, followed by postdoctoral research translocating robins to sites that had recently lost them. His work suggested that robins could be assisted most in fragmented landscapes by restoring native ground and shrub vegetation and deterring currawongs.

In addition to his own research on the conservation biology of raptors, owls and woodland songbirds, Stephen has made an outstanding contribution to Australian ornithological literature through his lengthy editorial roles with three ornithological journals. He joined the Bird Observers Club (later BOCA) in 1980, becoming honorary editor of its peer-reviewed quarterly journal, *The Australian Bird Watcher (ABW)*, in 1984 at the invitation of acting editor Rex Buckingham. Established in 1959, *ABW* published original papers on a wide range of topics relating to Australasian ornithology, including ecology, behaviour and the history of bird taxa, particularly emphasising field observations. He continued as coordinating editor of the journal, renamed *Australian Field Ornithology (AFO)*, from 2003 until 2013, coordinating several subject editors and an assistant editor, and personally refereeing and editing original papers on raptors. He solicited material for the journal, coaxing papers from reluctant professional and amateur contributors, and particularly helping inexperienced authors to develop sound



Stephen Debus with just-banded juvenile Little Eagle (dark morph), Armidale, NSW, February 2009.

scientific papers. When the journal's editorial board was formed in 2002, Stephen became a board member and helped broaden the journal's scope. He was awarded BOCA's Distinguished Service Award in 2005 after 21 years of editorial service.

Stephen was a sub-editor for special issues of the journal *Corella* on the Wedge-tailed Eagle (2007), the White-bellied Sea-Eagle (2009) and rare raptors (2011), and edited the *Australasian Raptor Association News* (1980–1989), later *Boobook* (2004–2015), a publication for raptor enthusiasts. He also edited the *RAOU Conservation Statement* series for 5 years (1987–1992). He served on the committee of the Australian Bird Study Association in 1981–88 and 2005–15, the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team since 2008 and the Red Goshawk Recovery Team since its inception in 2014.

In 2016, after 32 years, Stephen plans to step down from *AFO* editorial duties, making him one of Australia's longest-serving editors of an ornithological journal, and a most worthy recipient of the D. L. Serventy Medal.

James Fitzsimons, Alan Lill, Hugh Ford