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D. L. Serventy Medal 2007: Citation

Michael F. Clarke

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

Associate Professor Michael Clarke published his first scientific paper on interspecific aggression in the genus *Manorina* in 1984 and, since completing his Ph.D. in 1987, he has authored or co-authored over 50 refereed scientific articles, book chapters and review papers. Fifteen consultancy reports and several popular articles complete his publications list.

Mike's research proceeds along two distinct, but complementary, lines. The first is basic or fundamental research in the field of behavioural ecology – studying the evolution and adaptive value of social behaviour, particularly relating to avian mating systems. It involves testing current hypotheses using empirical data collected in the field. The second is applied research in the field of conservation biology – studying ecology in conservation-related contexts.

The majority of Mike's basic research has focused on the evolution of cooperative breeding in Australian honeyeaters, particularly in the genus *Manorina*. This has involved intensive field studies, coupled with molecular analyses of parentage and genetic relationships (using mini- and microsatellites) carried out in collaboration with colleagues in molecular laboratories. Another strong interest is the behavioural ecology of endangered species of birds, particularly honeyeaters, and threatening processes involved in the degradation of habitat. A major focus has been on the Black-eared Miner employing all of these approaches and techniques to produce practical conservation results based on sound science, which must be one of most well-rounded recovery efforts in the world.

Mike has published a great many of these studies in a range of international and national journals. He encourages participation and publication by the many students he has supervised since his employment at La Trobe University in 1992. In this time, he has shepherded five Ph.D. students, one M.Sc. student and 16 Honours students to successful completion of their theses. He has always tried to give his students experience in applied conservation biology as well as a strong theoretical background and he has encouraged the inclusion of a component of each in their research, to increase their career options in the future. At the International Ornithological Congress in Beijing, three of his postgraduate students were selected to present their research and they comprised one of the largest contingents presenting from any ornithological lab. This reflects the quality of their work and Mike's commitment to having his students' work recognised in the international arena.

Through their research and publications, his group has advanced understanding of the evolution of cooperative breeding, sex ratio manipulation and the ecology and movements of more mobile bird species. On the applied front, they have investigated the role of hyperaggressive species in eucalypt dieback and the control of such species through habitat manipulation. He has recently embarked upon a major new collaborative project that aims to identify the properties of habitat mosaics produced by fire that enhance the persistence and status of a broad range of taxonomic groups (birds, mammals, reptiles, key invertebrates and plants) in eucalypt-dominated mallee habitats.

Mike has served for over a decade on the national recovery teams for three endangered species of honeyeater. His standing in the field of conservation biology is also reflected in being invited to serve as chairperson of the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Victorian Minister for the Environment, in relation to the *Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*; a position in which he served for five years.

As well as his own publications and those with his students and colleagues, Mike contributes to ornithological publication by regularly reviewing papers for a suite of international journals and he has served on the editorial board of *Australian Field Ornithology.*

Mike commenced his formal association with Birds Australia during his postgraduate years when he oversaw the redesign of the national Nest Record Scheme, as its national coordinator. As an inaugural member of the Birds Australia Research Committee, he facilitated the publication of the *Wingspan* supplement on the Australian Bird Count. He also championed the need for regular ornithological conferences in Australia so that ornithological information could be better shared and the career development of younger ornithologists fostered.

Dr Penny Olsen

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