

Conference Report Raptor Research Foundation 2015 Annual Conference

Doubletree Hotel, Sacramento, California
November 4-8, 2015



Hosted by: Golden Gate Raptor Observatory (GGRO),
a program of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
& the Golden Gate National Recreation Area

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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In-Kind Support from: Terravant Vineyards, Mendocino Brewing Company, The Wildlife Society, Western Section, Nancy Brink Videography

RRF 2015 CONFERENCE SCORECARD

Attendees

Total = 434

RRF Members = 210

Non-Members = 95

Students = 89

Volunteers/Comp = 40

Sponsors = 8

Vendors = 7

Programs

Speakers = 149

Posters = 50

Symposia = 5

Evening events = 6

ECRR Workshops = 7

Field Trips = 4

**RRF 2015 CONFERENCE REPORT
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CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEES

Local Planning Committee

Allen Fish, GGRO, Conference Director
Laura Young, GGRO, Conference Manager
Candace Renger, Registration and Hotel Coordination
Christopher Briggs, GGRO, Planning, Poster/AV Coordinator
Kristine Vanesky, GGRO, Volunteer Coordinator
Christine Cariño, GGRO, Field Trips Coordinator
Lynn Bantley, GGRO, Logo/Booklet/Product Design
Bill Prochnow, GGRO, Logo Design

RRF Planning Committee

Kate Davis, Co-Chair
Allen Fish, Co-Chair
JD Dwyer, Scientific Chair
Elizabeth Wommack, Scientific Vice-Chair
Travis Booms, ECRR Coordinator
Libby Mojica, Webmaster
Dan Varland, Conference Chair Emeritus

Planning

Allen Fish and Kate Davis started talking about central California as a venue for the 2015 conference in December 2012. Kate brought consultant Kathy Webber (Experient Select) aboard to help to investigate and negotiate the hotel deals in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Sacramento area. The SF Bay Area hotel costs were mildly and ridiculously outrageous. The RRF board approved Sacramento as the conference location in Feb 2014.

Allen met with a broad regional planning committee, hosted by Dr. John Keane (US Forest Service) in June 2014. We were joined by many enthusiastic colleagues from agencies, academia, and consultants: Jessi Brown, Gary Santolo, Jeff Lincer, Joe DiDonato, Colleen Lenihan, Jeff Smith, Carie Battistone, Heather Beeler, Jeep Pagel, Brian Woodbridge, Joshua Hull, Judd Howell, Doug Bell, Amy Fesnock, Michelle Hawkins, Buzz Hull, Mike Collopy, and Chris Briggs. This was an essential kick-off meeting to toss around ideas for symposia, workshops, fieldtrips, funding sources, etc.

Kate and Allen spoke at least weekly by phone or email starting in 2014 and going right up to the conference. We began an every two-week conference call in July 2015 with the RRF Planning Committee above, which become weekly in the month prior to the conference.

Marketing/Registration Software

I (Allen) made up a really snappy postcard with a stunning Ferruginous Hawk photo to be a “Save the Date” reminder to hand out to the 2014 conference goers at Corpus Christi’s RRF conference. We had all the conference dates worked out—Nov 11 to 15. It was a week later that someone called to tell me that Veterans Day landed on the Weds mid-week, and that no federal employees would give up that holiday for the conference. I called the hotel and started begging for other dates. We got Nov 4-8. The postcard was obsolete in one week. We used the *Ornithological Newsletter* to “re-program” the date into RRF members’ lives, but I hated losing the value of the “Save the Date” postcard.

Beyond the date mistake, this re-negotiation of dates with the Doubletree Hotel meant that we never quite had enough space to do all of the programming we had hoped for. The hotel had to shoe-horn us into some time and space slots. Moral of the story: be careful of scheduling on or near federal holidays.

Subsequent announcements were made in the *Ornithological Newsletters*, and via the OSNA email network—also via RRF and GGRO newsletters and web sites, Facebook pages, and other social media. Libby Mojica added announcements to the RRF website, and set up all the conference pages during Feb-May 2015. Registration was set up on-line via Eventbrite by Allen, and later fine-tuned by Laura Young. Eventbrite is versatile and highly customizable but has lots of quirks; it would be helpful to work with someone who’s used it before.

Hotel

Resulting food and drink costs, meeting room rentals, and AV costs at the Doubletree Hotel were \$73,560.68. The initial room set aside at the Doubletree Hotel was for 100 room-blocks for the five-night run of the conference. Two months pre-conference, about Sept 16, we were notified that the block at the Doubletree was nearly filled, so we negotiated a deal with their sister hotel, less than half mile away, the Hilton Arden West, for a 50 room-block—the maximum they would give us. On Oct 9, the Hilton had also filled so our hotel consultant Kathy Webber jumped to the phones and within half a day had found us a third hotel to accept the growing number of attendees. We secured 40 more rooms, which seemed to take care of our needs entirely. Kathy was a critical asset in these negotiations, keeping our conference-attendee costs below \$110 per night.

In a less hotel-rich area, we might have been in big trouble here, and we were competing with other major local events, so we were fairly lucky to secure the rooms we needed to keep everybody close to the conference.

The hotel provided AV equipment (mikes, speakers, projectors) and support, although we brought in five projectors and five laptops from GGRO and through gracious loan from The Wildlife Society Western Section. Although we ran only three concurrent sessions, we maintained a laptop (plus volunteer assistant) near the registration desk for speakers to load their talks prior to their scheduled presentation time. The hotel AV staff people were critical at troubleshooting situations including running multiple videos with sound during the Saturday plenary panel. The hotel's AV charge was just over \$13,500.

We used a hotel vendor to secure poster board display stands. This was helpful as they could bring them in on trucks and assemble them exactly where and just a few hours before they were needed, and we moved them several times to accommodate different space needs then they were taken away to make space for the Saturday night banquet. The poster boards cost \$2,200 for 13 stands (one stand = 4 posters; 2 front, 2 back).

I scheduled an end time (9 pm) with the hotel staff in the poster reception room after attendees had already had 2 hours with posters and their authors. We served donated Redtail Ale from Mendocino Brewing Co. I had to personally sweep through and kick everybody out just when people were relaxing and talking raptor biology and I wish I had paid a little more to let the whole reception go another couple of hours.

Scientific Program

We set the abstract due date as August 3, 2015, three full months prior to the conference. JD Dwyer was the scientific program chair, and got significant help from Elizabeth Wommack who will take over the lead role in 2016. The large slug of abstracts he received at the last minute made JD wish we'd given it a time deadline also. Say, August 3 at midnight.

It is an old and venerable tradition to do 20-minute talks at RRF meetings; however both JD and Allen wanted to try 10-minute speed talks having seen this work well at TWS and other scientific conferences. We dedicated one two-hour slot to optional 10-minute talks; it filled quickly and seemed to go over well.

JD had a great team of abstract readers who handled the transition time between receiving and acceptance remarkably well. Thanks to Tricia Miller, Miguel Saggese, Peter Sharpe, Beth Wommack, and Isabel Caballero. This is a critical speed issue since as soon as the abstracts were accepted and organized; we could start developing the program booklet.

As they arrived at the conference, speakers were instructed to transfer their files by flash drive to a specific laptop next to the registration desk. We urged speakers to load their files

the day before their talk was scheduled, but many people worked on their talks until the last minute. Thankfully, all talks were on the correct laptop at the start of each session. It helped immensely to have one lead volunteer in charge of checking for the upcoming presentation files at least one hour before the session was to start. We did not provide a “preview room” for checking one’s PowerPoint presentation before giving a talk. I think the availability of laptops has made that practice obsolete.

Program Booklet

We set as the deadline for all Program Booklet text one month before the conference. We arranged with the designer to have the completed booklet ready for printing in two weeks, which was also two weeks before the conference.

We downloaded the electronic version of the Texas RRF 2014 Conference booklet to use as a model, but we were lucky to have a volunteer on-hand at GGRO, Lynn Bantley, who is also a professional designer with lots of experience using InDesign software that HWI’s Joseph Dane had used to make the Texas program booklet. We commissioned Lynn (at GGRO cost) to produce the booklet in full as well as for designing the logo Red-shouldered Hawk, the t-shirts, and the mug. As we collected photographic material for the booklet, we decided to get estimates for the booklet both in black and white, and in color. The latter was only \$2,000 more so we located a donor, the Hind Endowment, to donate the difference. The resulting booklet was 98 pages, excluding the cover. Total cost (with full color) was \$5,606.84, for 500 copies. Libby posted a PDF of the booklet on the RRF website as the conference commenced.

Conference Schedule

We started on Wednesday, Nov 4, with the RRF Board meeting and the ECRR workshop series. California Department of Fish and Wildlife hosted a Raptor Necropsy workshop off-site. Jeep Pagel’s cliff nesting class met at an off-site climbing gym. Enterprise vans were rented to transport students, driven by conference volunteers. We recommend securing a space for the climbing class as far in advance as possible. We encountered group liability-insurance issues that threatened to derail the class. In the end, we were able to purchase insurance through the gym for a nominal fee.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife hosted a full-day pre-conference meeting of the California-Nevada Golden Eagle Working Group. Attendees paid \$40 for this session directly to RRF which covered the costs of room, AV, and coffee/snacks.

The official RRF conference opened Thursday, Nov 5, with a Plenary Talk by Pete Bloom on “Fifty Years of California Raptor Conservation.” We ran the Golden Eagle and Island Ecology symposia that day and the Poster reception in the evening.

Friday, Nov 6 started right in with scientific papers, no plenary. We ran the Climate and Turbine symposia, and the ECRR reception ran back to back that evening with the California Raptor Center Alumni Reception (UC Davis). Author Bill Clark presented a special evening talk showing plates from his newest two raptor books.

Saturday, Nov 7 opened with the Madison Peregrine Panel, a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Joe Hickey’s 1965 Peregrine Symposium. We had concurrent sessions all day, the RRF business meeting in the evening and the Banquet and Awards session that night.

On Sunday, Nov 8, we sent field trips out to four locations: the Altamont Pass; the Cosumnes River Preserve, the Solano Grasslands—all rich raptor areas, and under the first threat of rain that California had felt since March 2015. We got crème of the crop trip leaders, biologists and birders at the top of their fields, and we offered them conference registration in exchange for their services. Volunteer field trip organizer Christine Cariño did a fantastic job coordinating leaders, drivers, scopes, lunches, snacks, waters, vans, and a bus, and it was a thrill to see the vans come back and trip goers talking of putting Burrowing Owl, Northern Shrike, and Ferruginous hawk on their life list.

The Madison Peregrine Panel

Fifty years ago, in August 1965, Professor Joe Hickey of University of Wisconsin, Madison gathered together almost 60 scientists to discuss the recent sudden decline in Peregrines and to attack the problem as a cohesive team. The results were extraordinary. A generation of deeply committed raptor biologists returned to the world to their study areas, and collectively put together the scientific foundation for DDT’s attack on a female raptor’s reproductive system. And then brought the Peregrine back in numbers matching its historical population sizes.

We were able to make contact with twelve original members of this illustrious conference, and persuaded five of them to come to Sacramento to join us for a reflective, celebrative panel on the meaning of the Madison Peregrine Symposium: Dan Anderson, Daniel Berger, Steve Herman, Clayton White, and Grainger Hunt. Several who could not join us sent short videos contemplating the event and its anniversary: Tom Cade, Sergej Postupalsky, and David Hancock. The panelists delved deep into their own stories, both scientific and personal, and regaled the room. One elder from the audience told me later, it was the best

thing he ever witnessed in a scientific conference. Of course many of the lessons of Madison are still necessary if not more so, today. And they have become much more complex.

Although I'd been planning the Madison Symposium for years prior to the 2015 RRF conference, by the time the final months rolled around I was overwhelmed. Jeep Pagel saved the event. He offered to do the final organization including contacting speakers, setting the format, and emceeding the event. Jeep also arranged a social event for the Madison Five, their spouses, and other dignitaries at a local restaurant the night before. He also obtained the videos from Cade, Hancock, and Postupalsky, who were unable to attend the conference in person.

Symposia

We had a lot of enthusiasm for setting up symposia at the Sacramento conference. That was great, lending a certain vitality to the entire scientific program. Clearly symposia do something toward defining the conference and the "hot topics" both for the attendees and also the public. Initially it seemed like five symposia might have been a little too much for three days of conferencing, but we expanded from two concurrent sessions to three to accommodate them.

In the future, it might be helpful to have something of a written job description for symposium organizers. Some wanted to raise their own funds, manage their own budgets, and pay speaker fees. Others did not. All organizers intended to find their own speakers but some were more successful than others at having speakers lined up when abstracts were due. For the 2015 RRF conference, some of the decisions about these issues fell between the Board President, the Scientific Chair, and the Conference Chair; however a little more up-front rule-making about just what a symposium chair can do with their symposium would be useful in the future. Thanks to our symposium chairs/organizers for their hard work:

Golden Eagle Biology	Mike Collopy, Jessi Brown, Brian Woodbridge
Raptor Island Ecology	Julio Gallardo, Kristy Swinnerton
Raptors and Climate Change	Jeff Lincer, Sandy Boyce, Zac Ormsby, Neil Paprocki
Raptor Disease	Michelle Hawkins, Miguel Saggese
Wind Turbines	Rick Watson, Todd Katzner

Sales/Gifts

We kept with RRF tradition and gave away a coffee mug commemorating the 2015 conference, and a tote bag which we ordered from a local recycled bag company, ChicoBag. The other free item was a high quality 3" x 5" sticker of the conference's California Red-

shouldered Hawk logo. We designed and ordered conference logo t-shirts in male size (n=216) and female sizes (83); the women's shirt sold out before the conference was over, and we were left with approximately 30 men's shirts, mostly in larger sizes. We also sold GGRO-logo shirts (32) and caps (59), adding their net sales to the conference income. Surplus program booklets, stickers, and mugs were also sold.

Laura Young ran the registration desk including all sales, along with the help of conference volunteers. Onsite registrations were processed using the Eventbrite app on an iPad. We used the Square app to process all conference item sales, which allowed us to take both cash and credit cards as payment. Shirts and caps were sold at a flat \$20, tax inclusive, which helped streamline sales by limiting the need to make change. Other items were also sold tax-included, for \$1, \$5, and \$10, depending on the item.

To specifically commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Madison Peregrine Conference, we worked with Travis Booms, who made contact with raptor aficionado and winemaker, Joe Eisaguerre. Joe offered us a deal of \$4 per bottle of Pinot Noir for 20 cases. Raptor author/artist Hans Peeters painted a Peregrine Falcon bust for the label, and bottles were distributed to all volunteers, board members, symposium heads, session organizers, and trip leaders. We had enough left over to provide several bottles for each table at the banquet. In retrospect, handling 20 cases of wine was perhaps more headache than help, however, the hotel was extremely helpful at moving the boxes around, and they gave the Madison Event finesse.

Volunteer Coordination

For at least six months before the conference, we kept names of competent local people who wanted a reduced registration price in exchange for volunteering. At about two months prior to the conference, we had the schedule organized enough to see what we needed: (1) AV support from people skilled with laptops and projectors; (2) reg desk help; (3) random runners for use at the reg desk; (4) poster stand movers; and (5) field trip drivers. Kris Vanesky stepped forward to be the coordinator of all conference volunteers—an absolutely critical role for the conference's success.

AV people were organized on-site by Chris Briggs, again a critical role for one person to handle. AV volunteers were generally half-day, and two people worked each room in tandem; one was the AV operator while the other was timekeeper. The timekeeper made sure to flash the time remaining to the speaker, and kept the overall schedule on track. This was especially critical to keep the concurrent sessions synchronized. Reg Desk volunteers worked for 3 to 4 hours stretches often assisting with questions, or local organizational details.

In all, we had 39 volunteers, mostly GGRO interns and volunteers, but also UC Davis and other students. In exchange for this service, volunteers were allowed to attend any talks as long as there were free chairs or standing room in the presentation room.

Vendors

Seven vendors participated in the conference, nearly all long-time friends of the RRF. We charged \$100 for an 8-ft table, and packed them into a lockable room with the registration desk. This ensured that whatever materials they brought could be left out and secure overnight, and that they would also be at the intersection of a lot of people all the time. We made little effort to recruit vendors beyond supplying the vendor form in the website. This was for two reasons: (1) the amount we charge vendors is low, so the payback to our budget was small; and (2) we knew we would have little room overall to accommodate tables. In the future, we might do more to match the vendor fee to the local economy. In California, we could have charged two to three times the fees that were set up for us.

Vendors were Hancock House Publishing, Hans Peeters, Blue Sky Helicopters, Lotek Wireless, Nick Dunlop Photography, Raptors of the Rockies, and Mike Smith, Raptor Trap-Maker.

Final Thoughts

Although a lot of GGRO staff time went into producing the RRF 2015 Conference, we also had an opportunity to hire a local conference planner for several months before and during the conference, Candace Renger. Candace helped with all aspects of planning but particularly with hotel details such as food and beverage ordering, as well as negotiating down costs. Candace has been acting in this capacity for the Wildlife Society conferences at the Doubletree Hotel in Sacramento for more than a decade, so her time and experience was invaluable. We used GGRO funds to hire Candace and so did not mingle those costs with the conference budget in whole.

Given especially the historical nature of the Peregrine Panel, we chose to use GGRO funds to hire a videographer, Nancy Brink, to document that event in particular. The resulting video is linked from the RRF website, and available to the public at the GGRO's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhOgtsiT9lYxIx5xYfU-sgMiXKH--oj-2). We do have video coverage of many of the other speakers, but we have discovered that the editing time required to merge the videos of the speakers with their PowerPoint slides is costing more time from our videographer than she has been able to provide. We hope to have Pete Bloom's plenary talk available on-line in the coming months.

APPENDIX I: BUDGET

REVENUE

Registration fees (<i>net</i>)	70,480.00	59.2%
Banquet	11,275.00	9.5%
Calif GOEA Work Grp ¹	3,400.00	2.9%
Field Trips	2,850.00	2.4%
ECRR Workshops	2,360.00	2.0%
Corp/Fndtn Sponsors ²	10,405.96	8.7%
Vendor Fees	600.00	0.5%
Box Lunches	400.00	0.3%
Square Sales (<i>gross</i>) ³		5.9%
RRF shirts	4,931.58	
RRF stickers	65.00	
RRF swag (extra booklets, mugs, etc.)	248.42	
GGRO shirts	640.00	
GGRO caps	1,180.00	
Individual Donations ⁴	10,160.00	8.5%
Total Revenue	118,995.96	
Total Expenses	103,995.96	
Net to RRF	15,000.00	

EXPENSES

Eventbrite fees	5,305.10	credit card & payment processing fees
Square fees	128.38	credit card & payment processing fees
Merchandise sales tax	602.48	Sacramento sales tax (8.5%) on wholesale items sold at conference
Venue	73,560.68	BOE, includes (\$13,527.99) AV costs
Name Badges ⁵	543.30	charges for unreturned badge holders (owned by TWS, lent to GGRO)
Poster boards	2,256.80	moveable boards for displaying posters
Plenary Panel		
Honorariums	2,000.00	Hunt, White, Berger, Herman; no W9 from Anderson
Keynote		
Honorarium	1,000.00	Pete Bloom
CTS Charter	1,370.00	Tour bus for field trip
Delta Charter	300.00	Bus for CRC field trip (only partial refund given for cancellation)
Enterprise vans	932.17	shuttles for ECRR classes, field trips
Fuel for vans	212.10	refuel of Enterprise vans
Climbing gym	317.00	for ECRR class
Program booklet	5,606.84	500 conference booklets (color printing costs covered by donation)
Shirts	3,432.80	83 women's fit, 216 men's shirts, with custom conference logo

APPENDIX I: BUDGET, cont.

EXPENSES, cont.

Mugs	1,438.52	500 RRF logo imprint ceramic mugs
Totes	1,980.28	475 conference logo Chico-bag totes
Stickers	361.59	700 conference logo vinyl stickers
GGRO t-shirts	141.12	stock out charge for 32 GGRO shirts sold to benefit conference
GGRO caps	448.85	stock out charge for 59 GGRO caps sold to benefit conference
Terravant Wine	1,081.00	240 custom wine as gifts to RRF leaders, organizers, & Peregrine panel
Peeters artwork	200.00	Hans Peeters art for "Peregrine Pinot Noir" logo
Conference logo	200.00	artwork from Bantley Design
Allen Fish	117.30	mileage expenses for conference planning in Sacramento
Office supplies	236.95	paper, pens, markers, clips, tape, tacks, etc.
Miscellaneous expenses	222.70	snacks & drinks for field trips (\$139.98); Eventbrite card readers (\$30.10); power cord for TWS projector (\$15.28); timers (\$37.34)
Total Expenses	103,995.96	

FOOTNOTES

- 1 This was the Golden Eagle Working Group Meeting, NOT the EAGLE BIOLOGY session put together by Collopy and Brown
- 2 Corporate sponsors included Garcia and Associates; CH2M Hill; Bloom Biological, Inc.; HT Harvey and Associates; UC Davis Raptor Center; UC Davis One Health Institute; UN Reno Academy for the Environment; and Pacific Gas and Electric, Co.
- 3 Only those shirts SOLD were expended to the conference, for RRF and GGRO designs
- 4 Individual donations were from GGRO volunteers and donors; also conference registrants who contributed "add-on" donations when registering
- 5 TWS is the Wildlife Society, Western Section who loaned us badge holders, 2 laptops and a back-up PowerPoint projector

Expenses paid by GGRO (not charged to conference fund)

Videography	4,000.00	Present Tense Productions
Design services	5,575.00	Bantley Design
Event planner	4,814.91	Candace Renger
Volunteer coordinator	1,386.15	Kris Vanesky

APPENDIX II: REGISTRATION DETAILS

	Early (Up to 9/4)	Middle (9/5-10/4)	Late (After 10/4)	At the Door	Total
Total Registrations*	168	120	86	20	394
RRF Members**	116	51	38	5	210
Non-members	32	22	35	6	95
Students	20	47	13	9	89
Volunteer/comp				40	40

*16 Single-day registrations included in totals

**Includes 1 Lifetime RRF member registration

	Early (Up to 9/4)	Middle (9/5-10/4)	Late (After 10/4)	Total attendance
RRF Members	180.00	200.00	250.00	210
Non-members	220.00	240.00	300.00	78
Students	90.00	90.00	100.00	80
Single day (members/non)		140.00	160.00	16
Single day (students)	50.00			6
Saturday Banquet	55.00			208
Boxed Lunch for field trips	25.00			17
Altamont Pass field trip	75.00			24
Cosumnes River field trip	30.00			20
Solano Grasslands field trip	30.00			20
California Raptor Center field trip*	30.00			5
Golden Eagle Working Group	40.00			85
Icebreaker/Cash Bar	free			203
Poster Session/Cash Bar	free			202
California Raptor Center Alumnae reception	free			37
ECRR Social	free			84
ECRR: Harnessing Raptors with Transmitters	30.00			16
ECRR: Safely Accessing Raptor Nests	40.00			9
ECRR: Raptor Necropsy	40.00			11
ECRR: Raptor ID and Molt	30.00			13
ECRR: Raptor Marking and Field Techniques	30.00			12
ECRR: Raptor Trapping & Handling for Research	20.00			15

*trip cancelled prior to conference due to low enrollment, money refunded