

# LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Pacific Seabird Group occasionally honors major contributors to seabird science and conservation with Lifetime Achievement or Special Achievement awards. The Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes an individual whose outstanding work for seabirds has influenced the course of research, conservation, and/or education throughout the Pacific or the world. At the 41st Annual Meeting in Juneau, Alaska, in February 2014, PSG presented the Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr. Anthony J. Gaston. Tony could not attend in person, but he received his award via video link. The award was presented in Juneau by Julia Parrish; the tribute to Tony published here was written by Jo Smith and others.

## DR. ANTHONY J. GASTON

**Joanna Smith, with assistance from Mark Rauzon and other PSG former Chairs and contributions from Tony's friends and colleagues: Alan Burger, Christine Eberl, Kyle Elliott, Mark Hipfner, Andrea Lawrence, Jean-Louis Martin, and Keith Moore**

The Pacific Seabird Group honored Dr. Anthony J. Gaston with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014. For nearly thirty years, Tony has been a leader and participant in the Pacific Seabird Group, presenting his research on the ecology of seabirds for Environment Canada and inspiring members young and old in the conservation and study of seabirds. A bird-bander since the age of 11, Tony is interested in all facets of ornithology. He has made significant contributions to our understanding of seabird demography and how bird populations are affected by large-scale oceanographic and climatic trends. His research program includes analysis of population dynamics of marine birds in the Eastern Canadian Arctic and Haida Gwaii, as well as the impact of introduced mammals on ecosystem components. Tony specializes in studying birds in locations that other ornithologists seldom access. Tony was born in Croydon, England, a town just south of London. Few PSG members know that Tony's career began in anthropology, searching for fossil hominids in India. After his B.A. in Physical Anthropology at Clare College, University of Cambridge, UK, he participated in several anthropological expeditions in India, Iran, and Pakistan from 1969-1975. Tony completed his Ph.D. in Zoology at Oriel College at the University of Oxford UK from 1970-1976, supporting himself on contracts including as a stage manager of a traveling dance company with his wife Anne-Marie. His Ph.D. program began with David Lack (who died), and was completed with Chris Perrins, both renowned ecologists.

Afterwards, he established and directed the Himachal Wildlife Project (1979) and undertook wildlife surveys in Himachal Pradesh, India. Tony's involvement with Environment Canada began with short-term contract work (1975-1977) that evolved into full-time employment from 1980 until his retirement in April 2014. Tony's career includes not one, not two, but three impressive long-term studies in three geographic regions of the world: the Eastern Canadian Arctic, Northeast Pacific Ocean, and Northwest Himalayas. These studies have allowed Tony to examine demographic questions, climate change effects, Himalayan ecology, and the impacts of introduced mammals at temporal and spatial scales seldom matched by others. Tony's career in the Eastern Canadian Arctic began in 1975. His research on Thick-billed Murres (*Uria lomvia*) and others seabirds has taken place every year and on no fewer than nine colonies: Prince Leopold Island, Coburg Island, Hantzsch Island, The Minarets, Cumberland Peninsula, Baillarge Bay, Coats Island, Digges Island, and Akpatok Island. In 1981, Tony co-wrote a book with David N. Nettleship titled The Thick-billed Murres of Prince Leopold Island (Canadian Wildlife Service). Tony's research on arctic seabirds is extraordinary; it is dangerous work, on steep cliffs, and it has yielded enormous insights.



*The Pacific Seabird Group honored Dr. Anthony J. Gaston (pictured here on Coats Island) with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014. Photo: Leah de Forest*

*"More than anyone, you, Tony have championed the effort to establish an international standard of excellence in the study of murres....Your life's effort and legacy is reflective of an uncommon path well-travelled. Yours is an experiential, process-oriented trek that has opened avenues and vistas for so many others both directly and indirectly." Bill Montevecchi, 2014.*

In 1984, he initiated what would become a multi-decadal research program on the Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) on Reef Island, Haida Gwaii, British Columbia. With his students and others, Tony has conducted detailed studies of banded individuals and nest sites to provide the essential ecological and demographic data for understanding and managing

## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD • Dr. Anthony J. Gaston



*Giving a lecture in the field, Reef Island, Haida Gwaii. Photo: Jean-Louis Martin*

this species. His research on Ancient Murrelets was truly groundbreaking and remains the role model for studies of burrowing alcids. Tony established nest boxes for the murrelets on Reef and Limestone Islands, creating a unique set-up to study this notoriously skittish species. His 1992 book, *The Ancient Murrelet: a Natural History in the Queen Charlotte Islands* (T & A.D. Poyser) is a wonderful example of clearly explained science and is a must-read for aspiring alcid biologists. Tony is the Research Director of the Laskeek Bay Conservation Society (LBCS), a non-profit society that was founded in 1990 to provide research and education opportunities for local people and visitors as volunteers in long-term monitoring of Ancient Murrelets in Laskeek Bay. For the last 24 years, Tony has been a major force on Haida Gwaii, and as a result Ancient Murrelets are part of the community profile now. Tony inspired many field biologists that worked with LBCS to a career in ornithology or marine sciences, including the current PSG Chair, Jo Smith.

*“One summer, I was working on Limestone Island to study the Ancient Murrelets with Tony, and was asked to assist Steve Stockton, a student of Tony’s, with his plant research, by taking him among the islands using our zodiac. One day, on a return trip from Kingsway Rock, we found ourselves in*

*thick fog. After what seemed like the longest run ever back to Reef Island, we found ourselves only a few 10s of metres from our point (on Reef Island). Tony and Jean-Louis Martin were there to greet us. ...Tony, as always, with binoculars around his neck, was probably far more interested in what he could spot in terms of seabirds in this thick fog but was nevertheless impressed we had made it back in one piece.”* Jo Smith (for Lifetime Award Presentation in Juneau, February 2014)

In 1997, Tony expanded the research on Haida Gwaii to include the impact of introduced Sitka black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis*) on the island ecosystems and the phylogenetic affiliation of the endemic races of landbirds in the archipelago. Serendipity brought Tony and Dr. Jean-Louis Martin (CNRS, Montpellier, France) together, a collaboration that led to the Research Group on Introduced Species (RGIS), a non-profit that specialized in the impacts of introduced mammals on Haida Gwaii ecosystems. Tony and Jean-Louis were pioneers on Haida Gwaii, quantifying the ecological effects of deer on the terrestrial

ecosystem and engaging with members of the scientific and local community to explore the controversial topic of deer management on the archipelago and develop solutions. RGIS research resulted in deer culls on two islands: Reef Island and the UNESCO World Heritage Site at SGang Gwaay.

Tony regularly attends the PSG annual meetings and is an important advisor to the Executive Council. He has inspired, impressed, and amused members with his numerous presentations and contributions. Who can forget the PSG meeting when Tony, the auctioneer, literally sold the shirt off his back (a desirable t-shirt)? Some highlights include a plenary presentation in 1997 titled “Age and Experience as Factors in Seabird Breeding Success: Lessons from the Thick-billed Murre,” a Special Paper Session in 1995 on “Coloniality and Seabird Population Dynamics,” and the only member to write a rap song for his presentation! In 2007, Tony convened a special meeting of PSG in Taiwan. From 1999-2012, Tony was the Editor-in-Chief for Marine Ornithology. Along with the late Steve Speich, he shepherded the journal’s transition to PSG management in 1999. Under Tony’s editorial guidance the journal began attracting a fully international authorship and readership.



*Taking in the view in Akpait National Wildlife Area, Baffin Island. Photo: Garry Donaldson*



## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD • Dr. Anthony J. Gaston

Tony remains as the Managing Editor for the journal, overseeing production and subscriptions.



*The editor of Marine Ornithology, scholar, and poet, safely behind his desk.*  
Photo: Jean-Louis Martin

Tony's passion for seabirds and natural history is infectious and many students are deeply grateful for Tony's mentorship and guidance. Tony has supervised or co-supervised 11 M.Sc. students and six Ph.D. students in Canada, plus three students overseas. He is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Biology at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario and has contributed to graduate student committees at Carleton University, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and University of Manitoba. The Pacific Seabird Group has seen few members that have had the same long-lasting and positive impact; at every meeting, scores of students seek out Tony for advice and comments on their research projects.

*"I can honestly say that I owe my career to Tony...he took a chance on a serially underemployed 30-year-old with no math skills, no computer skills, and a mediocre academic track. He taught me an awful lot, without ever having to say very much at all. To this day, I consider Tony to be the finest field biologist and natural historian I have worked with."* Mark Hipfner (for Lifetime Award Presentation in Juneau, February 2014)

Tony was recently recognized by the Society of Canadian Ornithologists for his contributions, receiving the Doris

Huestis Spiers Award for outstanding contributions to Canadian ornithology in 2006, and the Jamie Smith Memorial Mentoring Award for outstanding contributions in mentoring in 2013.

*"He does not have dozens of students in his lab, but rather one or two at a time, and has ample time and energy available to mentor each student...his enthusiasm is contagious. Tony has had a strong influence on many students... [he] has never been formally involved in my graduate career – yet he has been a better mentor than any of my graduate supervisors."* Kyle Elliott (nomination letter for the Jamie Smith Mentoring Award)

Tony has an impressive publication record, with 196 peer-reviewed papers (130 of these on marine birds) and four books on marine birds including three scientific monographs (the two mentioned above and Bird Families of the World - The Auks: Alcidae with Ian L. Jones; Oxford University Press 1998) and a popular account of seabird biology Seabirds: A Natural History (Yale, 2004). Bob Furness had this to say in his review of this book:

*"Tony indicates the book is aimed primarily at the interested novice... but I would enthusiastically encourage you to read it... many of the points raised are ones that I certainly had not been thinking about... So now I'm wondering whether I'm just narrow-minded, or whether Tony Gaston has an exceptionally fertile mind."* Bob Furness, 2004, on Seabirds: A Natural History.

Throughout his ornithological career, Tony has maintained his connections to India with research that has especially focused on the temperate and alpine regions of the northwestern Himalayas, an area he has visited for 35 years. He has been a Senior Consultant on forestry and wildlife for the World Bank (1991-92) as well as held two international consultancies on high altitude wildlife and ecosystem monitoring with the Wildlife Institute of India (World Bank 1994 and UN FAO 1997). Tony was involved in the creation of the Greater

Himalayan National Park, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Tony is truly a multi-dimensional performer; he is a published poet and, as narrator for dance performances, he regularly collaborated with his wife Anne-Marie (well known as Anjali, the classical Indian dancer). In 2013, he co-authored with Anne-Marie the chapter on Dance for the Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts, Oxford University Press.

In closing, it is with pride that the Pacific Seabird Group honors Dr. Anthony J. Gaston with the 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award. In February of this year, we had the pleasure of presenting the award via video-conferencing from the Centennial Hall in Juneau, Alaska to his home in Ottawa, Ontario. Following Dr. Julia Parrish's enthusiastic and amusing presentation, the audience gave Tony a standing ovation as he was presented the award virtually. Tony responded in true Tony fashion - by sharing a wonderful poem that he had written, providing several humorous comments and anecdotes, correcting Julia's mistakes, and humbly accepting this honor bestowed upon him by his peers and colleagues at the Pacific Seabird Group.



*In his element on Prince Leopold Island.*  
(Photographer unknown; used by permission of A.J. Gaston)