

D. L. Serventy Medal 2016: Citation

SONIA M. KLEINDORFER

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

Sonia Kleindorfer arrived in Australia in 2002 to take up a lectureship in biology at Flinders University, and Australasian ornithology has benefitted ever since. Her formal training in science came from the University of Pennsylvania and then the University of Vienna, where she completed a Ph.D. on the ecology of acrocephalid warblers. Short post-docs allowed her to extend and consolidate her work on these warblers, and explore other horizons and disciplines with endocrinological work on baboons that took her to Tanzania.

Despite heavy teaching loads at Flinders University (double the normal academic load), Sonia began studying the behavioural ecology of the Australian avifauna and building a research presence, while continuing and expanding her research on Darwin's finches. A little over a decade later, Professor Kleindorfer is an internationally recognised ornithologist, with over 100 peer-reviewed scientific publications. Around 40% of these publications are on the ecology and behaviour of the Australian avifauna (fairy-wrens, firetails, honeyeaters); 40% on Darwin's finches; and 20% on other species and systems (warblers, baboons and plants). Incredibly, these publications are spread across 50 journal titles.

Sonia's research is strongly field-based, with carefully designed field and aviary observations and experiments. Her work embraces both fundamental biology and applied conservation, often in combination. For example, her work on the effects of the invasive parasitic flies (*Philornis* sp.) on the Galapagos Islands has been crucial in designing the interventions necessary to protect the iconic threatened Darwin's finches, which the flies parasitise – an approach that is now used to protect our own threatened Forty-spotted Pardalote. Her discovery that fairy-wrens call to their eggs has led to another growing body of work aimed at understanding the benefits of the phenomenon. This work has relevance to neurobiology, behaviour, physiology and ecology, and will transform our understanding of how parents program the developmental trajectories of their offspring. Collectively, Sonia's publications



have not only contributed new knowledge and influenced a diversity of fields, they continue to place Australian avian research on a global stage. These are the qualities of a Serventy Medallist.

Sonia's contribution has been built on a teaching philosophy that inspires, encourages and supports budding behavioural ecologists through supervision of their research degrees and ongoing mentoring as they start careers. She publishes frequently with her graduate students, providing them with informative training and, importantly, experience in the art of publishing. There is a mutual respect and warmth between Sonia and her students, an ambience and sense of collegiality that reflects Sonia's philosophy for doing good science, rich in ideas that are backed up by dedication and hard work. For the last 8 years, Sonia has also served as an Associate Editor of *Emu Austral Ornithology*, providing critical insight. But spare a thought for a small, promiscuous, colourful bird, the Superb Fairy-wren, which has spawned two previous Serventy Medallists (Ian Rowley and Andrew Cockburn) and now has a hat-trick with Sonia Kleindorfer.

David C. Paton, Jeremy Robertson and Kate Buchanan