

## Biography of keynote speaker Christopher C. Witt



The Saturday evening banquet features a presentation by Dr. Christopher Witt. Dr. Witt is Biology Professor at the University of New Mexico, and Director & Curator of Birds at the UNM Museum of Southwestern Biology. His presentation is titled, *The Hidden Forces That Make Bird Species and Set Their Ranges*. Dr. Witt received his PhD in 2004 from the Louisiana State University and has been on the faculty at UNM since 2007. Some of the principle research interests of Dr. Witt and his graduate students are avian systematics and molecular evolution; biogeography of Neotropical birds; hummingbird evolution; the adaptations of animals to high-altitudes; and how climate change may impact montane birds. The wide-ranging breadth of his research is reflected in recent publications that focus on topics such as morphological differences between the Yellow-bellied and the Western Flycatcher complex; differential migration by sex in Short-eared Owls; the importance of museum specimens for research and conservation; the evolution of flightlessness in island birds; why cranes have a long trachea; phylogenetics of hummingbirds, siskins and goldfinches; and how blood parasites such as malaria can lead to speciation in birds. Much of his fieldwork is carried out in the Andes Mountains. Dr. Witt teaches courses on global avian diversity, evolution, and high-altitude biology. On the local scene, he writes articles for the Rio Grande Nature Center, and gives advice on the best ways to attract hummingbirds to the garden and how to distinguish the different populations of Sandhill Cranes that winter at Bosque del Apache.