WFO Retreat Summary
10-13 October 2019
Palm Desert

Board member participants: Kurt Leuschner, Jon Dunn, Suzanne Carota, Liga Auzins, Tom Blackman, Phil Unitt, Karen Havlena, Diane Rose, Wendy Beers, John Harris, and Chris Swarth (facilitator).

Special guest: Chris Dean, Fundraising Specialist.

Note: Kimball, Ken, and Bryce did not attend but each sent us very useful written reports responding to retreat agenda topics; their reports were shared with everyone at the retreat.

On Thursday evening many of us gathered at Kurt’s house in Palm Desert for a glass of wine and close up views of the dozens of Costa’s hummers that crowded the row of feeders hung on his front porch. The retreat was held at the Holiday Inn Express in Palm Desert.

Recommendations and Action Items

1. The board should come to an informal agreement that WFO is a board-driven organization.
2. Create a new Membership Committee which will be combined with Outreach activities.
3. Direct the Finance Committee to study the idea of WFO creating a Legacy Society or an endowment.
4. Revise the Bylaws to designate the Student Programs Committee and other important WFO committees as standing committees. All standing committee members should be WFO members.
5. Create short-term, ad hoc committees as needed; their members do not need to be current WFO members.
6. Have all board members agree to a conflict-of-interest statement once it is prepared and discussed.
7. Written committee reports need to be sent to the president at least a week in advance of every quarterly board meeting.
8. During on-boarding, new board members need to be made aware that they'll have a financial responsibility to WFO in addition to the time and effort they give. They should attend conferences and are expected to make an annual donation.
9. Board member needs to think of ways to keep members actively involved in our organization.
10. Search for a qualified person to conduct a financial review. (Jon has contacted Dan Singer; Tom will check his sources.)
11. Increase the honoraria for Phil and Suzanne.
12. Ed Pandolfino will be asked to write a history of WFO for *Western Birds* or to share his knowledge and archives with someone else who can do this.
13. Archive all known WFO historical documents. Find charter members and recognize them at the Reno conference.
14. Determine the locations of all past conferences in preparation of delivering a history of WFO at the Reno conference. Contact Don Roberson to see if he can share his knowledge of the early days of WFO and if he might have photos (Tom Blackman).
15. Search for a WFO member who could become a Field Trip Coordinator.
16. Every board member needs to help increase the number of manuscripts submitted to *Western Birds* by encouraging or seeking those who might have important studies to contribute.

**Birding the Salton Sea on Friday**

The retreat was preceded by a birding trip to the Salton Sea. We left the hotel at 6:15 a.m. to meet Guy McCaskie at Unit One (end of Vendel Road) on the south end of the Salton Sea. We arrived at around 7:45 at the Refuge overlook platform where Guy met us and told us he’d just spotted a juvenile Roseate Spoonbill 55 minutes earlier flying west with a flock of White-faced Ibis. Unfortunately, he, and we, were unable to locate it subsequently. The day was filled, however, with many great sightings and high diversity of waterbirds and landbirds. We birded the Unit One wetlands at the end of Vendel Road; from shore levees, via Lack and Young roads; a shallow agricultural pond on Lack road 200m north of Hwy 78/86; various stops in the vast Imperial County agricultural lands; at Cattle Call Park in Brawley; and in Niland around the scrabby backyard of homeowners who were friends of Guy. We finished the day back at the Unit One platform where we’d hoped to encounter the spoonbill, but it did not appear.
The highlight of the day was a juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper foraging in the open and at close range on the edge of the pond at Lack Road and Hwy 78/86. Guy spotted the bird almost immediately after we emerged from our cars. This was a first record for Imperial County and only the second record for the Salton Sea. It foraged along the pond edge, near Western and Least Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers and a few Greater Yellowlegs. The sandpiper tolerated a close approach and Tom and others were able to take many excellent photos. Others chased it later that morning, but unfortunately, it had moved on.

Other excellent birds of the day: Snow Goose (6, early); White-fronted Goose (two flocks, totaling 42); Snowy Plover (2); Stilt Sandpiper (1); Ruddy Turnstone (1 juvenile); Franklin’s Gull (1 1st winter); Western Gull (5-6); Common Tern (5, including two alternate-plumaged adults); Black Tern (50+); Burrowing Owl (2); Peregrine (2); White Pelican (2 flocks; around 150-200 each); Bald Eagle (1 juvenile); Violet-green Swallow (1 male, rare at the Salton Sea); and Pine Siskin (1 in Niland).

On Saturday morning Kurt led a trip to Desert Center where we birded for about two hours mostly around the edges of a golf course and small lakes. A good variety of birds were seen here, the best being a juvenile Dickcissel which foraged along a road edge with sparrows.
Saturday; 1:00 – 5:00

Retreat Objectives, WFO History, and Leadership
Kurt and Jon began the meeting by explaining the purpose of the retreat and what was hoped to be accomplished over two days of discussion.

Jon gave a brief history of WFO:
The initial meeting to discuss forming an organization was held in October 1967 at the home of Alan Baldridge. The group called the organization, California Field Ornithologists. In 1969, letters were sent to others to join. The name of the journal for the first three volumes (1970 to 1972) was California Birds. In January 1973, the journal was renamed Western Birds (WB), with Alan Craig as the first editor until present-day editor Phil Unitt took over in 1986. Guy McCaskie and Pierre Devillers, along with Virginia (Ginger) Johnson (still today our graphics manager), were founders. Conferences started a few years after that. We are now at our 45th Conference and our 50th year anniversary of Western Field Ornithologists and Western Birds.

We spent a few minutes going around the table so each of us could reveal a little about ourselves and why we enjoy being members of the WFO.

We then launched into the meeting, taking up topics one after the other as they were outlined on the agenda, and offering everyone a chance to weigh in with opinions. We arrived at consensus on many topics, which have been turned into Recommendations and Action Items that will be presented to the entire board at our next meeting on November 6. Some topics discussed initially on Saturday were taken up again on Sunday.

Board members, as leaders of the organization, should be bear in mind these general responsibilities:

1. **Mission.** To help keep the nonprofit organization on mission. The two most important questions that each board member should continually be asking are “What is our mission?” and “Does this action serve our members and supporters?”
2. **Meeting Attendance.** To take meeting attendance seriously. No one can attend all board meetings but the expectation is to make most of them and to let the president know when absence is required.
3. **Committee Work.** Board members serve on committees and provide oversight for all the specific organization operations.
4. **Finances.** To ensure that financial accountability and stewardship of funds are hallmarks of operations. All board members should participate in some form of fundraising. This may include identifying prospects or “opening doors” to possible donors.
5. **Provide Financial Support.** To support the nonprofit financially beyond one’s membership dues.
6. **Advocates in the Community.** To advocate for and serve as ambassadors for the nonprofit in the community and among peers.

Our collective vision for leadership should include a well-defined line of succession; no surprises; more diversity; adherence to our core mission and reason for existence, which is field ornithology, not birding. Board members should promote WFO, look for new board members, and adhere to our mission.

Phil will ask Ed if he can write an article on WFO history for *Western Birds*. If he’s unable to do that perhaps he can provide materials to someone else who can do that. Kurt will also ask Ed about who might do a visual presentation/talk in Reno on the same topic. Could be a 30 to 40 minute plenary talk; Kurt suggests perhaps with a second plenary talk by Dave Shuford, Tim Manolis or even Guy McCaskie.

Contact longtime members and get information from them about the early years – perhaps come up with a few questions to ask them so we can learn about those early years for our 50th. Suzanne was going to follow up on this. Suzanne will do more research on WFO history and may contact some of our charter members to learn more about our early history. She mentioned that there are scant records before 1985. Some WFO documents are archived at the Western Foundation for Vertebrate Zoology.

For a summary of WFO history it will be helpful to determine where every conference was held. John offered to call Don Roberson to get his knowledge of early WFO history.

In terms of spreading the word about WFO and increasing our membership, Tom mentioned that every board member should consider themselves to be an ambassador for WFO.

Jon emphasize the importance of voting on issues, and that while a board member may not agree with the results of every official board decision, we all must accept the vote and move on.

Suzanne had prepared or gathered several documents that were sent to everyone before the meeting and that were available at the retreat:

- Suzanne’s job description
- Financial and membership history
- Conflict-of-Interest Questionnaire
- Vanguard’s Sample Conflict-of-Interest Policy Statement
- Sample Board Orientation Checklist

**Membership**

1. We agreed to create a new Membership Committee that would be combined with Outreach. Suzanne, John, and Karen were suggested as members of this committee. This committee will get more involved with the “care and feeding” of our members by devising new ways for WFO to provide activities and other benefits for members. This committee could identify potential new members by researching organizations that
share some of our goals (birds, bird research, conservation, natural history education, etc.). A Membership Committee could also analyze our membership roster to determine how many members are from each geographical area (Calif., Arizona, British Columbia, Alaska, etc.), duration of membership, profession, student status, age (if we have such data). This is useful information to share with the board and officers so we have a more thorough understanding of our membership – who they are, where they live, etc.

2. It was suggested that we examine the effectiveness of WFO gift memberships to make sure they’re worthwhile in the long run. Although many of those who receive gift subscriptions do not renew, gift subscriptions still have value as outreach that helps others learn about WFO. We should, therefore, continue to encourage WFO members to give gift memberships to friends and family. In our recruitments some effort should be made to encourage folks to renew if they like the material.

3. According the Suzanne’s compilation of membership data on a summary sheet she passed around, membership has varied from a low of about 1,035 members in 2010 and 2019, to a high of 1,204 in 2015. Over the past decade membership has only varied by plus or minus 175 members. This is a 14% variance. Our membership is almost flat, but has been declining gradually and steadily since 2015.

4. We should recognize those WFO members who have been members for 5, 10 and 20 years. The newsletter is a good place to do this.

5. John suggested that we offer shorter field trips as a way to provide activities for younger WFO members and for those who may not be able to afford the more expensive week-long trips or trips to other countries.

6. Tom, Jon and Chris feel that some WFO committees have too many members which could make them less effective, especially if some members are not actively involved in committee work. Smaller committees where each member plays a productive role in committee business can probably accomplish more and be more effective and efficient.

7. The president is an ex officio (non-voting) member of each WFO committee. The vice president is not, but should be. They should both receive copies of significant correspondence or reports generated by committees which will keep them in the loop and aware of important issues. Jon, Tom, Chris and others will update the bylaws.

8. Phil suggested that we promote any Western Birds articles written by board members with a note in the newsletter.
Finances

1. Tom explained that he’s organizing a formal financial review with Suzanne’s help that will be completed before the Reno conference.

2. Suzanne passed out a summary sheet showing our finances over the last 10-year period. The Mike San Miguel Youth Scholarship Fund (initiated in 2010) and the Publications Fund (initiated in 2002) have both grown substantially since they were created. The overall WFO budget was $98,000 in 2009 and is $370,000 in October 2019.

3. Suzanne shared a one-page, detailed summary of her work duties. This included tasks related to both finances and to membership. She then took the time to go over this handout and to answer questions about her job. Tom explained that he and Suzanne go over all bank records monthly. Suzanne backs up all WFO financial documents to a Cloud storage service. Suzanne also passed around a sheet with the membership data for the last ten years. Jon made a point to thank Suzanne on behalf of the entire board for all the work she does for WFO.

4. Tom suggested that a copy of financial and membership data also be copied to an external hard drive. It was suggested that the president and the new membership committee also get a copy of the current WFO membership list.

5. Part of Suzanne’s work summary included her monthly honorarium and the approximate number of hours she works each week. Tom suggested that Suzanne’s honorarium should be increased and there was general agreement that this take place.

6. 1099 IRS forms will be sent to those that WFO pays for services.

Field Trips and Tours

1. Suzanne pointed out that payment for field trips is not to be considered a donation to WFO, but simply covers the cost for participating in an event that has value. Field trips are a very important WFO activity. They generate good will among participants and offer a chance for us to thank them for their support of WFO.

2. The subject of a field trip manager or “Field Trip Czar” came up, who could help oversee the many details involved in the week-long domestic trips or international tours. After they coordinated a certain number of trips they could receive a free field trip.

3. There are many logistics involved with these trips. Few serious problems or accidents have taken place, but the potential exists.

4. We need more volunteers to step forward to lead field trips. Field trip locations should be determined before we search for leaders.
5. We need to create a “Field Trip Bible,” similar to the conference bibles that Ed prepared. This bible would include all the many details involved with organizing and conducting WFO field trips.

6. John suggested that we hold local one-day or few-day field trips to places that are close by and that would therefore be inexpensive for members as compared with the long, multi-day trips. This would benefit our members and would allow those with limited finances to participate more often in WFO activities. The more expensive trips are usually filled with older or retired members. An example of this will be a donor trip led by Kurt and Jon next year, centered out of Palm Desert, a repeat of an earlier donor tour (proposed dates October 15-18, 2020. Another, suggested by John, was a trip to, “The Sewage Treatment Plants of the San Joaquin Valley.”

Conferences
1. Diane explained the many tasks she completes herself and coordinates with others prior to and during the conferences. Almost everything related to the conference flows through Diane’s hands. She handles all the online registration, fields all phone call inquiries from those who register, sends follow-up emails to all registrants, assembles the individual registration packets for each attendee, and tries to hold all fellow conference volunteers to the many deadlines leading up to the conference. For example, the Science Program is not generally set (speakers, talk titles, times of talks, etc.) until a few weeks before the conference begins. This all is a tremendous amount of work! She submits that while she does most of this work herself, she often has 4 to 5 volunteers who help her with tasks.

2. Total conference attendance size is limited by the size of the hotel banquet room.

3. We talked about holding conferences in the same (or in a very few) location each year. Going to a new location each year is challenging for the board and conference organizing committee, but it seems well worth it for our members and for us. It was the consensus that we better serve our membership and probably have greater attendance, because we do change locations regularly. Many members like this variety. Some locations, such as Fortuna in Humboldt County (northern coastal California), have proved excellent sites, and we should return there again in the near future when it’s time to have another California conference.

4. Our tradition of holding our conference in the fall works in our favor. Many groups have meetings in spring or summer; thus, we avoid competing with other organizations, and the early fall season is a great time for field trips to productive areas.

5. The person coordinating the conference field trips should try to have back-up leaders in case the original leader is not available.
6. We could do a better job of reaching out to government conservation and resource management agencies to encourage them to join WFO and to attend our conferences.

**Student Programs Committee**

1. There was agreement that the work of the Student Programs Committee is a high priority for WFO and it is important for WFO to encourage young birders in many ways.

2. The Student Programs Committee should become a standing WFO committee.

3. Several of us requested that this committee needs to produce a clear, thorough report that explains all annual activities and accomplishments. The budgeting process and the budget presented to the board needs to be improved with better details and clarity.

4. The Student Programs budget will be voted on and approved by the Board. The Board will decide on dollar amount and the number of scholars selected each year. We also discussed whether $15,000 is good budget floor or if a budget floor is even necessary. Currently each student scholar receives a scholarship of $750 to $800 to attend a conference.

**WFO Awards**

1. We did not discuss the current WFO awards that are presented to outstanding volunteers or ornithologists.

2. Questions arose about gifts given to retiring *Western Birds* Associate Editors and to which budget category or committee the cost for such gifts should be assigned.

3. We could review our long-standing *Western Birds* Associate Editors Dan Reinking, Tom Gardali and Bob Gill, at end of year and ask Phil to send a letter of recognition.
Sunday; 8:30 – 2:00
Fundraising

Our special guest Chris Dean led a discussion which followed her one-page handout (handout is attached to this summary report.)

Chris thanked us for inviting her to our retreat and the chance to talk with us about fundraising. Chris is an enthusiastic full-time birder in L.A. County and past board member of Pasadena Audubon Society. She has 20 years of fundraising leadership experience with a broad range of fundraising specialties including annual, online, major and planned giving, as well as, foundation and corporate relations and special events. Chris earned a master’s degree at Dartmouth College, a teaching credential at San Diego State University and a bachelor’s degree at Occidental College.

1. She explained that fundraising is a 4-part process that involves:
   • Identification (determining likely donors)
   • Cultivation (getting to know likely donors)
   • Solicitation (the “ask”)
   • Stewardship (the “care and feeding” of donors)

2. The “ask”, where we actually ask a potential donor for financial support, is only one part of successful fundraising. This step is only taken after much planning and forethought.

3. When beginning to cultivate a potential donor it’s important to know something about their ability and willingness to make a charitable donation.

4. A simple pyramid was used to show the variation in types of donors. Most donors (70% - 80%) give small donations (base of the pyramid); a few (5%) donors give large donations (tip of pyramid); the rest, 25% of donors, are in the middle.

5. Chris addressed concerns by some who are uncomfortable asking for donations. She pointed out that many donors are actually pleased and even honored to be asked for a donation. Board members must believe in WFO in order to make a donor feel like they want to give. Many donors have a deep desire to give to causes they believe in. Solicitation does not involve arm twisting. During solicitation the prospective donor should carry 80% of the conversation, not the board member. Listen to the donor.

6. She emphasized that it’s critical that every board member make a donation to WFO that is over and above their annual member dues. Having a donation from 100% of the board is an especially important sign to our members, to potential donors, and to foundations. It signals that board members believe in WFO. The important thing is that all board members give something; the dollar amount is not that important.
7. We need to distinguish between “membership dues” and “donations”. For WFO, membership actually is a donation.

8. Board members donate treasure, talent and time (the 3 “T”s) to their board duties. Not all board members give equally, which is fine.

9. For our purposes we should keep our giving categories simple. For those who give the most, in our case Life Members and Patrons, we need to devise special events that show our gratitude.

10. **Annual giving** is a fundraising area that fits WFO well. We would solicit donations that are over and above annual membership dues. Solicitation can be done in person, or by mail, email, phone, and on the web-site. Few of us wanted to make phone calls, especially cold calls. Typically appeals of this sort are done between Thanksgiving and the end of the year. A fundraising letter that is mailed seemed the best approach, followed by 2 email appeals.

11. WFO Life Members are the most obvious group to focus on considering that they already have a high regard for WFO and have already made a significant donation. If we cultivate donors who might make large donations, we should keep their names confidential.

12. **Planned giving** is another potentially useful type of fundraising for WFO to consider. This could be a big opportunity. This involves setting up a system so that supporters can designate WFO in their will or trust. One vehicle for this would be a Legacy Society or Legacy Circle. We would need to give this a name. We should get prepared to do this now, so we can launch it officially at the 50th anniversary conference in Reno.

13. We also discussed endowments. These are restricted funds with spending/access limits. Generally, in an endowment the principal remains invested and is not touched. An endowment is a *restricted* gift. (In an emergency this fund can be accessed, but there could be penalties). The annual interest that is earned by the principal is available to us for operations. Would probably begin an endowment with an investment of something like $100,000. In setting up an endowment we should seek donations that are not restricted by the donor. This gives us the most flexibility in withdrawing funds for organization activities. A Board Restricted Endowment is a “quasi” endowment created by the Board that takes unrestricted funds and imposes its own spending restrictions.

14. Chris also suggested we let our members know about the possibility of year-end, corporate matching donations. Some members may work for organizations that will match employee donations to charitable organizations like WFO.
**Best Practices:**
- We want unrestricted gifts as they give us the greatest flexibility
- Avoid specifics (i.e., a book) when donating
- All donations should go into a general fund
- Foundations and major gifts are usually restricted
- Ask those who donate to WFO if their company will match their donation

**WFO High-end Giving Plan:**
- Mail/e-mail solicitation schedule (1 mailing plus 2 e-mails)
- Mail letter last week of November
- First e-mail mid-December
- Second e-mail end of December
- Unfortunately, these dates coincide with **WB** renewal
- E-mailing is the best way to get money
- Cultivate Life Members for larger donations
- At year end, promote gift memberships

Chris concluded her informative presentation by offering to give the entire board a separate training on fundraising.

**Western Birds**

1. Phil provided everyone with a better understanding of the procedures and steps he takes as Western Birds editor and the process of publishing the journal. He could retire in the near future and he agreed that it’s good that the board begins to think about this eventuality. He likely would retire from his position at the San Diego Natural History Museum at the same time he retires as WB editor. The board will not form a search committee until Phil gives us a firm date for retirement. Phil began editing WB in 1986 and is only its second editor. Phil explained his philosophy of running the journal. He imparted wisdom and several guiding principles:

   - Publishing **Western Birds** creates something of lasting value.
   - Science is a conversation.
   - Just because something is in print does not make it true.
   - An editor is a diplomat.

2. Phil embraces these four principles and conveys them to contributors to ease any anxiety they might have about publishing (and the necessary editing and critical reviews) and to indicate how important it is that significant findings get published. Phil works hard with authors to get manuscripts into proper shape for publication. **Western Birds** is a “gateway” journal for graduate students, as this may be their first published paper, and a paper in WB can move them forward to becoming a professional ornithologist. **Western Birds** tends to publish papers that are not as technical or
theoretical as other ornithological journals such as the Auk and Condor. WB fills an important niche in western ornithology.

3. Phil would be happy to receive more manuscripts and asked that board members help this process by encouraging students, researchers, and others to submit manuscripts of relevant work to him. Jon suggested that the chairs of our two standing rarities committees (California and Hawaii) should encourage observers to submit articles on significant rarities. Western Birds should be at the forefront of publishing papers on status and distribution.

4. Jon asked Phil if he would give a talk about the publishing process during the science sessions at the Reno meeting and Phil agreed so long as he’s reminded well ahead of time. Phil was also asked to write an article for the web site that outlines the steps needed to submit a manuscript, and a shorter article for Western Birds.

Special Publications

1. Phil mentioned that our special publications should not compete with or undermine Western Birds. Ideas or proposals for special publications should first be considered for publication in Western Birds before being considered as a special publication.

2. Jon does not want WFO to actively seek out authors of potential special publications, but instead we should wait for ideas and proposals to come to us.

3. Kurt pointed out that special publications are “loss leaders” and we likely will not recoup the expenses/costs needed to publish them. These monographs are therefore subsidized by WFO and we publish them as a service to members and the wider ornithological community.

4. Tom and Suzanne are concerned about the ultimate costs to produce special publications. It’s best to know these costs early, when possible, as well as the eventual sale price for a book. The number of complimentary author copies needs to be considered, too.

5. After Ken steps down as chair of the Publications Committee, Kimball has agreed to become the chair and Bob Gill will be in charge of the Special Publications.
Communication and Committees

1. We discussed the concept of WFO as either a “board-driven” or a “committee-driven” organization. Ultimately the board okays the budget and votes on significant issues. Committees should decide how they want to function; select members; generate and debate ideas; and strive for consensus on issues. The Board should not micromanage the minor decisions that committees reach, but should oversee major decisions, especially ones that involve:
   - Major overall policies
   - Major new initiatives
   - Significant budget outlays

2. The consensus of those at the retreat is that WFO is “board-driven”, but that committees are crucial to achieving our mission.

3. The Student Programs Committee and all WFO-affiliated Bird Records Committees shall become standing committees. The Bylaws need to be changed to reflect this.

4. The State Bird Records Committees that are affiliated with WFO should be formally invited to become standing committees of WFO, the main responsibility being that each committee member will need to be a dues-paying WFO member.

5. Every person who serves on a WFO standing committee should be a current WFO member. Members of ad hoc committees may be exempt from this requirement.

6. At the Nov. 6 board meeting we will vote for all regular committees to become “standing committees.”

7. Tom asked that committee chairs do a better job of coming to the board with well-formulated arguments and proposals.

8. Jon, Suzanne, Chris, Tom, Homer and Dave Q. will work on updating and revising our bylaws and report back in the future.

9. Committee size should not be too large; smaller committees are better.

10. Tom felt the board should make fewer motions at meetings. He pointed out that the compilation Liga made of all board motions (2007 to 2019) was very useful.

11. Jon, Kurt and others would like committees to submit written reports to the president at least a week before each board meeting so that all board members are updated and prepared when we meet. Controversial topics and items that need board approval should be highlighted and sent around to everyone before a board meeting. Kurt asked to receive committee reports a week or so before a board meeting.
12. Chris will finalize the outreach/fundraising/membership committee. This committee might discuss having a digital *Western Birds*, electronic membership category at a reduced rate compared to the print journal which might help some renew their memberships if they’re on a tight budget.

13. We discussed how to do a better job bringing new board members up to speed and into a leadership position on the board. Diane suggested that a current board member could act as a mentor to a new board member. Suzanne pointed out that we need to let board members know that there is a financial obligation to joining the board – each board member must spend their own funds to travel to and register for our annual conference. Also, after an Annual Giving fundraising program is initiated, board members will be expected to contribute to the best of their ability. Board members also need to understand that any conflicts-of-interest must be acknowledged.

14. John will assemble a “New Board Member” packet that includes such things as the by-laws, recent board minutes, organizational chart and a new conflict-of-interest form.

15. Chris will check again with WFO members Lance B. and Mark S. to re-invite them to join a new grad student award sub-committee within the Student Programs Committee. John, Steve R., Kimball, Homer and Ken may also serve on this subcommittee and it will handle any graduate stipends and research proposals. Homer has been notified of this.

**Web Site**

1. Bryce submitted much useful information about the progress he is making on developing a plan for updating the web site. We have received a proposal from one company. The consensus was to encourage Bryce to continue working on this and to inform the board as more progress on a proposal and plan are made.

2. Chris will ask Bryce to get the analytics data on number of web site visits from Tim.

**50th Anniversary Plans**

We had a wide-ranging discussion of ideas for our upcoming meeting in Reno in September 2020, when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of WFO.

Write up the history of WFO and publish this in *Western Birds*. Phil offered to talk with Ed about this.

Ask Guy McCaskie to give a presentation on the history of the California Bird Records Committee.

Phil will give a talk on *Western Birds*, its importance as a place where significant bird papers are published. He will highlight significant papers that have had an impact on western field ornithology. This type of summary could also be incorporate into a history article that appears in WB.
Gather all past presidents for a group photo. Tom B., bring your camera! Have a special banquet table for WFO founders.

We discussed identifying and recognizing all charter members who were asked to join then CFO in the fall of 1969. This should be done at the conference for those there (by standing) and say the names of those that aren’t there who are still with us. Suzanne is working to identify the charter members.

Ask Ed to assemble 5-10 slides for a presentation on WFO people and founders.

Kurt will check on purchasing Optec binocular straps with the WFO logo on it. He suggested that we provide metal, vacuum-sealed, 32 oz. “Hydro Flask” water bottles, again with logo or sticker. For t-shirt, water bottles, etc., we prefer the wording be, “Established in 1970”, rather than “50th anniversary” in order to avoid “dating” our swag. Kurt will look into making a pin with the logo and some 50-year anniversary stickers. Kurt will also take pre-orders from board members and others for a special 50th anniversary polo shirt. Tim has already put our 50th anniversary logo on the first page of our website.

Kurt mentioned that a Reno tour company has already offered to provide $500 for the Thursday evening reception.

We will confirm/vote at Nov 6 board meeting to have Bryce create the 50th anniversary t-shirt design featuring a Sabine’s Gull.

Chris will contact LA Times reporter Louis Sahagun to see if he might write an article about WFO.

Jon and John will represent WFO at the upcoming Central Valley Bird Club conference, with Karen Havlena helping too. John will ask David Yee to announce our Reno meeting.

In October 2020 Kurt and Jon will lead a special trip to the southeastern deserts, headquartered in Palm Desert and with a visit to the Imperial Valley, led by one of WFO’s founder, Guy McCaskie (we hope - Jon wrote to him and we assume he’ll agree), with visits possibly to Desert Center and the San Jacinto Wildlife Area as well as areas closer to Palm Desert.

Tom will write press releases about the Reno conference.

John will write an WFO conference announcement for the AOS newsletter.

Kurt will ask Homer about leading a special Arizona birding trip for the students in summer 2020, for our 50th anniversary. Jon and Kurt may also lead another Coachella Valley long weekend fundraising trip for our 50th in October 2020.

Tom will write a press release for our 50th anniversary and we’ll all help to get the word out.
Kurt will contact John Garrett (and Cat) about getting our Fall newsletter out before Thanksgiving. Kurt has a few items for the newsletter like advertising the Gambell book, attracting more manuscripts for *Western Birds*, and mentioning our retreat with a photo or two. (already in progress).

**In conclusion:** Everyone seemed to enjoy this retreat and found it very productive. So much so that we agreed to hold another retreat in 2021, perhaps at the Zzyyx California State University field station in the Mojave. Kurt will check to see if that site is available.

A summary of these retreat notes and our group photo will go to John Garrett for an article in the WFO newsletter.
Western Field Ornithologists
Retreat Agenda
October 10-13, 2019

Thursday evening. Reception at Kurt's home and dinner in town
Friday. All-day field trip to Salton Sea led by Guy McCaskie
Saturday. Morning birding trip

Saturday. Group Discussion at the Palm Desert Holiday Inn Express
1:00 – 5:00.

Welcome by Kurt and Jon
1:00 - 2:30
  1. Introductions
  2. Where we’ve come from and where we want to go
  3. What we want to accomplish at this retreat

1. What is our collective vision for WFO over the next 3 to 5 years?
   • Leadership
   • Membership
   • Finances
   • Conferences
   • Standing and ad hoc committees
   • Western Birds Journal
   • Student Programs
   • Special Publications
   • Awards
   • Web page

2. Does WFO want to become better integrated with the academic ornithological community in
   the West, and if so, how do we begin to make this happen?

   Break 2:30 - 2:45

Leadership and Board Operations (Jon, Kurt and Suzanne)
2:45 - 5:00
  • How can the WFO board communicate better, and function more efficiently and
    effectively?
  • How can the board do a better job of on-boarding new board members? How can we
    give all board members a better sense of WFO history, mission, objectives, and how we
    operate as an organization?
    Provide new board members with a packet of documents including bylaws,
    history, list of committees, bios, conference duties and tasks, budget, etc.
    Assign a mentor to every new board member
  • How do we encourage board members to consider becoming an officer?
• How can we seek new board members who might serve as officers in the future? Do we need a nominating committee for officers?

Sunday. Group Discussion at the Palm Desert Holiday Inn Express
8:30 - 2:00

8:30 - 9:30. Fundraising, Annual Giving, & Legacy Fund (Chris Dean, Suzanne and Chris Swarth)
  • Current financial situation, with projections for the future (Suzanne and Kurt)
  • Planning for long term financial stability and growth (Chris Dean)

  Break 9:30 - 9:45

9:45 - 11:30. Publications Committee Issues (Phil and Kurt)
  • How do we prepare for the eventual retirement of Western Birds editor Phil Unitt and how do we search for and select a new editor? Phil needs to inform the board about his duties, challenges, and ideas for the future.
  • How can all WFO board members and others help WB attract more manuscripts? What sorts of papers do we want to see published? Is the current mix of papers balanced in terms of achieving the goals of WFO and the journal?
  • New ideas for future WFO Special Publications.

  11:30 Lunch

12:00 - 1:30. Planning for the WFO 50th Anniversary (Kurt and others)

1:30 - 2:00. Wrap up and Summary (Kurt, Jon and Chris)
WFO Fundraising Conversation (Prep’d by Chris Dean)

If WFO had more revenue, how would you advance the mission?

Fundraising – what is it?
- Approximately 60% of Americans give
- The cycle: Identification (ability, interest, linkage), Cultivation, Solicitation, Stewardship
- Donor pyramid
- Who gives: individuals (70-80%), foundations, corporations

Fundraising Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Giving</td>
<td>Mail appeals</td>
<td>Gifts from income</td>
<td>Stable, growing revenue (e.g., 25% increase support, 15% decrease)</td>
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<td>Online appeals</td>
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<td>Unrestricted operating support</td>
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<td>Website donations</td>
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<td>Fundraising calls</td>
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<td>Board giving</td>
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<td>High-end giving circle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Events</td>
<td>Galas (sponsorships, tickets, auctions, raffles)</td>
<td>Gifts from income</td>
<td>Marketing, visibility</td>
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<td>Pledge events/thons</td>
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<td>Community building</td>
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<td>Pitch events</td>
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<td>Can be expensive</td>
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<td>Corporate Giving</td>
<td>Marketing motivation</td>
<td>Gifts from corp. income</td>
<td>How will it benefit corp.?</td>
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<td>Events</td>
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<td>Board connections</td>
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<td>Program branding</td>
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<td>Unrestricted or restricted support</td>
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<td>Foundation Giving</td>
<td>Proposal process (LOI, proposal, site visit, report)</td>
<td>Gifts from foundation income</td>
<td>Long process</td>
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<td>Seal of approval</td>
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<td>Restricted support</td>
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<td>Major Gifts</td>
<td>Capital campaigns</td>
<td>Gifts from assets</td>
<td>Launch new programs, huge mission impact</td>
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<td>Moves management (donor meetings, calls, tours, etc.)</td>
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<td>Low fundraising expenses</td>
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<td>Restricted support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planned Giving</td>
<td>Marketing – mail appeals, website, newsletter, magazine</td>
<td>Gifts from assets</td>
<td>Huge mission impact</td>
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<td>Moves management</td>
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<td>Low fundraising expenses</td>
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<td>Legacy circle/society</td>
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<td>Unrestricted operating support</td>
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<td>Board-restricted endowment (quasi endowment)</td>
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WFO Opportunities
- Annual and Planned Giving
- 50th Anniversary
WFO Treasurer Duties (from Suzanne)  
10/8/19

Personal: I retired in 2013 after working for 30 years in accounting and finance. My experience includes general accounting, financial reporting, internal controls, budgeting in a corporate environment. I was a plant controller and have experience in Project Management, Human Resources and Contract Administration.

After five years as Treasurer, I feel that one of the most important roles of the Treasurer is to manage the day to day activities and also be able to step back and look at the big picture, the long term.

The Treasurer should be focused on providing relevant information to the officers and directors. That may mean raising an issue that presents itself. Or just giving folks something to think about.

WFO pays me $630 per month. I work an average of 15-20 hours per week. Time required varies - some weeks are busier than others. I don't have a set schedule. I work when it fits my schedule. I try to respond within 24 hours to email. The only other time commitment that I have is a 4 hour volunteer shift every other Tuesday at the Red Cross.

Daily - I respond to whatever is needed, email, snail mail, phone calls

Record Cash receipts into Paypal - member dues, page charges, donations, etc. (avg 45 per month)
- Pay bills/write checks (average 10 checks per month)
- Deposit checks received into B of A (average 20 checks per month)
- I try to be very timely and responsive to member needs
- The Fund balances need close attention, because they are maintained in a spreadsheet.

Monthly - I record all transactions into Aplos and produce Bank reconciliation
- Bank rec review is very important because bank activity requires oversight.
- I produce monthly financial statements Including a review of bank balances, income, expenses and budget variances

- I back up all my files to the cloud at the beginning of each month
- I also do a backup if I'm going to be traveling with my laptop

Quarterly - file sales tax returns
- Annually Prepare and submit Federal Form 990 and CA Form 199
- Prepare and submit CA Registration of Charitable Trusts
- Prepare the WFO budget with input from committees for board approval in January
Western Birds
I inform the printer how many copies will be needed
I prepare the mailing lists and provide them to the mailing house
I manage the balance in the bulk permit account
I manage the envelope inventory and printing as needed
I manage the 'past due account' at the USPS
I record and report all $$ received for page charges (provide invoices as requested)

Membership
I respond to all member inquiries and needs
I maintain the member lists - and update all new members, renewals, etc.
I notify Ed P of all member updates
I mail out lost copies of WB, back issues, checklists, merch ordered
Annually, I send out renewal reminders starting in December
Annually, I send out emails to all Life members who are on the installment plan

Books
I help update the webpage and Kindle with prices
I record payments that come into PayPal
I send book orders to Allen (weekly)
I reconcile monthly inventory held at Allen

Conference
I review all registrations daily for membership status
I record all revenue and expenses monthly
I assist the scholars with room reservations
I pay all bills: hotel, comp rooms, honoraria, vans, etc.

Projects
As needed for communicating financial issues to the board
Kimball Garrett’s retreat agenda comments are in red

1. What is our collective vision for WFO over the next 3 to 5 years?

Leadership

A well-defined line of succession; no surprises; more diversity; adherence to our core mission and reason for existence. Field ornithology, not birding.

Membership

Challenges will grow as they do in all membership-based organizations whose publications are easily obtained by non-members. If we can keep membership even or, ideally, grow somewhat, we’re doing well. Once we engage members we keep them, so we need to keep doing things to engage members and provide them with great publications, meetings, personal connections, etc.

Conferences

These have been spectacularly successful in recent years, in large part because of heroic efforts and careful attention to detail by just a small handful of our hardest-working members. Great to have this kind of success, but is it sustainable?

I would seriously consider having a small group of tried-and-true meeting sites both within California and in other states that we can return to on a regular basis and not have to adapt to novel sites/challenges every year. To do this we would have to spread the work out so as not to make local committees (and local field trip leaders) work like crazy every 3-4 years.

Although many or most members come to meeting for the field trips and birding, they all get a lot out of the presentations and workshops. We need to figure out a way to maintain or even beef up workshops and scientific research presentations while still giving the birding addicts their drug.

Standing and ad hoc committees

We need to work to make outreach (especially outside of California) work better. Partnerships with other states have come in fits and starts, and need to be increased but perhaps also re-thought. What mutual benefits, for example, are coming out of our partnership with Colorado Field Ornithologists. If it’s working, what do we need to do to extend this to other areas. If it isn’t what we had hoped, what is a better approach?

Western Birds Journal

Our reason for being, and nurturing this journal is our most important task

Student Programs

Let us continue to emphasize youth programs (grade school to high school); I am open to ways to further engage undergraduate students as well. I am not keen on putting our resources into funding graduate students, as they get no real academic advancement from WFO meetings. Getting graduate student researchers involved in meetings (presentations, field trips) is very important, but that is the purview of the local committee and the scientific program committee; funding some aspects of their involvement (e.g. free registration if they present) would be fine, but I don’t know about competitive scholarships to graduate students for attending meetings.

Web page

Very important to revamp this, with an adjunct youth page as well.
2. Does WFO want to become better integrated with the academic ornithological community in the West, and if so, how do we begin to make this happen?

Our penetration into the academic community continues to be relatively low. This is largely a function of the emphasis placed in academia on publication in “high impact” journals and on research that emphasizes hypothesis-driven experimental studies, laboratory studies, molecular studies, and the generation and testing of complex models. All we can hope for is to serve and engage the segments of the academic ornithological community that focus on field and specimen-based studies and the topics best covered in our journals and programs (status and distribution, field techniques, distributional ecology, habitat associations, migration and vagrancy, etc.). We do a good job of this but perhaps can think of ways to better involve the academic community. We will never be relevant to >>50% of modern-day ornithologists whose work is pretty far removed from what we do, apart from appealing to the “inner birdwatcher” in many of them.

I think we can also be “watchdogs” of bird conservation organizations, helping them in their initiatives but also trying to ground them in accurate field ornithology. Witness the ballyhooed National Audubon Society reports all over the media in the last couple of days about extinction probabilities of birds due to a warming climate. Important stuff, and a very real and sobering topic. But look at their web site where you can enter your zip code and see the vulnerabilities of your birds to climate change. The classification of species in the various categories from “High Vulnerability” of extinction to “Stable” seems to have little relationship to reality. Stable species in L. A. County include things like Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Least Tern, whereas Allen’s Hummingbird is highly vulnerable to extinction in a warming climate. Huh? When organizations like National Audubon Society have almost become a joke among field ornithologists and birders because of their seeming detachment from basic truths about bird status and distribution, it is incumbent on organizations like ours to keep them grounded.

Back to the core of this topic, though. WFO needs to be represented at major ornithological meetings (e.g. AOS or joint meetings like the 2020 NAOC in Puerto Rico). We need to show off our special publications and journal and plug our meetings. We need to formalize our participation at such meetings. This is an area where many of us involved to various degree with AOS can help.

Leadership and Board Operations
How can the WFO board communicate better, and function more efficiently and effectively? Let me just go on record as saying that I hate teleconferences. I know they’re necessary to get business done, but I think we need to reduce the breadth of topics covered and have clearer action items (e.g., required votes, proposals that are solidified and shared prior to the meeting, assignments of tasks, etc.). Ironic I should say this and then not attend the much better alternative (a retreat), but I really don’t enjoy the long teleconferences.

How can the board do a better job of on-boarding new board members? How can we give all board members a better sense of WFO history, mission, objectives, and how we operate as an organization?

- Provide new board members with a packet of documents including bylaws, history, list of committees, bios, conference duties and tasks, budget, etc.
- Assign a mentor to every new board member

An important topic, but I also think that in our bumbling along we have done a great job at this. We’ve had some top-notch board members join us in the past several years. Many or most of them have become key components of the organization. Others have done great work for several years and then gone on to other things. Both cohorts are important and welcomed.
How do we encourage board members to consider becoming an officer?
How can we seek new board members who might serve as officers in the future? Do we need a nominating committee for officers? One can never know for sure who will be future officer material, and I’d be pretty leery of someone who came on board and immediately declared they want to be president someday. But the best path is to bring on good people and put them in a position to feel like an important contributor to the organization and become passionate about our mission and how to accomplish it.

Fundraising, Annual Giving, & Legacy Fund (Chris Dean, Suzanne and Chris Swarth)
Current financial situation, with projections for the future (Suzanne and Kurt)
Planning for long term financial stability and growth (Chris Dean)
Critically important, and something I am terrible at. Thank you Chris!

Publications Committee Issues (Phil and Kurt)
How do we prepare for the eventual retirement of Western Birds editor Phil Unitt and how do we search for and select a new editor? Phil needs to inform the board about his duties, challenges, and ideas for the future. The over-arching topic on WFO’s “to-do” list over the next year or two (or, I hope, a few years from now). I am willing to help with a search committee, with developing parameters, etc. But Phil is the person whose thoughts and opinions are key here, and he will be the best single judge of the qualifications and likelihood of success of any candidate. We need to seriously consider adding a managing editor position to the overall editor unless we are fortunate enough to find somebody (again) who can fill both roles effectively.

How can all WFO board members and others help WB attract more manuscripts? What sorts of papers do we want to see published? Is the current mix of papers balanced in terms of achieving the goals of WFO and the journal? There is no end to important topics relating to status and distribution, field identification, population trends, invasive bird species, field identification, significant short-term phenomena, etc. The challenge is getting the people who can obtain and analyze this kind of information to actually sit down and write it up. I really want to see a presentation (not a workshop, but a session presentation for all attendees) at the next and other future WFO meetings about the mechanics of writing things up for publication, and how the Western Birds publication process works. We’ve already tasked Phil with leading such an effort, so I hope he is able to do this. Our challenges will only increase as up and coming generations lose the ability to write in a clear, thoughtful and organized way and we continue to circle down the twitter drain.

New ideas for future WFO Special Publications.
This is an important topic for the Publications Committee (and board as a whole) and we will work on developing criteria for soliciting or vetting proposals for special publications. Consider the continuum from (1) a first rate masterfully written exposition of field ornithology completely aligned with our mission and region of interest but with zero funding, to (2) a much more marginal contribution that comes completely paid for. We all agree this isn’t “pay to play” and any submission has to go through the review process and be accepted, but we are challenged with coming up with ways to pay for publication of important works without breaking the publications fund. We also need to think about broadly general vs. more parochial submissions – how “local” can a monograph be and still have wide appeal?

12:00 - 1:30. Planning for the WFO 50th Anniversary. Let’s have a party.
5 September 2019  
To: WFO board retreat, Palm Desert, CA, 12-13 September 2019  
From: Ken Able

Dear colleagues:
I regret that I cannot be with you this coming weekend. Our son is returning home from five months in southern Africa just as you will be arriving in Palm Desert. So I have family obligations this weekend that require me to be at home.

I would offer just a couple of comments on items that appear on your agenda.

1) Planning for long term financial stability and growth

At the last event of this sort, held in conjunction with the Petaluma Conference, I attempted to make a case for the importance of establishing an endowment to provide a long-term financial foundation for WFO. The idea did not gain traction at that time. It is my hope that we will begin to make firm plans in that direction now. I have no expertise with respect to the detailed workings of establishing or maintaining an endowment. However, in my own involvement with various membership organizations over the decades, I have witnessed first-hand just how critical a well-managed endowment can be, not only to the continuing health of the society, but to its continuing existence.

WFO, as do many (perhaps most) such organizations these days, faces basically flat membership numbers and ever-increasing costs. Increasing dues cannot keep pace with expenses. We have managed well in filling the gap by various fund-raising opportunities (conferences, trips, etc.), but this is likely to become ever more difficult. In the near future, our costs for publishing *Western Birds* are likely to increase substantially, and expanding existing activities or initiating new ones is likely to become more difficult or impossible. At the grand age of 50, it seems to me high time to launch this long-term project. (Peripherally related, it does not seem wise to me to have so much of our reserve money sitting in CDs that earn very little. Perhaps some of these funds could play a role in starting an endowment.)

2) How can the WFO board function .... more efficiently and effectively?

I have long felt that our board too frequently tends to act as a committee of the whole, spending time inefficiently on issues and details better hashed out by committee. To my mind, the board should deal with issues of policy and significant financial matters, not the nitty-gritty of implementation. Long excursions “into the weeds” waste time that would be better used to discuss more important matters. We have good working committees. Let them hash out details such as how many students we sponsor at a meeting, the price of a book, the menu for the conference banquet, etc.

My two cents and my best wishes for a very enjoyable and productive retreat, Ken.