

Members of the 2007 Partners in Flight World Series of Team “The Redstarts”

John Sterling (Team leader)



From a very young age, John Sterling exhibited a curiosity about natural history, but it was the sighting at fifth grade science camp of a Pileated Woodpecker in Napa County, California that set John on his life path to becoming one of the state’s top field biologists. Now having been an enthusiastic birder for over 36 years and an ornithologist and wildlife biologist for the past 26 years, John’s life passion for birds and their conservation has taken him to every corner of California, around the United States, and abroad.

John’s field skills are the result of decades of disciplined birding and study, dozens of “big day” bird-a-thons, and professional training and experience as a biologist. He holds numerous “big day” records, including, along with team member Todd Easterla, the national record for the number of birds seen in a single county. He also was the founder and captain of the Smithsonian Bushnell World Series of Birding Team from 1994-99.

As a biologist and birder, John has an extensive knowledge of the status, distribution and ecology of birds in California. As the leader of the California county birding movement, he has maintained detailed county lists his whole birding life and has mentored generations of birders to use the fun and challenging experience of county birding to build the collective knowledge of the local status and distribution of bird species throughout the state. He maintains a website devoted to organizing such information by county, an effort that has resulted in an exponential increase in awareness of county-level bird distribution. John recently achieved a major life goal when he became the second person to have ever seen 200 or more bird species in each of California’s 58 counties.

John’s professional experience spans both conservation research and environmental consulting. He has conducted focused surveys for many special-status bird species, as well as general surveys for birds, reptiles, amphibians, dragonflies and damselflies, and mammals. His ornithological research has taken him to Canada, Russia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Peru, and he has pursued personal study tours in southern China, Thailand, and Kenya. For eight years John was a staff Avian Ecologist at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, where he conducted

research on the habitat selection and foraging behavior of birds in boreal forest and tropical ecosystems. He also worked for two research groups of the U.S. Forest Service, as well as for Arizona State and Oregon State universities. Now in the consulting field, he puts his expertise to work assessing biological conditions, evaluating impacts, developing mitigation and conservation plans, and creating monitoring plans. He is currently employed by H. T. Harvey & Associates (www.harveyecology.com), an environmental consulting firm in northern California that is providing generous sponsorship to the PIF Team.

John is involved in many volunteer, conservation-focused activities. He is the President of the Central Valley Bird Club, a board member of the Sacramento River Watershed Program and the Cache Creek Conservancy, a sub-regional editor for *Alpine*, *Calaveras* and *Modoc* counties for *North American Birds* and *EBird*, and a member of California Partners in Flight and the California Steering Committee of the Intermountain Joint Venture. For the California Department of Fish and Game's Bird Species of Special Concern project, John was the co-editor of range maps and author of three species accounts, and he serves on the project's Technical Advisory Committee. From 2003-5, he served on the California Bird Records Committee. John has also contributed to several California Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plans as well as to the Intermountain West Joint Venture conservation planning process.

Carlos Bethancourt



Carlos Bethancourt is a professional bird guide at The Canopy Tower in Panama. He was born in Panama City, Panama in 1978 and grew up in the little village of Huile, bordering the forest of the old Canal Zone. His fascination with the natural world comes from his childhood visits to his grandmother's home, deep in the neighboring forest. He recalls seeing lots of birds and mammals around her house. "I loved watching trogons, motmots, and night monkeys, but did not know their names," says Carlos. "Now I even know their calls, their English, Spanish, and Latin names, and also their behavior." After finishing high school in Panama, he won a scholarship from the USAID and Georgetown University to study natural resources at Mt. Hood Community College in Gresham, Oregon. It was there that he began birding in an organized fashion, and where he received his first formal training in ornithology. Upon his return to Panama in October of 2000, he immediately started working in the Canopy Tower where he further refined his birding skills, and birded with some

of the best known professional birding guides in the world. In 2002, Carlos attended the American Birding Association Convention in Duluth, Minnesota. While participating in one of the field trips, he was able to identify a raptor flying very high in the sky. He was immediately nicknamed "Hawk Eyes" by the other birders.

Denis Lepage



Denis Lepage is a Canadian currently working for Bird Studies Canada (BSC, formerly Long Point Bird Observatory), in Southern Ontario. He completed his PhD in biology in 1997 at Laval University, Québec. His thesis was focused on reproductive strategies, a topic that brought him to study Snow Goose for several summers on Bylot Island, in the Canadian High Arctic.

From 1998 to 2000, he spent 2 years as a postdoctoral associate at the Fitzpatrick Institute, in Cape Town, South Africa, where he worked on understanding life-history evolution and cooperative breeding in birds.

For the last 7 years, Denis has been working as a senior scientist with BSC's National Data Center. In his capacity, he has been primarily involved in using and developing new information technologies and applying science for the purpose of bird conservation. Some of his main projects include the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas and the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas.

In his spare time, he manages a few very popular websites on birds, including Avibase (www.bsc-eoc.org/avibase) and Bird Links to the World (www.bsc-eoc.org/links), which attract several thousands of visitors each day from all around the world. Denis is also an enthusiastic world traveler who has looked for birds and enjoyed the diversity of nature in 24 different countries so far, including his most recent trip to Argentina last fall.

Todd Easterla



Todd Easterla has been an avid birder since childhood. It was in his home state of Missouri that he honed his keen observation skills and inherited a lifelong passion for bird identification from his father, Dr. David Easterla, coauthor of the “Birds of Missouri”.

Todd brings to the PIF team extensive “big day” experience, having for more than two decades participated in bird-a-thons and Audubon Christmas Bird Counts throughout the United States. From 1985-89, Todd was the top record holder for big day counts in his home state of Missouri, and he currently holds records in numerous California counties. Along with team captain John Sterling, Todd is a member of the California team that holds the national American Birding Association (ABA) record for the most species seen in a 24-hour period in one county (217). He also brings experience in the World Series of Birding competition, having from 1995-99 been a major asset to the Smithsonian Bushnell WSB Team, which placed well in the competition.

Todd’s background includes ornithological, conservation-focused field research. In the early 1980s, he conducted bird censuses and surveys at Dobbins Woodland in northern Missouri for the Missouri Chapter of Nature Conservancy and at the Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge for Northwest Missouri State University. In 1987, he received an undergraduate research assistantship in field biology at Austin Peay State University, Tennessee. There, he conducted research in the Tennessee canebrakes on the locally rare Swainson’s Warbler. In 1995, Todd worked for the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center studying the foraging behavior of boreal forest birds in the Kostroma region of western Russia. He has published data in such publications as *Western Birds*, *American Birds*, and *Birds of Land and Between the Lakes* (Tennessee).

Todd is also an experienced tour leader, with over 17 years of experience leading general birding tours for both experienced and novice birders, as well as pelagic trips off of the coast of California. He is a member of the National Audubon Society, the Missouri Audubon Society, Sacramento Audubon Society, the American Birding Association, and the Western Field Ornithologists.