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Melodie Roschman

Andrews University, roschman@andrews.edu

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Creation-inspired Research

BY MELODIE ROSCHMAN

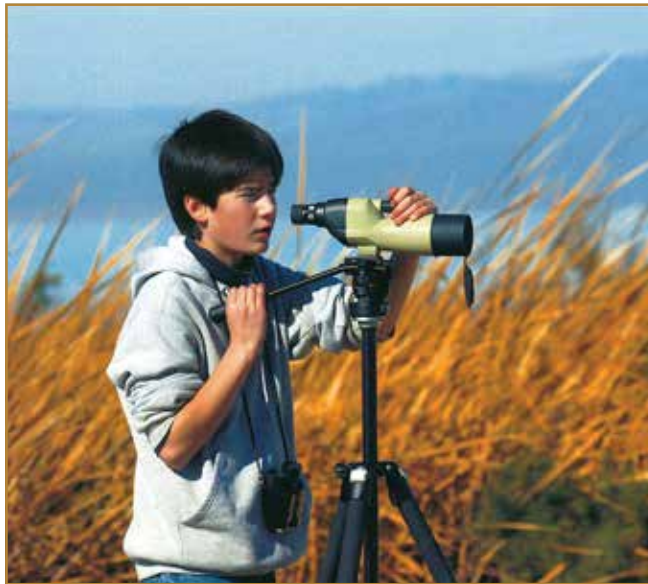
For Andre Moncrieff, birds are more than a hobby. In fact, they're something of a calling. Andre has been fascinated by birds since he was ten years old. His father, Scott Moncrieff, professor of English at Andrews University, recalls how he and his wife Lilia gave Andre Ken Kaufman's "Birds of North America" for Christmas.

"Andre quickly surpassed any mild birding knowledge I had," Scott says. "Andre was significantly aided by a vibrant Berrien County bird community, both hobbyists and professionals, and any family vacation became an opportunity for birding."

When Andre enrolled at Andrews University in 2009, studying biology and music, he realized that birds were something he wanted to devote his life to. He spent four summers working on Protection Island National Wildlife Refuge in Sequim, Washington, studying seabirds.

"There's no question," Andre says, "that working as a member of the Andrews University Seabird Ecology Team paved the way for my career in biology."

Jim Hayward and Shandelle Henson, co-leaders of the team and professors of biology and mathematics respectively, were instrumental to his development as a scholar as well. Jim recalls Andre's excellent, insightful fieldwork and his significant scholarly contributions; as a junior, Andre was senior author on a publication in a peer-reviewed journal.



Andre Moncrieff has been fascinated by birds since he was ten years old.

Scott Moncrieff

"Andre is not only an excellent young scientist," says Jim, "he also possesses an outstanding character and personality. He is among the most trustworthy, competent and pleasant students with whom I have worked in the past 36 years."

Andre graduated from Andrews in December 2014 with a bachelor's degree in music and another in biology, and days later decided to begin a Ph.D. at Louisiana State University that spring. "I had planned to

start somewhere in the fall," he reflects, "so this spontaneous decision made for an exciting Christmas break!"

Now Andre is pursuing research, specifically in Neotropical birds, "which is a logical choice," he explains, "due to the staggering diversity of birds in this biographic region." In the first semester of his program, he has taken classes and been a teacher's assistant for Introduction to Biology.

"The main thrust of my program is the interaction and collaboration I have with the seven other grad students in the Brumfield Lab," he says. "We're all obsessed with Neotropical birds, and I have learned a bunch from my lab mates."



Andre Moncrieff has turned a lifelong passion for birds into the opportunity for a career studying this unique part of God's creation.

Andre is a recipient of the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, a prestigious award of more than \$45,000, given to 2,000 students each year. The fellowship gives him three years of full funding, allowing him to focus his full attention on research. "It's a nice change to get paid rather than pay to go to school!" he laughs.

This past summer Andre took his research farther afield — to Peru. At the time of this interview, he is working to get research permits in the Peruvian capital of Lima, shortly before he and three other Louisiana State students and several local collaborators enter the wild to conduct in-depth field studies. The expedition will take them to the Department (similar to a state) of Ucayall for most of July and August. After meeting with tribal federations and gaining all legal grounds, they will plunge into the bush, "studying poorly-known birds in really remote areas." They are focusing on genetic diversity, attempting to discover whether birds in the grassland areas they are exploring are genetically different than the same species on the nearest grasslands hundreds of miles away.

"There will be lots of camping, hiking and bushwhacking," explains Andre. "The last couple of weeks we'll be focusing on studying birds that only live on small river islands."

Andre hopes that this summer project marks the beginning of a long and bright career studying some of God's most amazing creatures.

"Ultimately," he says, "I'd like to teach at a university or work as a bird curator at an active research museum."

Melodie Roschman is a graduate student writer for the Division of Integrated Marketing & Communication at Andrews University.

Andre hopes that this summer project marks the beginning of a long and bright career studying some of God's most amazing creatures.