AWARDS

2020 Brina C. Kessel Award to Corey Tarwater, Ryan Germain, and Peter Arcese

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Every 2 years, the American Ornithological Society bestows the Brina C. Kessel Award for a paper published during the preceding 2 yr in The Auk: Ornithological Advances that has made an exceptional contribution to ornithology. The Kessel Award for 2020 is presented to Corey Tarwater, Ryan Germain, and Peter Arcese for their paper, “Examination of context-dependent effects of natal traits on lifetime reproductive success using a long-term study of a temperate songbird,” published in 2018.

The Mandarte Island population of Song Sparrows (Melospiza melodia), first studied by Frank Tompa and later by Jamie N. M. Smith and then Peter Arcese, has made countless contributions to ornithology, ecology, behavior, and evolutionary biology. It represents one of the finest, if not the finest, long-term study of a single population of birds in North America. The present contribution by Tarwater et al., based on nearly 4 decades of information on individual probability of surviving to breed and lifetime reproductive success of a fully marked population, showed that survival and lifetime reproductive success were heavily affected by a suite of natal
characters, but that maternal age and inbreeding coefficient affected both traits. Population density, which can vary tremendously from year to year at this site, interacted with inbreeding such that negative effects of inbreeding were more apparent in years of low population density. Low individual lifetime reproductive success was associated with being relatively inbred, raised by a young mother, hatching late in the season, and low body condition just prior to fledging. Fundamental and possibly most important was the conclusion that natal traits had life-long influences on fitness, and that with the exception of effects of inbreeding, the effects of other natal traits were insensitive to variation in population density.


Given in even-numbered years and consisting of a cash prize of $1,000, the Kessel Award is given in honor of Brina Kessel, former President of the AOU (1992–1994) and beloved leader and mentor in ornithology.