

# 2017 Early Career Researcher Award

## *Stefanie LaZerte*

2017 is the inaugural year for the SCO-SOC's Early Career Researcher Award. The award honours fledgling ornithologists - in academia, industry, non-government or government agencies – who show strong potential for future leadership in Canadian ornithology. I am pleased to announce that this year's award was presented to Stefanie LaZerte.

Steffi LaZerte is an independent consulting biologist and R programmer, currently living in Brandon, Manitoba. Steffi received a B.Sc. specializing in animal behaviour from the University of Toronto (2007), an M.Sc. in behavioural ecology from McGill University (2010) and an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in natural resources and environmental studies from the University of Northern British Columbia (2015). She won the 2012 Baillie Award from the SCO-SOC for her student research, as well as the top Student Presentation Award, at the SCO-SOC's 2013 meeting in Winnipeg. She was also invited to present at a symposium on urbanization at the North American Ornithological Congress in 2016, received top marks among her cohort for her Qualifying Exam and a Graduation with Distinction (top 5%) from the graduate program for her PhD. Her research interests focus on how humans influence the behaviour of animals, particularly through urbanization. Steffi's PhD work addressed the effects of urbanization and noise on chickadee communication and her post-doctorates have focused on the development of an R package for tracking animal movements between RFID (radio frequency ID) loggers in urban environments. Steffi is also interested in the use of citizen science and R programming as tools to increase the quantity and quality of data in the field of behavioural ecology. As a way to encourage use of these tools, she teaches R to help researchers unfamiliar with large datasets become more comfortable with data management. Steffi is currently located in Fredericton, New Brunswick, soon to be relocating to Brandon, Manitoba. When not at her computer compiling code, she enjoys hiking, gardening, and spinning wool into yarn.



Steffi has numerous collaborators, as shown in the large numbers of letters written in support of her. I believe those letters speak for themselves. One letter writer stated that “Stefanie is an exceptional researcher, with a rare gift of being able to extend her scientific knowledge into innovative tools for academic, management and citizen scientist projects. Her skills in these areas are not going unnoticed, and she has been sought by enough groups to contribute to helping manage/analyze data sets that she has begun thinking about branching this into part of an independent career in consulting.” Another writer stated that “She has an incredible knowledge base, with a demonstrated ability to apply that knowledge to problems in biology.” And yet another stated that “She has developed her own viewpoints and lines of research, which are driven by curiosity and innovative conceptual perspectives. I am sure her enthusiasm, general academic skills and communicative character will fit the honor of the prestigious award of the Society.” All letter-writers noted how generous Steffi was with her time, especially towards younger colleagues, such as Honours students.

Clearly, Stefanie embodies the spirit of the SCO-SOC and we are very privileged to have such strong ornithologists upcoming within the ornithological community in Canada.

On behalf of the award committee, I would like to congratulate Stefanie on her achievements and encourage others to consider nominating other deserving individuals for next year's award.

*Kyle Elliot*  
*Chair, Early Career Research Award Committee*