

Partners in Research Science Ambassador Award 2016

Acceptance May 3, 2016 Ottawa

I am grateful to the Partners in Research organization for this recognition and opportunity.

At the onset I must acknowledge the brilliant young student presenters in the Bio-Genius competition from whom we heard from last evening and who are here with their posters today.

My lab at Memorial University of Newfoundland is driven by students and if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here today. We study seabirds. We study seabirds as messengers of ocean health. Fifteen species of seabirds breed in eastern Canada. To maximize information efficiency, we focus on these three.



The Northern Gannet at top is the largest species that breeds in the North Atlantic; the bird under water below is the Murre – an intermediate-sized deep-diver, and on the right is the smallest nesting seabird - the Leach's Storm-Petrel about the size of a robin.

These three species capture the full range of seabird body sizes, population sizes that are inversely related to body sizes and the entire scope of feeding interactions from large pelagic fishes through forage fishes to plankton in the eastern Canadian Ocean. These factors are essential in considerations of energetics, prey consumption and conservation, and we use them to diagnose animal responses to environmental change.

The miniaturization and enhanced capability of bird-borne tracking devices has allowed us and other scientists to track seabird movements throughout the world's oceans throughout the year - identifying hotspots of bio-diversity and areas of risk. Some of

that risk is driven by hi tech in the form of offshore oil production and the brilliant artificial night-lighting of a formerly opaque ocean environment.

Partnerships like some of those promoted here with industry and with government can help address these problems. We need this effort. Yet beyond these partnerships, we need the societal responsibilities of universities for independent basic research to ensure transparent information - free of conflict of interest.

The strongest most powerful partnerships in our society involve trust and autonomy. Trust that we are working for the greater good of our entire society. Autonomy from both government and industry to support unencumbered research and information flow and transparency.

Universities have to avoid risks that lead to their incorporation either as government extensions or industry labs. Universities must be guardians and generators of the scientific information needed by government for evidence-based decision-making and needed by all of us in a democratic society.

With so many young students being honored here today, I want close with something about the future. It is often said that we look to you to safeguard our future environment. This is true. But as well, you must look to us, to your parents, to your grandparents and great grandparents and to assume responsibility to act for those who came before. Their future is not later – it's right now. We cannot rely on you to do it better next time - you have to do it best this time. I trust you can. Congratulations and good luck.

Importantly, I must thank my nominators Dr. Aimee Supervant, Dean of Graduate Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland; Dr. Axel Meisen, Past-President Memorial University of Newfoundland; and Dr. Nancy Turner, an ethno-botanist and Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada at the University of Victoria. I thank Janet for supporting decades of chaotic research demands and for the efforts and dimensions involved with a raising a wonderful crop of millennials. Lastly I thank my parents Lorraine and Aldo who are no longer living, but with who's future I am entrusted.

Thank you

Bill Montevicchi