



COMPILED EVALUATIONS

**FEBRUARY 26–28, 2004
ROHNERT PARK, CALIFORNIA**

The following represents a compilation of the ratings and comments from attendees of the recent annual conference. Out of approximately 490 attendees, only 25 evaluation forms were submitted (5.1%). We sincerely

thank those of you who took the time to write evaluations and comments. Responses to specific comments are included in this compilation.

Summary:

1. To what extent were your personal/professional objectives satisfied? (5=highest; 1=lowest) N=24. **AVERAGE: 3.54**
2. To what extent did the environment contribute to the learning experience? (5=highest; 1=lowest) N=23. **AVERAGE: 3.56**
3. To what extent did the written materials contribute to the learning experience? (5=highest; 1=lowest) N=24. **AVERAGE 3.0**
4. To what extent did the symposium contain significant and current intellectual or practical information? (5=highest; 1=lowest) N=23. **AVERAGE: 4.17**
5. How would you rate the guest room prices at the hotel? (5 = Too High, 1 = Too Low) N=15. **AVERAGE: 3.60**
6. How would you rate the registration fees for the 2004 Annual Conference? (5 = Too High, 1= Too Low) N=21. **AVERAGE: 3.38**

Details:

To what extent were your personal/professional objectives satisfied? (5=highest; 1=lowest) N=24.
5=5 (20.8%), 4=14 (58.3%), 3=4 (16.6%), 2=1 (4.2%), 1=0 (0%) **AVERAGE: 3.54**

Comments:

--Although the world has changed, it would be enlightening to all the young people to have some papers on game species, as ducks, deer, etc. are still wildlife.

--Very disappointed at the lack of job fair

--VERY NICE CONFERENCE. [I] would have liked the management talks to have been placed earlier (I had to leave on Friday).

--Field trips should have been offered on Saturday. I could not justify staying an additional day just for the field trip. Just like the National Meeting, there are always people who are willing to miss a few papers for a field trip.

--Need a way to encourage/persuade more interactions between attendees. Not sure how, but it's difficult to meet new people as a newcomer in the field.

--This was difficult to obtain because the avian talks were all at the same time. I have no problem learning from other systems but in addition to those I would have benefited more if the avian talks had not been concurrent.

--There are always a lot of people at these section conferences whom I'm interested in talking to (especially when they're in Northern California).

--The location of the exhibit area was not in a prominent location resulting in very poor traffic.

--It did seem as though there were fewer sessions offered this year.

--Some talks were repeated from last years' meeting.

--Informative presentations, excellent range of topics

--I came primarily as a presenter. Some titles/abstracts didn't give a good indication of what the talk was about.

--The concurrent sessions were too mono-species focused. Fishers and amphibians dominated the talks. [There was] very little if any [information] on habitats or real conservation techniques.

--Ecology of Amphibians and Reptiles was excellent! I hope to see those sessions carried over into future conferences.

--Please try to mix the topics a bit more – all sessions on Saturday were about birds. This made it difficult to attend all the sessions for those interested most in birds, and probably disappointed some who aren't interested in birds. Having some of the bird sessions on other days would have helped.

Responses:

- We definitely agree that having three bird sessions occurring simultaneously was a problem, and we apologize for that. A combination of factors, including:
 - the relatively late cancellation of the Partners In Flight session,
 - the chair of one session specifically asking to be scheduled on Saturday,
 - a desire to not conflict any of these sessions with the Grinnell Legacy,
 - at least one speaker who was scheduled to speak in two different sessions,
 - a potential conflict with a Point Reyes Bird Observatory event, and
 - the Seabirds/Shorebirds session growing larger than we initially expectedwere all factors in the decision. We will attempt to “spread out the birds” more at future meetings. Similarly, we can't promise that such conflicts won't happen again, but we'll try to prevent a repeat.
- Focus on certain species (i.e., martens): This is almost entirely dependent on the session chairs. In some cases, they may “cast the net” for papers too near their “boat.” The simple response is to get the word out when our Call for Papers is released, and if we can encourage more submissions, we can almost certainly broaden the subject matter.
- It is true, there were few papers on game species this year, but that was not necessarily by intent. Note comment later in this document saying “every other conference [seems to be] dominated by deer, ducks, etc.”
- Exhibit Area: Obviously, looking at the layout of the hotel, there were no extra rooms. The poster session and exhibitors were put in the Chardonnay Room because the Thursday evening reception was right next door. We purposely put a bar in the exhibitor room to get traffic in there during the poster session and before the reception. See more detailed response on the rooms assigned for sessions below.

**To what extent did the environment contribute to the learning experience? (5=highest; 1=lowest)
N=23. 5=5 (21.7%), 4=9 (39.1%), 3=3 (13%), 2=6 (26.1%), 1=0 (0%) AVERAGE: 3.56**

Comments:

--At the banquet, [you] should have taken the time to introduce all the past presidents, etc. who took the time and expense to come to the meeting!!

--Many of the presentations were well attended and had an excess of people per seating space. Some talks has as many as 25-30 standing.

--Rooms were often too small & crowded. Just because 100 chairs can be fit into a room does not mean people can move in & out of that room. Room size did not facilitate movement between sessions.

--ROOMS WERE TOO SMALL! Overcrowded with not enough seats, food was delivered by hotel at inappropriate times (i.e. morning food should have been available before conference started, at 7:30 a.m.).

--Some of the rooms seemed too small for the number of people in attendance. In two of the sessions, this was very distracting.

--Small rooms with limited temperature control.

--Thanks for having coffee throughout the whole day. MUCH appreciated!!

--The hotel was pretty sterile and had a strange antiseptic smell.

--Banquet food was excellent. Wow! No rubber chicken!

--Rooms were much too small. Opening doors were disruptive.

--Did not really add or detract.

--Rooms were too crowded, many people standing in the back.

--Facilities were excellent.

--More chairs – it is much easier to learn when everyone can see the speaker, slides and sit in a chair.
 --Fairly well. The last-minute room changes were a bit confusing, but were able to be figured out.
 --In spite of larger attendance due to conference registrations, the hotel staff seemed to adapt the rooms quickly and smoothly. Rooms were close together, permitting relatively easy movement between talks. I do think more attention would have been paid to the posters if they and the vendors were located nearer to the meeting rooms. Several people remarked over the course of the conference that they did not find the exhibits until midway through day 2. Please continue to exhibit posters throughout the conference, it provides a better opportunity for thorough reading.
 --Very comfortable location. Nice, yet cozy.

Responses:

- ❑ Room sizes / number of chairs: Clearly, this is one of the biggest problems we experienced this year. With the tight schedule, the time available to “turn around” rooms from (for example) the past officer’s lunch to the banquet and then to the Saturday morning sessions was clearly a challenge. Rooms were assigned for various sessions several weeks in advance, the approximately 75 walk-in registrations did somewhat stretch our planning efforts. Though of course we welcome more members to attend, advance pre-registration makes problems like this much less significant. We attempted to estimate how many members would stay for all sessions on Saturday, how many would sleep in, etc., but it’s nearly impossible to get everything right.
- ❑ Standing room: Though we realize that rooms were crowded, on several occasions, there were seats available in the front of the room while people stood in the back (for example, the Zoonoses program chair repeatedly invited members to move forward to the nearly empty front rows). Additionally, people will often sit on the aisle and others are unwilling to ask to get to empty middle seats. On a few occasions, we ensured that there would be additional access from the sides of the room, and in many, many cases, we obtained extra chairs from the hotel staff to increase room capacity. Again, we strongly encourage pre-registration to alleviate some of these problems. One verbal comment received, which we may be able to integrate into future conferences, is a non-binding indication of which sessions a member is planning to attend when they pre-register.
- ❑ Room changes: At least in a few cases, these decisions were made to try and alleviate some of the problems discussed above. For example, the Seabirds/Shorebirds session was moved to a larger room on short notice. Fortunately, it didn’t seem to confuse too many participants.
- ❑ “Late food”: The fact that there was food available in the early morning was just a bonus. The Section does not plan to (or advertise that we will) provide breakfast, just snacks at the break.
- ❑ Not introducing the past presidents at the banquet: The comment mentioned that the past presidents paid their own expenses to be able to attend. While some did (and are probably those who always attend our conferences), we offered help with expenses to all past officers if they wanted to attend only the Friday events. The Section picked up the tab for those who requested that we pay for their rooms on Friday night, mainly, the more senior folks; however, we also paid the room expense for several past officers to enable them to attend. All past officers and charter members (that we could find) received the same letter with the same offer. We did not extend the offer to "current" board members as they would be there anyway and we pay travel expenses for them. In addition, none of those past officers/charter members attending only the Friday events was expected to "register" for the conference, although a few of them did give us a "contribution" in the amount of the retired reg. fee (\$90). We apologize if any past presidents felt slighted by not being specifically introduced at the banquet; however, that was one of the purposes of the past officers’ lunch and the bright red ribbons on their nametags. We value beyond measure the contributions of those who have served as officers of TWS-WS.

To what extent did the written materials contribute to the learning experience? (5=highest; 1=lowest)
 N=24. 5=3 (12.5%), 4=7 (29.2%), 3=8 (33.3%), 2=5 (20.8%), 1=1 (4.2%) **AVERAGE 3.0**

Comments:

--Would like to have had abstracts for ALL presenters.
 -- Nice design on the program. I like the matrix showing sessions, times and what room they were in.
 --Abstracts were helpful in determining which sessions to attend, but some abstracts were missing.
 --The program and abstracts were good, but speakers didn’t have any handouts.
 --Not enough posters.

--The program was well organized and clear.
--I would have liked more room in the margins next to the abstracts for taking notes.
--I was disappointed that not all of the abstracts that were submitted were actually in the program. Alvarez & Shea and Shea & Alvarez were submitted, but not printed. I suspect others also were submitted but not printed.
--Could provide more literature.
--I didn't see any written materials.

Responses:

- It's always difficult to obtain abstracts from every presenter. About six abstracts arrived after our (extended) due date, some even arrived after the errata sheet was prepared. Some abstracts were never received. We must print the program several weeks in advance.
- Handouts from each individual speaker would be very difficult, and likely very expensive, as we wouldn't be able to easily predict how many copies would be needed. If you have interest in a few particular presentations, we would encourage you to contact the author(s) directly, as some will be willing to provide graphics and additional information (though they have no obligation to do so).
- Posters: We're always willing to have more poster submissions!
- Margins: The price of printing the program is determined by the page count. Having wider margins or extra pages will add to that cost, so we recommend that attendees bring some notepads or paper to take notes.
- Alvarez & Shea and Shea & Alvarez: One of these abstracts was printed, and, as of press time, we understood that the other presentation had been cancelled. We apologize for the omission.

To what extent did the symposium contain significant and current intellectual or practical information? (5=highest; 1=lowest) N=23. 5=8 (34.8%), 4=11 (47.8%), 3=4 (17.4%), 2=0 (0%), 1=0 (0%)
AVERAGE: 4.17

Comments:

--I was unable to stay for many of the talks of interest to me – BUT carnivores and bat sessions were very good.
--This one's hard because it relies on abstract submittal. Some talks were great, others a waste of time – Typical at many meetings.
--I thought the Grinnell session was a nice change of pace.
--I really like the zoonotic disease session, I learned the most there.
--Mostly good
--Some presenters had "scientific" results without adequate sample size – can be misleading.
--A great education for this group would be a talk or a plenary session reporting the environmental issues & cuts by the Bush Administration.
--The talks were fairly high quality this year.

Responses:

Comments noted. We will forward the specific complements on each session to the respective chairs of those sessions. The suggestion of a session on a (mostly) political issue will be forwarded to the program committee, but don't hold your breath!

How would you rate the guest room prices at the hotel? (5 = Too High, 1 = Too Low) N=15. 5=3 (20%), 4=5 (33.3%), 3=5 (33.3%), 2=2 (13.3%), 1=0 (0%)
AVERAGE: 3.60

Comments:

--I was unable to get a room at the special rate
--Room rates were reasonable
--The hotel was very nice – good choice! There were also a lot of choices for places to eat nearby which was great.
--For a student, very high. Only reimbursed up to \$90 out of state.
--Government only provides \$89 for this area.
--Very nice facility! Especially appreciated that they weren't stingy/cheap on break refreshments and timing (they put coffee and snacks out early and left them).

--I stayed at Motel 6 to save money.
--High quality for a reasonable price. Hotel was located near many eateries.
--Could offer a discount room rate for the night prior to talks.
--Stayed off-site
--This was a really nice place to have the conference. I liked the fact that the rooms were close together – the conference was very localized. Also the hotel was comfortable (not too ritzy). The location was close to sources for casual food. Good choice!

Responses:

- ❑ Room rates: It appears most participants were satisfied with the room rates, and that others were able to find even more economical lodging nearby. We're also aware that, under certain conditions, federal participants can request "Actual lodging costs not to exceed 150% of per diem." Obviously, this isn't a solution for everyone. Additionally, participants can/should consider sharing rooms. Finally, we'd like to make students aware of possible travel grants from either the Western Section or their individual chapter.
- ❑ Those who could not get the special hotel rate probably did not register until after the hotel's deadline. The hotel did its best to accommodate our group and extended the special rate to those who requested it. Again, early registration and paying attention to the deadlines advertised on the website would avoid being charged a higher rate.
- ❑ Re the nights before the conference: we did, and we always do, provide a block of rooms for Wednesday night. In addition, this year, we had a block of rooms available even earlier in the week to accommodate those who attended the Biometrics Workshop.

How would you rate the registration fees for the 2004 Annual Conference? (5 = Too High, 1= Too Low) N=21. 5=1 (4.8%), 4=7 (33.3%), 3=12 (57.1%), 2=1 (4.8%), 1=0 (0%) AVERAGE: 3.38

Comments:

--Normal
--Affordable
--I'm a student, so prices are usually steep.
--Some expenses could be trimmed like commemorative pins and pens, live music at the banquet, snacks at every break.
--Cost is OK
--The conference was very well organized. The food was excellent.

Responses:

- ❑ It appears that most participants were satisfied with the registration cost. We know that it can be tough for students to participate, however the section does allow for registration reimbursement in exchange for volunteer work (simple things like running the lights and PowerPoint). Additionally, student travel grants are available, and most chapters are also willing to consider student travel assistance.
- ❑ The commemoratives were primarily used this time as it was a very special year; long-time participants know that we don't normally provide these kinds of items.
- ❑ Music at the banquet: This was the first time in recent memory that members haven't stayed around to listen to the band and dance until the host hotel had to "shut down" the party. We suppose that the volume and the quality of the music may have been a factor. We probably won't hire this particular band again, although they were less expensive than some past performances (which might have been a clue...).
- ❑ Snacks: If you'll read elsewhere in this report (and previous meeting evaluations), you will note that food at breaks is always a "no win" situation: If we provide none, our members are angry; if we provide too much, they're angry; if food is too late or too early, they're angry. Sure, we'd love to get it "just right" at least once, but it's apparently impossible to please everyone... We had no intent to provide members with breakfast before the sessions began; the break food was delivered early, and many members took advantage of that.

Please rate the following items in terms of providing a good experience for you (5=Good, 3=Mediocre, 1=Bad)

Workshops: n=11, Average: 4.09
Poster Session: n=20, Average: 3.40
Welcome Reception: n=13, Average: 4.23
Plenary Session: n=17, Average: 3.76
Concurrent Sessions: n=22, Average: 4.14
Members' Forum: n=4, Average: 4.25
Banquet: n=13, Average: 4.31
Student/Professional Lunch: n=6, Average: 3.83

Comments from the above-rated elements:

--Lack of women on [Plenary Session] panel.
--Should have had longer question time and shorten the talks.
--Larger room for posters and [Poster Session should be held] concurrently with social.
--Nice program at the banquet. Rick [Williams] did a great job with the slideshow!

Responses:

- ❑ Scheduling of the Plenary: The amount of time available for the plenary, and our desire to have a retrospective “look back at the first 50 years” panel precluded extensive Q&A. We apologize for the tight scheduling; however, we thought it was a great overview.
- ❑ Participation of women on the Plenary panel: We strongly value the role of women in our Section, but to be honest, it's perhaps more difficult when we look at the long history of the organization to show the part women have taken. For the early eras, we were drawing from a small pool with few women represented. Yes, it's certainly true that we could have looked to women for their view of the future of our Section; however, at least two of the (male) speakers acknowledged the role of women in the present day and the future of wildlife management. Please remember that the critical and emerging role of women in wildlife management was the core of our plenary just two years ago (and that was a great plenary!).
- ❑ Poster Session: See responses to question #2. Note: poster session was held just before the reception; however, it is not the intent to “stop” the poster session during the reception. People are certainly encouraged to continue to view the posters and speak with the presenters.
- ❑ Banquet program: We'll let Rick know. We're confident many other meeting participants have complemented him already!
- ❑ Note the small “sample size” for the Members' Forum. We know it's not the most desirable item on the agenda, but it is a crucial time for members to participate in the business of the section. Last year, we had leftover (free) beer in the Members' Forum – we may try that again in the future.

Other miscellaneous comments:

--Work on getting a job fair for next year. I would like to see more from private firms for job seekers.
--Very disappointed at the lack of job fair.
--All bird (non-raptor) sections not held at the same time, please!
--Have bird and mammal workshops concurrently rather than two bird talks at the same time.
--Need to have space for other comments / feedback on the evaluation form.
--Need to inquire about networking. Social events outside the program contribute to the overall experience of the conference.
--Excellent conference – I liked the choice of concurrent sessions, especially the emphasis on bats, herps, Grinnell. Good non-game representation. {It's} ironic there were no ungulate talks, but if there's any grouching, remember that's how the rest of us feel at every other conference dominated by deer, ducks, etc.
--Great to have a social room to hang out, talk, socialize etc. until late at night. This is a big facet of the overall experience: to get to be social and “act loose” with peers and new acquaintances.
--Perhaps organized field trips / extra activities that take in the surrounding area.
--Regarding the topic that came up at the Plenary, I think it is an excellent idea for the society (or the section) to take a stand on issues. However, I think we should not only do this for high profile issues/measures. We need to set a track record so that our opinion will be respected when high-profile issues come around. I recommend having a small “vote” on the website for members on all relevant measures, then making this statement available to the general public.

Responses:

- ❑ We're sorry that the job fair did not occur this year. There was a combination of decreased outside interest from consulting firms, the inability of agencies to budget attendance due to the economy, and an internal TWS-WS problem in that a coordinator was not identified for the job fair until probably too late in 2003. We will try to offer a job fair next year, but these and other factors may preclude it.
- ❑ Session scheduling: See response under question #1.
- ❑ We of course encourage networking and socializing between participants, if you have any particular suggestions, contact the 2005 Host Committee (when they're identified).
- ❑ Field trips: We always consider field trips, but the logistics of field trips when there is such a large group have been problematic in the past. We can't, within reason, accommodate more than 5-10% of all participants, so field trips have been eliminated from the main portion of the annual meeting. We do often offer field trips at many of our smaller workshops.
- ❑ "Taking a stand on issues." This is an important and continuing part of the Section's mission. We'd suggest that the writer of this comment contact the Conservation Affairs Committee.

I would like to suggest the following topics for workshops/conferences:

--Predation control & wildlife species (birds, mammals, herps)

--Effects of invasives on wildlife

--Creating relationships through mentoring young biologists. More experienced folks can help newer biologists to understand the importance of: accuracy in data collection; sharing information; specimen collection; reporting to the CNDDDB; lifelong learning, etc.

--Ethics and environmental consulting

--Growing disparity between private and public, making an already difficult situation nearly unbearable.

--Tracks and scat workshop

--Habitat Assessments

--Habitat improvement recommendations & techniques for wildlife

Responses: These include some excellent ideas, and they have already been forwarded to the Professional Development Committee for consideration. In the next year or so, look for Sensitive Reptiles and Amphibians of the Central Coast, a Mojave Ground Squirrel Workshop, Ecology of Bats, grant writing, more biostatistics, and others. A raptors workshop is in the early planning stages for fall 2005. Other programs, ranging from half-day workshops associated with the 2005 meeting to 3- or 4-day comprehensive workshops are also planned. Members should know that they are always welcome to suggest ideas for workshops and other training to their Professional Development Committee.