



UNIVERSITY
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FOUNDATION

Dr. Leonard Alan Freed

The Leonard Alan Freed Scholarship Endowed Fund

REASON FOR GIFT

Dr. Leonard Freed (best known to his friends and family as Len) loved birds and he loved to teach. He was the world authority on a very special endangered Hawaiian bird, the Hawai'i Akepa. Working with students who came to Hawai'i from around the world, Len taught them how to safely capture, measure, band, bleed, and release these precious birds back into the high-elevation rain forests on Mauna Kea. There are five other unique species of Hawaiian Honeycreepers that still survive in these forests, and he helped to establish and build a remote field station at Hakalua Forest National Wildlife Refuge, where scientists, educators, and students continue to work to preserve this special heritage for the people of Hawai'i.



Len's wife, Becky, is establishing this scholarship in his honor to support UH students pursuing a degree or certificate in any biological field with an interest in utilizing applied research to seek innovative solutions for conservation of Hawai'i's avian fauna.



ABOUT THE HONOREE

Len came to Hawai'i in 1982, after living and conducting bird research for the Smithsonian Institution in Panama. He was born in 1947 in Cleveland Ohio, so he had a lot of explaining to do with his mother and father as to why he decided to go live and study in the middle of a tropical jungle for two years. Len's parents expected he would settle into their comfortable suburban life, join the local synagogue and country club, and raise his family. Instead, it was during Sunday afternoon dominos marathons in Panama that the neighboring small farmers taught him their version of Spanish. The only problem was that his facility with their language horrified the genteel secretarial staff of the Smithsonian back in Panama City. No matter, it also helped him avoid parking tickets when pulled over by the local police. One further legacy of that trip was his file of Spanish idioms, and a special one later figured prominently on his office door at the University of Hawai'i in Mānoa's Department of Zoology (now Biological Sciences). Local kids with a knowledge of Spanish from home

would walk by his door and suddenly burst out laughing. He also developed a taste for Central and South American cuisine, and became an excellent chef preparing special dishes for celebration dinners. We revisited his study sites in Panama after 20 years, met with his original hosts on a remote forested finca, and reunited with his then, Panamanian student assistant, who is now a research fellow himself with the institute. His experiences in Central America catalyzed his lifelong desire to specialize in tropical biology.

While in Hawai'i, Len met his wife Becky through a mutual faculty friend, and after a semester of arguing with each other at an evening class, they began to have occasional meals together that turned into marriage. That was in 1989, and on May 20th they will celebrate their 32nd year together. They collaborated on many scientific papers while both were at the University of Hawai'i, and made notable contributions to understanding the role of avian malaria in limiting the current distribution of native birds to high elevation forests. Len was an early advocate for greater vigilance and surveillance of introduced mosquitoes, highlighting the role that climate change would have in reducing the "safe zones" on Mauna Kea, Mauna Loa, and Haleakalā above 5000 feet elevation. Many people were aware that while our mosquitoes could not transmit a malarial pathogen to humans, they were still the biggest threat, after the loss of forests, to the vulnerable Hawaiian birds who had no immunity to the pathogens they did carry.

Because of Len and Becky's extensive interests in wildlife conservation, they travelled around the world visiting some remote national parks in Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysian Borneo, Bali, New Zealand, the Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. They recently worked on a study of hybridization between different groups of woodpeckers in Sri Lanka as a sabbatical project. There, they lived for a year in an isolated village adjacent to a national park where elephants routinely came out of the forest at night and foraged in peoples' yards. There were no hot water showers that year. They eventually tired of eating highly spiced curry three times a day, having a cook who was convinced hot peppers were the key to a long life. They always had to check their boots for frogs and snakes, and chase after the monkeys who took their shoes, socks, and t-shirts. This was quite a change after Hawai'i, where very few species in the forest are dangerous, and most animals leave your clothes alone when left out to dry. Len was extending their study with two Sri Lankan students when they noticed he was losing his short-term memory, ending this portion of their lives.

Len's daughter Becka and her husband Bill Weber were able to come from Wisconsin a little early this year for a mini-reunion, as was his one surviving sister Carol Pasmore, who flew in from Florida. Tragically, Len has inherited a genetic disorder that robs him of speech and now his mobility. He retains his sense of humor however, and still enjoys watching baseball movies, the Three Stooges, and old Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy videos. While observing Caring Mānoa and Living Mānoa activities from his geri-chair, he listens to the music and moves his hands in rhythm. He was an early convert to American roots music, especially delta blues and Chicago blues, stemming from his time as an undergraduate at Northwestern University near Chicago haunting the blues clubs after hours for old Mississippi delta blues guitarists. How this translated into a love of opera we cannot know, but it did and he always enjoyed season tickets in the center balcony section at the Blaisdell concert hall.

While serving in the US Navy on the USS Buck during the Vietnam War, Len became a pilot. He flew drone helicopters as well between ships, often exchanging movies, coffee, and candy bars between members of his fleet in his role as "morale officer." He has fond memories of playing rounds of golf on courses where the monkeys routinely stole the golf balls, while gibbons howled from the palm trees. He said he learned first as a Boy Scout in Cleveland (later, Order of the Arrow and Eagle Scout), that you never asked a friend, student or a

subordinate to do something you yourself would not do. Len practiced that principle as an officer and led fellow crew members on work trips that would rebuild playgrounds for kids when they were kept in port. That lesson also served him well as a professor, and he gained the admiration of former students and younger professors for passing on this work ethic. In an era when many female students felt the sting of professional discrimination, he made sure to listen and watch carefully to assure himself they were being treated with fairness and was sensitive to the needs of young parents, having been one himself.

Len had another characteristic - he retained a lifelong interest in numbers. Teachers noted this talent at an early age and he eventually earned an advanced degree in statistical analysis, which was important to his work in tropical ecology. It also became the basis of his contribution to health care, where he partnered with his younger sisters Marcy Freed (now deceased) and Carol Pasmore to form the company Vital Stim. Marcy, a speech therapist working in Cleveland and later Seattle, pioneered the use of electrical stimulation to help her patients recover their swallow reflex. When lost as the result of a stroke or other injury to the head, patients often needed to be tube fed and risked aspiration pneumonia. Len performed the statistical analysis of the various trials that led to the FDA approval of this method for restoring the quality of life to many elderly people and their families, burdened with the knowledge that the simple act of offering food could be dangerous for their loved ones. His contributions were important for convincing many therapists, now trained in this technique themselves, that electrical currents could be safely applied to the neck in order to stimulate the throat muscles. This technique, with its special placement of electrodes and carefully engineered stimulation units, is now additionally used with pediatric patients who have even, never before, been able to swallow on their own.

Travel was not always work, and numbers figured again. Len enjoyed taking cooking classes that emphasized balancing quantities of flavor, texture, and smell. Len and Becky trained for a week in Oaxaca, Mexico to learn the proper technique for making mole. They sampled the cuisine of the Basque Country and were invited to several eating houses where the men cooked communally and later celebrated their successes as well as failures, always with a good strong glass of wine. During one sabbatical in Rome, they ate their way through most of Italy and came to appreciate the regional differences that were boat to table, as well as farm to table. When home, they celebrated their shared birthday with the ever-changing array of Hawaiian regional cuisine masters, but their favorite remained Merriman's in Waimea on the Big Island. Such eating usually required a lot of exercise later, which was easy given Len's desire to start a small tropical botanical garden on the conservation land behind their house in Kailua. He discovered Hawai'i had an exceptional tree act that helped preserve particular habitats, so he sought out those exceptional trees and propagated their seedlings for his garden. After so much time spent in tropical forests, he was always at home with big trees, and hoped to live to see some of these potential giants well-established. His garden is now growing, and he would look out our back windows at home early in the morning with his cup of coffee and smile.