

Ornithology

Biology 360

Department of Biological Sciences
University of Windsor



Ornithology Assignment #2 – Popular Science Article

Due date: Thursday November 19, 2015 by 10:00 am sharp (prior to start of class)*

* Late assignments will be deducted 10% for any portion of a 24-hour period that they are late, starting at 10:00 am sharp on Nov 13

Goal: The goal of this assignment is to give you experience in popular scientific writing. Whatever career you pursue as a biologist, you will often have to read complex scientific writing, interpret it, and make it understandable for a wider audience. You may also need to take dry scientific material and make it exciting and intriguing for a non-specialist.

In this assignment, you must choose a scientific article from the journal *Auk: Ornithological Advances* and write a 450 to 550 word popular science article about the study. You should write in the style and tone of a newspaper article, such as you would find in the science section of the New York Times (see examples here: www.nytimes.com/pages/science).

For your source article, you can select any Research Article published in the year 2015 in the journal *Auk: Ornithological Advances*. (This is the world's top scientific journal for ornithological studies and it can be accessed through the Leddy Library's "Bio One" access as long as you're on campus: www.bioone.org/loi/tauk). Note that *Auk* publishes several different types of articles in addition to "Research Articles", such as "Commentaries", "Perspectives", "Book Reviews" etc. The word "RESEARCH ARTICLES" precedes all of the articles. You can choose any Research Article in any category from any of the four issues published in 2015 (volume 132) in *Auk*, and write your popular science article about that journal article.

Voice: In writing this popular press article, you should adopt the voice of a science journalist. Be as engaging as you can, to draw readers into your article. Do not provide tiny details of the source article. Instead, focus on the main points, the key questions, the most critical methods, and the primary conclusions. Connect your article to the broader world of ornithology, by explaining to the reader why the source article is important and the way that it moves avian research forward. If you wish, you can briefly connect the findings of your chosen article to other articles from the literature, but the focus should be on your one chosen journal article.

Academic Integrity: This assignment should be completed entirely independently. No two submitted assignments should share any writing in common. No strings of text should be taken directly from the source article. The popular science article should be written entirely in your own words, summarizing the ideas in your chosen article.

Format: At the top of the page please write the following include your name and your student number. Follow this with a title for your assignment. You should choose a good popular science title, similar to what you might read in the Science section of the New York Times (www.nytimes.com/pages/science).

Please print your abstract double-spaced, in 12-point font, using either Calibri or Times New Roman font.

As the second-last thing on your assignment, please type out the following statement: "*In submitting this assignment to Dr. Mennill, I certify that this is the product entirely of my own work and that I have followed all of the University of Windsor regulations on academic integrity.*" (Here is a [link](#) to the U Windsor Academic Integrity webpage.)

As the final thing on your assignment, please type out a full reference for your source paper (e.g. Authors, Year, Title, Volume, Page Numbers), like this:

"Source article: Sosa-Lopez JR, Mennill DJ (2014) Continent-wide patterns of divergence in acoustic and morphological traits in the house wren species complex. Auk: Ornithological Advances 131:41-54."

Please do not print out a copy of your source article; we will access the articles to read them.

Please do not include report covers etc. Simply submit plain print-outs on 8.5 x 11 paper. Staple pages together.

Word Limit: Your popular science article must be between 450 and 550 words (not including the title, or the words mentioned above in the "Format" section, etc.).

Evaluation: 50% of your grade will be based on content: Have you broken down the science of your source article to make it understandable for a lay audience? Did you emphasize the primary findings of the source article, and avoid presenting less important points? Are the primary conclusions of the paper interpreted and summarized correctly? Have you provided good reasons for why this work is important? Etc. The other 50% of your grade will be based on style. Is your writing clear? Have you adopted the voice of a science journalist? Would the language be understandable for a general reader of the New York Times (the target audience)? Have you minimized use of the passive voice? (Here is a [link](#) for information on active versus passive voice; modern and engaging scientific writers minimize use of the passive voice. A perfect assignment should have no instances of the passive voice). Etc.

This assignment will count as 7.5% of your final grade in this course.