

THE CHICAGO WILDERNESS HABITAT PROJECT PRESENTS
2006 GRASSROOTS CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Eric Secker

Eric Secker has an impressive knowledge of the region's birds, an artistic and generous spirit, and a good head for data. A college sophomore, he serves as the webmaster for the *Bird Conservation Network* (BCN) website, helped to design the eBird/BCN site, and pitched in on the analysis of the BCN data for the Chicago Wilderness report card. He also spearheaded a rigorous analysis of the BCN data, through effective consultation with a team of ornithological experts. We hope that he'll be contributing to our community for quite some time. You can view his great work by exploring www.bcnbirds.org.

Brad Semel

Brad Semel, when does he sleep? In 2005, he undertook prescribed burns for twenty-one straight days. He has championed the importance and value of native plant landscaping and has worked with private landowners as well as on state and county land. His efforts to create and maintain successful breeding habitat for Common and Forster's Terns, two state-endangered species, are well known. With the reduction in scientific staff at the *Illinois Department of Natural Resources*, state taxpayers are especially fortunate to have as dedicated a public servant as Brad Semel toiling tirelessly on their behalf.



Robert Sliwinski



Robert Sliwinski epitomizes the "go anywhere, do whatever it takes" volunteer spirit. His response to requests for help in monitoring or surveying has consistently been "I can do that." During the three-year *Grassland Bird Blitz* program, Robert was ready and willing to survey needed sites, regardless of their remote or inconvenient geographic location, covering more than 20 sites in four counties. He also has worked on the *West Nile Virus Bird Impacts* study program and as a regular *BCN Census* monitor at *Baker's Lake Heronry* in *Barrington*. He conducted five bird surveys to provide baseline data for the *Spring Creek* Restoration project. Robert found and edited aerial photos for use by other monitors and contributed to the CW Report Card work sessions for birds and herps. He carried out bat surveys at three sites for the Illinois Natural History Survey. In his spare time, he monitors frogs in northern *Cook County* with the *Calling Frog Survey*. Robert has found monitoring to be "very addictive".

Jim Steffen

Jim Steffen, ecologist at the *Chicago Botanic Garden*, develops and implements the restoration plan for Mary Mix McDonald Woods. He has originated studies on mushrooms, mussels, spiders, buckthorn, worms, and soil microarthropods, to ascertain the components of the habitat, and to learn how the community develops and functions. His work has discovered four First-in-Illinois species. Jim has been a Lake County land steward, teaches classes, organizes work days, tutors volunteers, and presents at programs and conferences. He has written and is writing papers based on his data. He leads by example, teaching, developing restoration techniques, and sharing his knowledge and skills.



Coco Venturin



Coco Venturin began her work as the natural areas manager for *Indiana's Lake County Parks and Recreation Department* about a year and half ago and hit the ground running, according to volunteer Derek Nimetz, who describes Coco as his "local hero." Coco has implemented numerous controlled burns, and she joined a butterfly monitoring program. Coco partnered with Dr. Yong Choi, a biology professor at Purdue University Northwest, and together they started some volunteer workdays at a local nature preserve for college students. Coco has also donated some of her time to the Sierra Club during volunteer workdays.

Jenny Vogt

Jenny Vogt makes the *Habitat Herald* good reading from cover to cover. She designs the layout, creates the spread, arranges the photos, selects fonts, and so much more. And she does so with a cheery, generous spirit and impeccable efficiency. Jenny is a hero who allows conservationists to communicate great work to each other.



Don Wilson



Don Wilson is the volunteer steward for *Illinois Beach State Park* in *Zion*. He has encouraged his fellow employees at Abbott Laboratories to volunteer at monthly work days, resulting in a loyal cadre of workers. At least two volunteers who started with Don are now site stewards of other local natural areas. Don has been a bird monitor, frog monitor, and Plants of Concern monitor. Several times each year he conducts a walking tour of parts of Illinois Beach for volunteers who can stay after a work day for lunch and exploration. Don also is assisting with restoration and rehabilitation at *Almond Marsh (Lake County Forest Preserves)*.



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The Habitat Project is about effecting change. It is about building a culture of conservation that connects people to our natural heritage and brings neighbors together to protect, enjoy, and know it. The following people exemplify the Habitat Project spirit. They are changing the world, and we are all a part of their success. These awards are sort of the Academy Awards of conservation. All nominees are proposed by the region's leaders and volunteers – and all decisions are made by a review committee of leaders and volunteers.

Diane Aoki



Diane Aoki loves frogs. A Chicago Wilderness *Calling Frog Survey* monitor for five years, in 2005 she worked with Ron Humbert of the Chicago Herpetological Society to engage school children in the selection of an Illinois State Amphibian and Reptile (the winners were the tiger salamander and painted turtle). She organized "herp searches" in *Chicago Parks* for schoolkids and grown-ups alike. She leads the *Cook County* training workshop for frog monitors, and she rides her bicycle everywhere, even to her monitoring sites.

Jane and John Balaban

Jane and John Balaban are the stewards of *Harms Woods* in *Cook County*, where they are bringing light, beauty, and friends back to this glorious open woodland. Jane and John are helping to train a new generation of botanists by giving annual walks that teach us to identify sedges, shrubs, and woodland wildflowers. Jane is a regular attendant of Cook County Board meetings and coaches other citizens to advocate to the board for better protection of our forest preserves. In a Cook County forest preserve, they discovered a rare sedge *Carex formosa* – previously unknown in Illinois – and helped get it added to the Illinois endangered species list.



Benjamin Cox



Benjamin Cox is the Executive Director of *Friends of the Forest Preserves (Cook County)*. Since taking the helm in 2004, Benjamin has brought Friends to a new level of success and prominence. Among their many accomplishments in 2005 were the solution of a massive erosion problem dubbed "Apathy Canyon" and a much approved FPD budget with improved conservation outcomes of many kinds. In his characteristic way, Benjamin headed off a "land grab" of Whistler Woods by a major steel company in a way that left pretty much everybody happy and positive.

Richard M. Daley

Richard M. Daley, mayor of *Chicago*, has implemented bold and far reaching environmental initiatives that affect our community and provide an example to be followed by metropolitan areas worldwide. He has provided incentives for energy efficiency, insisted on the use of renewable energy sources, encouraged green roofs, demanded fuel efficient vehicles in the city fleet, and planted over 400,000 trees for beautification and pollution absorption. Future generations of Chicagoans have been given a wonderful green legacy by Mayor Daley.

Gary Davis and Marilyn Schweitzer

Gary Davis and **Marilyn Schweitzer** gave the Habitat Project website a serious makeover in 2005, thereby increasing our capacity to communicate with each other about all of our great work. They made the site easy to navigate and fun to look at, they created a forum for us to talk with each other, and they continue to maintain and update it so that it reflects the latest happenings among Habitat Project monitors, stewards, advocates, and educators. Go to www.habitatproject.org to see for yourself.



Patricia Hayes



Patricia Hayes is the bright spirit behind the rapid success of *Orland Grassland* in *Cook County*. The other Orland Grassland Volunteers describe her incredible enthusiasm and passion as the force that drew them into the group. William Fath credits Pat's motivation and support for his recent accomplishments: becoming a master steward, receiving his state herbiciding license, and becoming certified to participate in prescription burns. "She saw the potential in me and gave me the encouragement to see it through," says Bill. Pat's colleagues credit her organizational skills with keeping them and the surrounding community involved in the grassland's regular events and workdays. "She leads by example through her hard work on workdays," wrote one.

Cindy Hedges



Cindy Hedges has a personal commitment to our natural areas that shines through in all she does as Natural Resource Volunteer Coordinator for the *DuPage County Forest Preserve District*. Cindy coordinates the work of 185 volunteers, running a superbly organized program that partners with all of the region's other volunteer efforts. This is no small task, and Cindy does it with warmth, generosity, and supreme competence. She recruits monitors, supports them, assists with their data submission and paperwork, and ensures that priority plants, animals, and natural areas get the monitoring and stewardship they need. The volunteers love her, and her organizational partners love working with her. Cindy also is a volunteer, as a Plants of Concern monitor.

Barbara Hill



Barbara Hill is not afraid to get dirty – sticky, wet clay dirty – if it means saving a remnant prairie. Barbara noticed that about __ square feet of a rare railroad prairie in *Palatine* had been partly buried under clay when the village repaired a water main. She met on site with a man from the excavation crew and showed him hoary puccoon, blue-eyed grass, and Seneca snakeroot, and he spotted and asked her about prairie phlox. He then volunteered to return with a backhoe, while Barbara did the detail work of pulling clay away from root crowns. In the five days before she got the village to pitch in, Barbara had managed to remove about half of the clay with her shovel, trowel, fingers, and buckets. Truly a labor of love.

Mel Manner, Tom Peterson, and Greg Rajskey



Mel Manner, Tom Peterson and **Greg Rajskey** were prime forces behind the *Wild Things conference* in February of 2005. This great coming together of the conservation community owed its spirit and effectiveness to the efforts of many, but none more than this generous and competent trio. Greg and Tom co-chaired the program committee, and pulled together a hundred different inspiring workshops. The considerable logistics of assembling 760 people in one place were no match for Mel Manner's formidable organization skills. Greg is also a steward and expert plant monitor; Mel is administrator of the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network; and Tom is a butterfly and frog monitor and member of the Fermilab restoration group.

Mary Anne McLean, Keith Nowakowski and Mary-Kay Stanfield



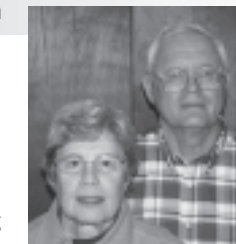
Mary Anne McLean, Keith Nowakowski and **Mary-Kay Stanfield** put their skills to work last year to save a remnant savanna in *Crete* from development. Marianne and Mary-Kay formed Crete Neighbors United, gathered petition signatures, and joined 100 other citizens at a Village Board meeting to defend the remnant. Keith, a landscape architect who has written a book on using native plants in home gardens, evaluated the remnant and brought his findings to the meeting. While the campaign ultimately was not successful, the Habitat Project honors these heroes and all their fellow citizens who work to defend nature in our communities. Every positive and friendly campaign raises awareness and helps the cause.

Lisa Nagel



Lisa Nagel organizes data entry for the *Bird Conservation Network* (BCN). She is helping the BCN to work through a back-log of data entry and to be sure all of the data shows up on the new website. These data have recently been used to determine the status of the region's grassland birds and to help land managers restore prairies that work for birds as well as plants.

Don and Espie Nelson



Don and Espie Nelson monitor eleven endangered plants species with *Plants of Concern* at *Midewin NTP* and in the *Will County Forest Preserves*. They also recruit and train new POC volunteers, and provide leadership at community events, training sessions, and in the field. They are site stewards for *Vermont Cemetery* in *Wheatland Township* and *Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve*, executing their work with vigor and expertise. They have volunteered hundreds of hours at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. Espie is currently researching and writing a history of Vermont Cemetery. Don and Espie are a wonderful team to work with and have inspired a number of budding conservationists to volunteer their time.

Dennis Nyberg



Dennis Nyberg has a long history in creative conservation. As Director of the *James Woodworth Prairie* and Steward of *Cranberry Slough Nature Preserve*, both in *Cook County*, Dennis has supervised restoration and published his results. An Associate Professor of Biological Sciences at UIC, Dennis is a leading member of the Green Campus Council, which focuses University involvement into natural areas conservation. Dennis recently co-nominated the Franklin's Ground Squirrel (FGS) for endangered status in Illinois, is a co-founder of the Chicago Wilderness FGS Conservation Task Force, and co-wrote the FGS World Conservation Union Species Plan for the IUCN Red List.

The Orland Grassland Volunteers



The Orland Grassland Volunteers have succeeded not only in returning vibrant good health to *Orland Grassland* in *Cook County*, but in connecting the local community to the grassland. In three years since this group began, they have worked tirelessly, passionately, cooperatively, and it shows. Since 2002, five volunteers have become site stewards for parts of this 960-acre preserve. They have regularly scheduled workdays both during the week and on weekends. Their newsletter is mailed to more than 1,000 people. Many neighbors and school groups turn out to their trash clean-ups and restoration workdays. The Orland Park library has dedicated their new library's youth section to the biodiversity of the prairie, commissioning a 20 foot "More than Grass" mural. Both prairie plant species and grassland birds are increasing in numbers in response to their good work.

Jim Peterson



Jim Peterson has been part of the *Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network* (IBMN) since 1999, as a monitor at *Cuba Marsh* in *Lake County*. Shortly after joining the Network, Jim applied his computer skills to developing a website for the Network. Monitors now can download copies of the *Guidelines for Monitoring* and data collection sheets, and browse galleries of butterfly pictures to assist with identification skills. In 2004, Jim added another element to the system: online data entry. In its first season of operation, the web entry system accounted for over half of the data submissions to the Network. In 2005, we are approaching 90% of data being submitted online by the individual monitors, saving many hours of work by Network Administrators each year. Jim actively maintains the system in good working order. Jim's hard work has advanced the IBMN's website from a very useful tool to one that is completely essential to the continued growth and health of the program.

Joyce and George Proper



Joyce and George Proper contributed more than 1,000 hours to natural areas conservation last year. Stewards of *Grant Forest Preserve* in *Lake County*, IL since 1995, they also monitor rare plants with the *Plants of Concern* program, frogs with the *Calling Frog Survey* (Joyce), and sandhill cranes. Joyce has supervised the Forest Preserve District's Seed Processing Program since 2001. George skillfully wields the District's chainsaws with dramatic results, and helps burn 300-400 brush piles each year. He has improved ways to separate the seed from the chaff for the District's seed processing program. At home, the Propers have propagated thousands of native plants for Grant Forest Preserve. They have helped to educate the general public, students and Scouts to the wonders of our natural heritage and the effort it takes to preserve it.

Dick Riner



Dick Riner, Steward at *Cook County's Bartel Grassland*, has a knack for getting Bartel and its volunteers in the news. Last December, he recruited 98 people to spread more than 15 million seeds at Bartel in one day. The fledgling restoration effort at Bartel has grown and thrived under Dick's spirited leadership. He holds regular community outreach walks to recruit new faces and connect with returning friends; he brings new voices into the volunteer leadership with strategy sessions at a local eatery; and he organizes events at Bartel from birdwatching to plant sleuthing to, of course, seed spreading.