



CHICAGO WILDERNESS™

A Regional Nature Reserve

THE CHICAGO WILDERNESS HABITAT PROJECT

2009 GRASSROOTS
CONSERVATION
LEADERSHIP AWARDS

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 “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.

ALAN ANDERSON



Alan Anderson has been a powerful voice for *bird conservation* for 32 years. For more than 20 years, he has made it his business to check nearly every grassland in **Cook County**, record bird data (which often showed declines), and share the information with anyone who could help. Several of these grasslands received major restoration due to Alan’s efforts and now have increasing populations of grassland birds. Last year and this, at the urging of Alan and fellow grassland bird monitors, the Cook County Forest Preserve District has undertaken a program to mow back invasive brush and improve habitat for these birds. This summer some of the sites already had increased numbers of rare birds such as bobolinks and grasshopper sparrows.

BARBARA AND GEORGE BIRMINGHAM

More than a decade ago, **Barbara and George Birmingham** sounded the alarm, as illegally directed floodwaters carved an ever deeper ditch, then gully, then true canyon through the ancient oak woods of the peaceful and beautiful **Theodore Stone Forest Preserve in Hodgkins**. Current visitors now see little sign of the battle that was waged there, and the heroic dedication of the people who have finally succeeded in protecting it. That erosion increasingly buried the ancient prairie below, with its many rare and endangered species, in silty run-off. In 2004, the Birminghams teamed up with **Friends of the Forest Preserves** executive director **Benjamin Cox** and wrote, spoke, testified, researched and negotiated a collaborative solution. To their credits, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, the Village of Hodgkins, and the owners of The Quarry Mall have spent more than tens of thousands of dollars to solve the problems. With the hard work of District staff, contractors, and volunteers, the ecosystem is healing nicely.



RICK DAVEY



Rick Davey spent his senior year in high school literally running around and listening for frogs. A member of the cross country team at **Stagg High School in Palos Hills**, Rick and his fellow runners often followed a route through the **Swallow Cliff** area of the **Palos Preserves**. The route winds through great frog habitat, and when Rick found out about the Habitat Project’s **Calling Frog Survey**, he joined his fellow runner **Kevin Wolz** (see below), and began revisiting their route in the evenings, this time as frog monitors. In addition to frog monitoring, they both spent many hours at Palos restoration work days as part of their high school service learning credits, and Rick obtained a summer job as a restoration intern with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Rick led a spring evening tour of his route for frog monitors from all over the region, and the outing was featured on a Chicago Public Radio show by journalist Ken Davis. Rick is now a college freshman at the University of Southern California and plans to major in environmental engineering.



SUSAN FARGO

Susan Fargo has made a remarkable impact on the public understanding of midwestern plants and wildlife in the city of *Chicago*. She is vice-president of the nonprofit *Lincoln Park Conservancy* and has developed a Biodiversity Program that recruits volunteers to attend citizen scientist training programs. She has created the North Pond Docents, a group of tour guides who interpret the *North Pond* landscape and wildlife to park visitors. On Earth Day, 2001 Susan created the *North Pond Gardeners* – a misnomer, she says, since they really should be called restorationists. The group now has more than 90 volunteers who collect seeds, remove invasive species, and plant new native plugs, and the program grows every year. Susan’s passion, energy, and dedicated volunteerism have inspired hundreds, if not thousands, of Chicago volunteers over the last eight years.

GLENN GABANSKI

Good science leads to good conservation. **Glenn Gabanski** made great contributions to science and conservation through his unique combination of skills - devoted birder and retired Statistics teacher. He was the perfect person to lead the 2008 trends analysis of the *Bird Conservation Network* census data. He coordinated a large group of organizers and analysts with persistence and good humor to keep the project on track, and provided critical judgment in navigating through the complex landscape of statistical analysis of volunteer data. Glenn’s lively interest in birds and conservation also inspires his other volunteer roles as Bird Conservation Network Treasurer, bird bander and *Field Museum* volunteer.



GARY GLOWACKI



Gary Glowacki is *Lake County*’s wildlife biologist. When his county decided to redo their bird monitoring protocols, Gary made sure to include the *Bird Conservation Network* (BCN). Last winter, Gary and his colleague **Tim Preuss** designed a bold, new county-wide study to monitor plants and wildlife at random points within 25 priority sites. Gary worked with bird monitors to pilot new protocols, and this winter he is working with a group of Lake County monitors to refine the protocols and recruit more monitors. He also is working with the *Calling Frog Survey*, the *Dragonfly Monitoring Network*, and the *Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network* to recruit monitors for these new, priority monitoring points. He has made new opportunities available to bird monitors in Lake County who want a more challenging role - and has challenged the BCN to “raise the bar” in the way that it supports the needs of land managers.

ANN HAVERSTOCK

A self-described “head-hunter,” **Ann Haverstock** is a person who uses her people skills to help nature. She has worked with the *Kane County* Forest Preserve District and the *Bird Conservation Network* to strengthen a spirited corps of bird monitors in Kane County. Her donation of \$649 to Audubon (in the hopes of seeing her 650th North American bird) allowed each bird monitor to receive a copy of a recent publication with up-to-date information about Illinois birds. Some of the data that inform the latest strategies for bird conservation come from Ann’s own expert monitoring over the years.



PETE JACKSON



What makes **Pete Jackson** so special is his unique combination of science-based knowledge and heartfelt enthusiasm. It has been said that Pete, as steward of *Deer Grove Forest Preserve* in *Palatine*, engages volunteers with the smile of a friend and the patience of a teacher. It is his engaging nature that draws loyal volunteers to his workdays, confident that Pete directs their efforts where they will do the most good. Trained as a biologist, Pete also had the foresight to recognize that he could inform his own stewardship – and oak woods management throughout the region -- if he could monitor the results of his work. So he set up vegetation monitoring plots in his management areas and in comparable unmanaged areas nearby. His data tell us with scientific confidence that management efforts have increased native plant diversity at Deer

Grove, but that oak regeneration remains low. These results are helping Pete and others adjust stewardship priorities to address the most important needs of the ecosystem.

ROGER KELLER

Since 1990, **Roger Keller** has been a dedicated steward of *Hidden Pond* in the *Palos Preserves*, working with his wife **Cara** and the many volunteers of the *Palos Restoration Project*. Roger took over as Palos Regional Steward, an important and fairly demanding job, when Deb Petro passed away in 2003. Roger also has been a recruiting force extraordinaire and a mentor to new stewards. He has offered to drive new recruits to work days, and has turned new volunteers onto the world of native plants – both in the preserves and in his yard. He speaks at schools and garden clubs and has recruited District interns from local high schools and volunteer groups. He helps people find a place to contribute their passion for nature. He has presented and spoken to the Cook County Board on many occasions to champion the cause of restoration and the need for more resources. He volunteers tirelessly for our preserves and his community. He also is an excellent photographer, catching the seasons changing, the restoration accomplishments, and our many volunteers contributing. Roger is the voice and the face of the Palos Volunteers.





RICH KOOMJIAN

Rich Koomjian takes seriously the adage, “Make no small plans.” As a long-time member of the *Riverwoods Preservation Council* (RPC) but one with absolutely no gardening experience, his questions about taking care of the woodlands in his yard inspired the RPC to write a 128-page book entitled *In Our Own Backyard*, which outlined the natural heritage of Riverwoods and the steps needed to preserve and restore its extensive woodlands. The book was distributed in 2007 without charge to all residents of *Riverwoods*, in *Lake County*, Illinois. This summer, Rich led the RPC in conducting a study of the health of woodlands in the community, collaborating with Audubon, the Village, and ecological consultants. The RPC owes much of its success to Rich and his colleagues, **Greg Mancuso, Sue Auerbach, Carol**

Lieberman, Joan Becker, Laurel Bretkopf, Howard Patterson, and Jackie Borchew, who have each applied their respective professional talents to RPC projects. Rich says, “Together we’ve accomplished some things that none of us could have done alone...and had some fun in the process.”

JOHN MCCABE



John McCabe is widely known as a dedicated and powerful leader of *Cook County FPD* staff, interns and volunteers. He has dramatically improved training in controlled burning and the effective and safe use of chainsaws and other mechanical tools. John coordinates staff and volunteers during the spring and fall burn seasons. He supervises the District’s resource management crews and coordinates with volunteers, partner organizations, contractors and interns to ensure thoughtful and effective habitat management. He represents the District in public hearings on restoration to assure the best public understanding of this important work. With creativity and unfailing good humor, he opens many bottlenecks as a top notch problem solver. The amount of good ecological management work in Cook County has increased exponentially because John is on staff, and he is much appreciated by the grassroots conservation community.

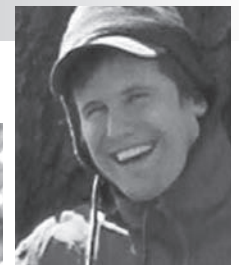


JOE AND MARLENE NOWAK

For more than two decades, **Joe and Marlene Nowak** have been inspired leaders of *Calumet* area conservation. Stewards, photographers, teachers and mentors – this team focused the spotlight of concern on neglected prairies, savannas and wetlands that are some of the most important in Illinois. They led by example, when no one else was yet organizing the teams of brush cutters, weed pullers, and controlled burn teams that are so essential to natural areas management today. Their detailed knowledge of the plants and animals of these areas is still sought out by new generations of stewards and advocates. Their photographs have inspired readers of *Chicago Wilderness magazine* and many slideshows in the community.

REBECCA BLAZER, ERIN FAULKNER AND DON PARKER

Don Parker and **Rebecca Blazer** kept noticing that they were the youngest people at most restoration workdays along the *North Branch of the Chicago River*, in *Cook County*. They decided that having more young folks at workdays would not only be good for the future of nature in Chicago, but would also be a lot of fun. So they started the 20s-30s workdays, which invite people in this age group to gather for brush cutting, seed collecting, and other good work, followed by a social hour around the fire, complete with brats, marshmallows, and other delectables. Four years later, led by Don, Rebecca, and **Erin Faulkner**, this gathering of the next generation’s conservation leaders is now thriving and has produced new stewards of new sites, as well as new friends and upcoming leaders. Older and younger folks are always welcome, by the way.



JUDY POLLOCK

The birds of Chicago Wilderness, and the people who love them, have many reasons to thank **Judy Pollock**. Her most recent effort was to help with turning a ten-year data set from the *Bird Conservation Network* (BCN) Census into a scientific analysis of population trends for the region’s birds. Judy found scientists and statisticians, paired them up with computer gurus and statisticians **Eric Secker** and **Glen Gabanski** (see below and above), got these folks together with leaders from the BCN, and together they developed a means of turning this rich data set into a rigorous report card on the region’s birds. Judy continues to be a force for bird conservation anywhere there are grasslands, shrublands, and woodlands that can be restored for better bird habitat. Under the leadership of Judy and her partners in the Bird Conservation Network, and their collaborators in nearly every county land agency in the region, thousands of acres of bird habitat have been restored, and bird populations are rebounding.



LEE RAMSEY

There are now 180 bird monitors participating in the *Bird Conservation Network* (BCN) Census, and **Lee Ramsey** has probably been out in the field with half of them. Lee has been an inspiring presence since the BCN Census began. He has helped to maintain connections with landowners, helped scores of monitors negotiate the details of the eBird website and data entry, and most importantly, walked around many sites with monitors, helping them set up routes and communicate their findings to site managers and stewards. Besides being a world birder, Lee is also a stewardship volunteer at the *Poplar Creek* preserves, so he has valuable knowledge of restoration techniques. Lee also understands the importance of good science, which is why he devotes so much of himself to ensuring that the BCN Census is a world-class endeavor. And it's why he helped implement a new 2008 study that sent birders to random points within Cook County woodlands where plant monitors had also taken data.

DAWN SASEKS

Dawn Saseks goes the extra mile with her students in the **Ecology Club** at *Oak Forest High School* in southern *Cook County*. Not satisfied to attend occasional restoration work days, Dawn and the club set out to become stewards of their own site. Because of the club's good track record of dedication toward previous projects, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County was happy to designate a worksite near *Yankee Woods* for the club to adopt as its own. Club presidents **Joanna Summa** and **Caitlin Stark**, vice president **Wes Wallace**, and the rest of the Ecology Club's 61 members are doing what they can to restore and preserve the ancient prairie that once thrived here.



RANDY SCHIETZELT

Randy Schietzelt is well known to most people involved with the environment in *McHenry County*. Some of Randy's contributions have included serving as president of the McHenry County Chapter of the *Illinois Audubon Society*, Director of the *Friends of Volo Bog*, and Vice President of the *Land Conservancy of McHenry County*. He has been called upon by several McHenry County planning commissions for consultation. Randy and his wife Nancy are master co-stewards of the *Cary Grove Jr. High Prairie*. He has participated in over 60 controlled burns in the last five years and has led countless bird walks. In the role of citizen scientist, he participates in several bird censuses, as well as *Riverwatch*, *Mussel Watch*, the *Dragonfly Monitoring Network*, and *Prairiewatch*. He has compiled lists of flora and fauna for *Moraine Hills State Park*. Randy is a member of the biology faculty at *Harper College*, where he develops the environmental biology course, and he has made many contributions to the Harper Natural Area, including serving as "burn boss" for the annual burn. The Schietzelt residence, in *Crystal Lake*, is a private Nature Conservancy lot, and in the spring, Randy leads wildflower walks through his property.

ERIC SECKER

People like **Eric Secker** are forming the next wave of bird conservationists. As a young man who's personally acquainted with just about every bird in *DuPage County*, Eric brings his considerable intellectual and artistic talents to making sure those birds have a bright future. Eric did all the data crunching and much of the writing for the 2008 *Bird Conservation Network* census trends analysis. He also created a handsome web site to showcase the results, including photographs that he donated. Check out his work at <http://bcnbirds.org/trends07/>.



KEVIN WOLZ

Kevin Wolz is continuing the cross country froggers tradition begun by him and fellow runner **Rick Davey** (see above) last year. A member of the cross country team at *Stagg High School* in *Palos Hills*, Kevin and his fellow runners often followed a route through the *Swallow Cliff* area of the *Palos Preserves*. The route winds through great frog habitat, and when Kevin and Rick found out about the Habitat Project's *Calling Frog Survey*, they began revisiting their route in the evenings, this time as frog monitors. In addition to frog monitoring, they both spent many hours at Palos restoration work days as part of their high school service learning credits. Now a senior, Kevin continues his involvement with the high school science club and cross country team, as well as frog monitoring. He has expanded his role from attending restoration work days to bringing others with him. He began by bringing his parents. Then he brought 30 high school friends with him. Now he is working with his high school to designate a dedicated forest preserve for all of the school's service learning restoration outings.