

## “HELPING BIRDS IN YOUR BACKYARD” KEYNOTE SPEECH AT 2009 ANNUAL MEETING



Tennessee warbler

Helping Birds in your Backyard and on Your Land" was the title of the presentation at the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's 2009 Annual Meeting. The talk and slide show by Vicki Piaskowski, the International Coordinator for Birds Without Borders, had members buzzing with new ideas to help birds in their backyards.

Ms. Piaskowski conducted field research on migratory and nesting birds, using sites in Belize and Wisconsin (including land in Pewaukee belonging to WCLC board member, Donna Meyer) for her research. By netting and banding 9,867 birds since 1997, she was able to determine the needs of various species of birds, including the size and type of habitat required and food preferences. Ms. Piaskowski assured our members that even smaller properties and suburban lots can be good stopover sites for migrating birds.

Researchers banded 7,419 birds of 86 species at the Pewaukee site during the seven years of the study. The Waukesha County Land Conservancy's members were astonished to hear that the most abundant migratory bird at the Pewaukee site was, by many times over, the Tennessee

Warbler. In Ms. Piaskowski's book, *How to Manage Your Land to Help Birds*, she says, "The birds banded in highest numbers at the Pewaukee study site were Tennessee Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Gray Catbird, Magnolia Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, and American Robin. The banding of 2,339 Tennessee Warblers at the site indicates that this area could be a very important migration stopover site for this species."

Ms. Piaskowski emphasized the importance of planting native plant species. Her research confirmed that migratory birds feed almost entirely upon insects. Obviously the use of pesticides is not recommended and planting to attract insect species is also important. Insects in Southeastern Wisconsin are attracted to particular plant species. By studying bird feces, Ms. Piaskowski determined which insects each bird species preferred. Then she researched which plants harbored the greatest numbers of those insects. Some plants on which high numbers of insects were found were red oak, pussy willow, yellow bud hickory, black cherry and red-osier dogwood.

Birds do supplement their diet with fruit, especially in fall. And although they will eat buckthorn berries, Ms. Piaskowski found these plants to be habitat for very few insects. Ms. Piaskowski emphasized that areas that are overgrown with buckthorn have much less insect food available to birds.

By removing non-native plants and not spraying for insects you can help to make your yard into good bird habitat. Supporting the work of the Waukesha County Land Conservancy also protects and preserves the plants the provide food for both migrating and nesting birds.

Andy and Jean Holtz with David and Sandra Keating before dinner



Jim McKenna and Dan Finley at the 2009 Annual Meeting



Phil & Pat Crump visit with Donna Meyer.

Photos courtesy of Gee Esslinger



George & Sandy Dionisopoulos, two of the Co-Chairs for the Gala on the Lake held on Aug 28, 2009



Cocktail time at the Red Circle inn prior to dinner

## RALPH CURTIS IS VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

The Waukesha County Land Conservancy depends heavily on volunteers. Ralph Curtis has been an exceptional volunteer for the organization. In recognition of his years of work, Ralph has been selected as the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's Volunteer of the Year.

For several years, Ralph has volunteered to handle the deer hunting permits at one of the Conservancy's larger sites. This takes hours of work dealing with more than sixty applications every year. Ralph sends out applications, finds someone to do an unbiased lottery drawing, prepares and mails permits and keeps records. Apparently this was not enough for Ralph. He volunteered to take on another site with another fifty applicants! Ralph has also worked on tree planting and prairie burns on the Conservancy's properties.

Ralph's real passion is wildlife photography. Ralph has allowed the Waukesha County Land Conservancy to use his photos, so you may be familiar with his work from the note cards that the Conservancy had produced and Ralph's wildlife photos that have graced the covers of the Conservancy's Annual Reports. All of these photos are taken on the Conservancy's properties, many of them on the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge south of Dousman.

Ralph has so much patience! He sits for hours in a blind, waiting for animals to come into view. But the rewards are worth it. What a thrill it must be to see a rare hawk owl staring at you from a nearby tree or baby foxes looking up curiously at a butterfly overhead! I urge you to take a look at his work. His stunning photos can be found on his website at [www.rcwildlife.com](http://www.rcwildlife.com)

And stay tuned for a future photo book of wildlife on Conservancy properties.

Ralph was a close friend of the former owner of the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge, Ruben Barsamian. Ralph wrote a compassionate essay about his love of wildlife which appears in *Stories of Stewardship: Tales from Wisconsin's Big Backyard* printed by Gathering Waters Conservancy. You can read this essay at [www.gatheringwaters.org](http://www.gatheringwaters.org)

Ralph Curtis has been a great advocate and volunteer for conservation in Waukesha County. It is time he was honored as the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's Volunteer of the Year!

Written by Marlin Johnson



Ralph Curtis accepts volunteer of the year award from Marlin Johnson.

### TOUR AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS

#### WORK DAY:

April 22, 2009 (Earth Day) – Tree and seed planting. For time, call Jason Dare at 262-391-0159

April 25, 2009 ---- 9 AM Tree planting and prairie seed planting at the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge. Meet in Dousman in the parking lot on the east side of Main Street, north of the bike trail.

#### TOUR A NEW SITE:

May 3, 2009 — 1:30 PM. Visit one of the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's recent acquisitions. The Theisen Preserve consists of woodlands, old fields and restored prairie overlooking the Vernon Marsh to the east. It was donated by Albert Theisen and surrounds the farmhouse he formerly owned at W299S7404 Hwy 83. We will meet in that driveway. Bring binoculars; we should see some early bird migrants! The tour will be guided by Biologist Marlin Johnson.

## Susan Marguet Joins the Board

A long-time member of the Waukesha County Land Conservancy and resident of the Town of Ottawa was elected to the Board of Directors at the March 18th Annual Meeting. Susan Marguet served as co-chair of the 2007 summer fundraising and membership raising event at Glen and Tizza Meyer's farm.

A graduate of Indiana University and the University of Indiana School of Law, Susan has a practice at Weiss Berzowski Brady. She has represented municipalities and land owners in land conservation matters, including park planning and conservation easements.

Susan has served as president of the Association for Women Lawyers, and currently serves as a volunteer for the Lake Country Free Clinic, the Kettle Moraine Food Pantry, and the Kettle Moraine Garden Club, of which she is a past president.

Susan will fill a one year vacancy on the board, renewable in 2010 for a full three year term.

## Christopher Gloe Becomes an Active Emeritus Board Member

Due to conflicts at work, Christopher Gloe has asked to become an Active Emeritus member of the Board. Chris served on the Waukesha County Land Conservancy's board for years, driving to monthly board meetings from his office in downtown Milwaukee where he works as Vice President and Trust Counsel for the Marshall & Ilsley Trust Company.

In addition to attending board meetings, Chris donated many hours to the Conservancy applying for grants from local foundations. Chris and his wife, Nancy, and their daughter, Shawna, often came to help in the field on work days. Chris and Nancy have also licked many an envelope for the Conservancy's mailings.

We will miss all the time Chris volunteered for the Conservancy, but most especially, we will miss Chris' thoughtful insight at board meetings.

## Spring Blooms in Martin's Woods

Maidenhair ferns and trillium, Jack-in-the-pulpits and mayapples form a carpet of colors and shapes on the floor of the first property purchased by the Waukesha County Land Conservancy. Martin's Woods remains one of the most diverse sites owned by the organization.

When the Waukesha County Land Conservancy was formed in 1992, preservation of Martin's Woods was its highest priority. The Conservancy knew that this unusually diverse woods had never been grazed or mowed. The plants on the forest floor of this thirty-two acre parcel are much the same as they were in pre-settlement times.

Martin's Woods is part of a larger mesic and wet-mesic forest adjacent to the Fox River in the Village of Big Bend. Sugar maple and basswood are the trees that dominate the mesic forest, while the southern hardwood swamp is dominated by green ash and large swamp white oaks. Over 150 plant species have been identified in Martins Woods, including the rare Kentucky coffee tree and chinquapin oaks.

Martin's Woods is also home to a diversity of bird species, such as the blue-gray gnatcatcher, veery, wood thrush, wood peewee, ovenbird, scarlet tanager, rose-breasted grosbeak

and indigo bunting. Helping to protect these native plants and animals from human disturbance is the poison ivy that is ubiquitous throughout, as a vine, a shrub and an herb. Another native species also stands guard: great numbers of mosquitoes call Martin's Woods their home.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources declared Martin's Woods as a "State Natural Area," meaning it is an outstanding example of Wisconsin's native landscape. As a Waukesha County Land Conservancy member, you have helped to protect this significant site.



Bloodroot



# Land Letter



Waukesha County Land Conservancy

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Blue-winged Teal photo courtesy of Ralph Curtis