

The Daily Union

opinion page



W.D. HOARD
Founder, 1870

Congrats, citizen monitors!

Congratulations go out today to the Lake Koshkonong Wetlands Association, recipient of the Wisconsin Citizen-based Monitoring Program of the Year Award for 2006.

Andy Paulios, Citizen Monitoring Network liaison for the U.S. Bureau of Endangered Resources, and Scott Hassett, secretary of the state Department of Natural Resources, presented the award at the annual Citizen-based Monitoring Conference held at Rowley's Bay Oct. 5-6.

The honor recognizes outstanding projects, organizations, or communities exhibiting innovation in the development or expansion of citizen-based monitoring programs that have had direct impact on DNR's natural resource management.

The Lake Koshkonong organization was chosen for its work to have the Greater Lake Koshkonong Area recognized as an Important Bird Area through an international effort to protect birds and their habitat. The local program is implemented by the Wisconsin Bird Conservation.

So what did the local volunteers do? Well, in 2004 and 2005, the Lake Koshkonong Wetlands Association spearheaded multiple surveys of nesting and migratory birds in the Lake Koshkonong area. Forty-four volunteers participated, including ornithologists from the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, members of the Lake Koshkonong Wetlands Association and other local groups including the Friends of Rose Lake and the Ned Hollister Bird Club, and interested citizens who enjoy the birds of the lake and its wetlands.

The surveys documented the importance of Lake Koshkonong for migrating waterfowl. They found that more than 20,000 ducks rest and feed on the lake during the spring mi-

gration, and surveys during May and June revealed that many birds of conservation concern use the area for nesting and raising young, including prothonotary warblers, black terns, cerulean warblers, Acadian flycatchers and sedge wrens. As lake residents and visitors often tell us, bald eagles, osprey and white pelicans also frequently visit Lake Koshkonong.

A scientific panel reviewed the data and approved designation of the Greater Lake Koshkonong Area as an Important Bird Area. On Sept. 16, Yoyi Steel, Wisconsin coordinator of the Important Bird Area program, formally dedicated the Important Bird Area at a ceremony on Carcajou Point.

In the future, the Important Bird Area program will be available to assist in evaluation and management of habitats for long-term conservation of birds within the area.

The Koshkonong Wetlands Association is among 150-plus groups in Wisconsin whose members contribute more than 300,000 manhours of labor each year monitoring everything from birds and zebra mussels to invasive plants. If they were on salary, the payroll would be about \$20 million a year.

The data gathered supports natural resources decision-making by governmental, university and conservation organizations. In other words, this is much more than a Sunday afternoon of birdwatching.

We've always known that Lake Koshkonong is a draw to boaters, fishermen and tourists in general, and now, thanks to the Lake Koshkonong Wetlands Association, we know it also is a destination — or at least a pitstop — for many of our fine-feathered friends.

How fortunate we all are to live so close to this environmental and recreational jewel.