

Celebrating 10 Years for the Birds

Mequon Mayor Christine Nuernberg (second from left) and her husband, Rob (far left), helped celebrate the 10th anniversary of Birds Without Borders - *Aves Sin Fronteras*® with Cheryl and Mark Brickman, who hosted 65 guests at their Dragonfly Farm and bird habitat on June 21, 2006.



When you hear that bright Baltimore oriole singing in your yard this spring, know that you have had a hand in keeping it alive. As a Zoological Society member, you have contributed to a bird conservation-education-research project that reaches 1,400 miles across two countries.

That project—called Birds Without Borders- *Aves Sin Fronteras*®—celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2006. Its success has gone far beyond what we originally expected, and now the project is branching out to help other wildlife—and to help humans, too.

The original impetus for the project was the decline in songbirds. These lovely birds are an important part of our ecosystem. Their decline could be a warning sign for the human species. So in 1996 Dr. Gil Boese, then president of the Zoological Society of Milwaukee (ZSM), founded BWB-ASF as a joint project of the non-profit ZSM and its conservation partner, the Foundation for Wildlife Conservation, Inc. (FWC). Dr. Boese hired researcher Vicki Piaskowski to be international coordinator of the project.

Last June BWB-ASF celebrated its anniversary by noting its success with each of its four goals. At a party held at Dragonfly Farm and bird habitat in Mequon, hosted by farm owners and BWB-ASF supporters Cheryl and Mark Brickman, Piaskowski and Dr. Boese summarized their success:

Goal No. 1: to do research on migratory and resident birds in Wisconsin and Belize in hopes of discovering what habitats are important to birds during all stages of their life cycle and how we can help them. Since 1997, 10,140 birds have been

banded at three Wisconsin study sites (Pewaukee, Rosendale and Land O' Lakes). This number is similar to the numbers of birds banded at large bird observatories, Piaskowski said. In Belize, since 1999

more than 4,500 birds have been banded at our three Belize study sites. The research has resulted in eight research papers published (or accepted for publication) in scientific journals, and more in preparation.

Goal No. 2: to apply the research results to conservation by compiling recommendations for landowners on how land can be managed to benefit birds. A 106-page guide for Belize landowners will be published by BWB-ASF in Belize this year, and a PDF of that report is now available on the ZSM's Web site: <http://www.zoosociety.org/bzlandowner>. Piaskowski said that a second guide, for Wisconsin, is in the works.

Goal No. 3: to educate children and adults about birds. "Since 1997, we have given more than 100 educational outreach talks and bird-banding demonstrations to the general public and schoolchildren in both Wisconsin and Belize," said Piaskowski. In addition, the ZSM presented bird-science classes to children in grades six through nine in 14 schools in Wisconsin, Michigan and



Belize. The Zoological Society's Education Department ran these classes, which included children doing field observation of birds at study sites near their schools. The ZSM and FWC also created a colorful, educational bird poster called Let's Protect Our Belizean Birds and distributed more than 2,500 copies in Belize.

Goal No. 4: to train Belizeans so that they could design and conduct further research independently. "In Wisconsin, we have had 18 college students or recent graduates work with us as interns," said Piaskowski. "Many have gone on to graduate school or continued in the research/conservation field. In Belize, 22 Belizeans have been trained while working with BWB-ASF, many of whom remain in the conservation field. We hired only Belizeans, and the expertise they acquired far surpassed our initial expectations. We now have a full-time, year-round staff of five Belizeans. Our Belize staff is proud to be the first Belizean nationals who have given scientific presentations and authored or co-authored scientific papers."

Producing so many scientific papers as well as a lay-person's guide while also being involved in extensive conservation and education programs is a significant achievement, said Dr. Boese. "The research went on for seven years. Not only were Vicki and the co-authors doing work in the field, but they also were publishing papers, giving presentations at meetings, and giving public talks. While the staff was doing bird banding, population censuses, and trying to determine the birds' breeding success and survival rates, other things would come up. One exciting find in Belize was the discovery of a mangrove vireo nest with eggs,

Shawn Graff and Cheryl White of Slinger observed birds during the 10th anniversary party for Birds Without Borders - *Aves Sin Fronteras*®, a project they have supported.



Vicki Piaskowski (right), international coordinator of Birds Without Borders - *Aves Sin Fronteras*®, met with donors to the project: Arlene Hansen and Fred Ott. Ott donated land near Rosendale, Wis.

which was previously undescribed by scientists. It was important to follow up on such a sighting, and so the staff made observations of the nest, sketches, photos, etc., and then published a paper on it. They would complete such shorter-term projects and get papers written while continuing on the longer term projects. It was a credit to Vicki and the entire team, even though they are spread out between

two countries, that they used their time so efficiently. It was a goal of BWB-ASF to get information out as quickly as possible, and they are doing that."

Now that the main goals are done or nearly done, BWB-ASF has expanded its mission, said Dr. Boese. BWB-ASF, under the auspices of the Foundation for Wildlife Conservation and in partnership with the ZSM, is now managing Runaway Creek Nature Preserve, which is owned by the FWC, and using the preserve as a field-study area. "We will continue to collect data on migratory and resident birds to help conserve them, but we also will study other wildlife. We are launching a series of action groups in partnership with other organizations that will focus on various species or orders of animals and plants." Already begun are field studies of endangered jaguars and rare jabiru storks. In early January Dr. Boese met with representatives of two universities and the Belize Zoo to launch a study of spider monkeys. And three other projects are in the works, including one to study a possible new plant species in the genus *Zamia* and two projects to help the people in Belize.

Through BWB-ASF Dr. Boese also is helping other groups to secure private land next to Runaway Creek Nature Preserve that can be turned into preserves. "The goal is to have multiple owners joining together under a philosophy of wisely managed, privately protected areas and then partnering with governments to better manage public areas. I see a need for a global movement to protect larger land areas. I think this will be critical to the future of the human race. These land areas are the oxygen sources." Boese also is on the boards of other groups that are working to create large wildlife preserves in Africa.

-By Paula Brookmire



Birds Without Borders - *Aves Sin Fronteras*® donors Scott Haag of Pewaukee and Susan Barbiere of Mequon (left) joined Lillian and Gil Boese of Pewaukee at the BWB-ASF anniversary party. Dr. Gil Boese is founder of the BWB-ASF project and is president of the Foundation for Wildlife Conservation, Inc.