



# ILLINOIS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## President's Message

Knowing about Illinois' current financial difficulties, it is disheartening to contemplate how much our state's wildlife conservation and natural resources management activities are being impacted by significant budget cuts. If some politicians have their way, more, even deeper cuts will occur. Short term impacts often produce dramatic headlines: State Park To Be Closed; No Funds Available! Occasionally, these draconian and unpopular decisions are reversed because of the attendant publicity and immediate public outcry.

But the real issue may be the more subtle, longer term budgetary constraints being imposed today on the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Natural History Survey. Capable, seasoned and dedicated wildlife professionals are leaving, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes not. Even as staffing levels shrink, money for basic operations has dried up, leading to situations where the professionals and the volunteers who work at their sides don't have enough money to provide fuel for vehicles, or herbicides to suppress non-native, invasive plants, as they struggle to maintain and enhance important habitats on a landscape scale. Coupled with that, there's no money available for large scale habitat acquisitions. Illinois ranks very low nationally in the amount of public land set aside for wildlife. We should be doing more to reverse that statistic, but the budget crunch makes that nearly impossible.

You may ask what does that have to do with IOS? A lot, I think! The Illinois Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, Chicago Wilderness and other organizations have picked up some of the slack. As an all volunteer organization, we don't have the financial resources of these conservation powerhouses. But we do have an impact, through the IOS Grants Program that you help support.

Each year we send out requests to universities and other public entities around the state, offering \$1,000 grants for bird related research. We always receive more worthwhile proposals than we have funds to provide, so a team of IOS members who are professional biologists review each proposal, and rank them on the quality and importance of the work. In 2010, we were able to fund six grants, thanks to you, our members, and thanks to the local birding clubs who reached into their pocket to provide support to the program. This year, IOS is giving \$6,000 toward grants, the most in our organization's history.

In this issue of *Meadowlark*, you can read in detail about those six projects. While the monies IOS provides are not large, they are significant. Why? Because we send a clear message along with the money. That message: IOS represents a constituency that cares about the future of birds in Illinois, and we will do what we can, going forward, to support the future ornithologists and wildlife biologists who care as much as we do about birds and their habitats here in Illinois.

I ask each of you, squeeze out a few extra bucks on top of your membership dues, so IOS can again increase our level of funding in 2011. Let me close by quoting Ben O'Neal, one of the 2010 grant recipients, now an Assistant Professor of Biology at Franklin College, right across the border in southeast Indiana.

"It has been a great joy being able to teach in the field I love so dearly." One of the great things about grants from IOS and others is that "it allows me to continue working with the American Golden-Plovers in Illinois and Indiana. We very much appreciate all IOS does!"

— Robert Fisher, President

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