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Guest Essay:

IOS grant program fulfills mission

BY MATTHEW MCKIM- LOUDER

For the past 150 years, Illinois has served as a powerhouse of ornithological science. Beginning with one of the earliest and most renowned ornithologists from Illinois, Robert Ridgway in the late 1800s, Illinois has been the home to many eminent avian researchers aiming to understand bird distributions, behaviors and, perhaps most importantly, the protection of bird populations. Thanks to the Illinois Ornithological Society and its grants program, the legacy of Illinois' impact on avian research will continue into the future.

One of the IOS's objectives is "To promote scientific research and education in order to improve knowledge and awareness of birds in Illinois." With more than \$53,000 in total grants awarded since the program's inception, providing funding to 44 applicants from nine universities and five private foundations, the IOS Grants Program has fulfilled this important objective. Projects awarded funding include population surveys investigating the distributions and habitat requirements of Illinois avian species, educational workshops promoting birding enthusiasm among our state's youth, and studies exploring bird behaviors and interactions with their environment. Many of these projects not only increase our understanding of Illinois birds, but also provide land managers with valuable information to ensure the survival of bird populations. The benefits of the IOS grants program can be directly appreciated through student publications in *The Meadowlark* and presentation at our society's annual meetings.

The generous support of IOS members and several birding organizations have made many research and educational projects possible that may have otherwise been underfunded or not feasible. With few funding opportunities for student researchers, the IOS Grants Program is more important than ever. As the number of graduate students has increased over the past decade, both large and small research grants have stagnated, particularly for projects focused on basic science or conservation. In turn, national research grants are more competitive, giving applicants less than a 20 percent chance of successfully receiving the research funding they need. This comes at a time when the technological innovations and novel ideas brought up by bright young minds are crucial to solving our current and future conservation crises while continuing to expand our understanding of birds in general.

As a graduate student and member of the birding community, I enthusiastically thank the members of the Illinois Ornithological Society and other generous organizations that have contributed funding to this remarkable program. I also implore the birding community of Illinois for their continued support, which is greatly needed by both the scientific and birding community of our state.

Matthew McKim Louder,

IOS Grants Program Chair

*PhD student, University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign*