

Leopold Scholarship Recipients

Submitted by Pat Kaiser, Leopold Scholarship Committee
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Back in 1994, the Wisconsin Chapter of the Wildlife Society (WCTWS) embarked on a 'Scholarship Award' for college students studying for degrees in conservation related fields such as wildlife management, ecology, biology, or related areas attending college's and university's in Wisconsin. The Leopold Scholarship Award was named in tribute and memory of Aldo Leopold, the noted Wisconsin Professor of Wildlife Conservation. To finance the program, in 1987 the WCTWS commissioned a wildlife print by Jonathan Wilde, a Wisconsin wildlife artist, titled -- "100th Anniversary Aldo Leopold Commemorative Print". After several years of the sale of these prints and other fund raising activities, the WCTWS was able to establish a \$500 scholarship. Annually, WCTWS Scholarship Committee of five chapter members requested, accepted and reviewed applications from college students, with one of the applicants receiving the award. So in 2008, Leopold Scholarship Award was presented for the 15th time.

Where Are They? In several past years the Scholarship Committee and some WCTWS members have asked, -- Where are those past recipients and what are they doing now? I too was intrigued by that question! Having been active with the Scholarship Committee from the beginning I decided to tackle the issue and do some background investigation. Locating some of those past students (three, in particular) and making contact with them was a trial and error process of its own. For a while I thought a couple of them had disappeared from the face of the earth and that the task of locating them was like a "Cold Case" file of the current TV series. However, with the assistance of informational leads from Dr. Scott Craven – UW, Madison and Dr. Eric Anderson – UW, Stevens Point even the 'Cold Case's' eventually unfolded and those former students were resurrected to real live people.

Eventually, as contact was made with each student and information was made known by each one of them regarding their continued studies, job experiences, career decisions, and current employment, – an appreciation for their true talents, gifts, determination to excel, dedication to the field of conservation unfolded. Some of the most recent recipients are still in their educational careers while the earlier recipients are experiencing exciting careers. I think the WCTWS can be very proud of the Leopold Scholarship Award winners. The following summary regarding each person will begin with the (1994) first scholarship recipient and follow thru to our 15th recipient of (2008).

(1994) Al Guggisberg – UW, Stevens Point. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife in 1994. Began work with US Forest Service in Sitka, AK as part of a research team evaluating alternative timber harvest patterns. Then worked with Univ. of Alaska as a database specialist in Fairbanks, AK and while there became interested in and started his own kennel for sled dogs. For 6 yrs. worked for ASF which is a NASA sponsored group that downlinks and processes satellite imagery for scientists around the world. Eventually began a new career as a carpenter and now owns his own construction company. He and his wife live in a log home north of Fairbanks with a family of 19 huskies. With his natural resources background he has testified at numerous local, state, and federal panels on natural resource related issues. (Cold Case #1)

(1995) Matt Becker – UW, Madison. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife, entomology, and biological aspects of conservation in 1996. Began work on research projects in Antarctica on penguins and seabirds in winter and then summer research projects on seabirds and shorebirds in Alaska for two years. Was a project manager for a chimp ecology project at Kibale NP in Uganda, Africa, also worked on African wild dogs in Botswana. Political instability forced him to leave Uganda! Then, worked on grizzly bear DNA project in Montana. In 2003, began work toward a PhD at Montana State University studying wolf – ungulate relationships in Yellowstone NP, and received PhD degree in May 2008. His work will be published with 66 other scientists in a book titled "Large Mammal Ecology in Central Yellowstone: A Synthesis of 16 Years of Integrated Field Studies. Now, 2008 begins work in Zambia, Africa as project manager for African Wild Dog Conservation project.

(1996) Carol Strojny – UW, Stevens Point. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife. Entered the Peace Corp and served 2 years as a volunteer in Bulgaria working on environmental programs. Went to the University of Maine and received a Master's degree in wildlife ecology with research on the effects of timber harvests on relative amphibian abundance. While in Maine, she worked as a seasonal technician with USFWS at Moosehorn NWR banding waterfowl, woodcock, and mapping wildlife habitat. Currently works for Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources as project leader for wetland monitoring program.

(1997) Laura (Denter) Huber – UW, Stevens Point. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife. For several years worked with the Wisconsin DNR as a LTE at the Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center of the Sandhill Wildlife Area. She taught basic wildlife-related concepts to (Kindergarden – college) students. The job included doing research on porcupines by trapping, tagging, and monitoring movements. This was part of a High School Independent Studies Program. Now married and raising a family with her husband, she is a stay at home Mom, but is still connected with conservation work as a volunteer. She is the treasurer of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, secretary for the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame, and on the Board of Directors of the Golden Sands Resource Conservation & Development Council. Also, she still finds time to hunt, fish and hike.

(1998) Travis Booms – UW, Stevens Point. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife and biology in 1999. Pursued and received a Master's degree in Raptor Biology from Boise State University in 2002. Thesis work was a study of Gyrfalcon breeding ecology and food habits in Greenland. He was a Biological Science Technician for USFWS at Yukon Delta NWR, Alaska for summer season of 2002. Currently is working toward a PhD degree in Zoology at Univ. of Alaska Fairbanks with continued study of Gyrfalcon Breeding Ecology on the Yukon Delta NWR and across Alaska. He expects to graduate in spring of 2009. Also, he has written and published several gyrfalcon related articles in scientific journals. Would like to become employed as a college/university professor or non-game biologist with a state/federal agency.

(1999) Jamie (Drossel) Nack – UW, Stevens Point. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife and biology in 1999. Went on to graduate school at UW-Madison and received a Master's degree in wildlife ecology in 2002. Her research and thesis was on the effects of predators and cattle on ground-nesting birds in southwestern Wisconsin pastures. Since then she has been employed in wildlife education as the Extension Wildlife Outreach Specialist at the Dept. of Forest and Wildlife Ecology, in Madison, WI. She is married to wildlife professional, Robert Nack, and they recently became proud parents of daughter 'Karlee'. She has remained very active in other wildlife related functions and currently serves as the President of the WCTWS.

(2000) Angela (Wiegel) Wescott – UW, Stevens Point. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife and biology, and a minor in military science in 2001. After graduation she entered the military as US Army Officer with a Military Police occupational specialty. She has served; a) in Korea as a platoon leader, b) in Alaska as a provost marshal at Ft. Wainwright and, operations officer at Ft. Richardson, c) in Missouri at Ft. Leonard Wood she got a Master's degree in Business and Organizational Security Management, d) served in Baghdad, Iraq, e) now in Colorado, she is Captain Wescott at Ft. Carson. Her husband was a seasonal hunting and fishing guide in Alaska. Whenever retirement from the military occurs, they expect to return to Alaska and she hopes to obtain a job in wildlife management. (Cold Case #2)

(2001) Matt Ruwaldt – UW, Madison. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife ecology in 2001. Upon graduation, he completed the Peace Corp Trainee program. In 2002, he worked with Wisconsin DNR Natural Areas program as a LTE assisting with prairie management activities. Also worked as a research assistant for the Cooperative North American Shotgun Education Program. From 2003 – 2007, was a Habitat Project Director for Wisconsin Waterfowl Association. Part of 2007, worked on a salmon study project for Oregon Department of Fish and Game. Currently, he works with Plum Creek Timber in Coos Bay, Oregon as a Biotech Crew Leader. Work activity includes monitoring and inventorying spotted owl populations and murrelet nesting on Plum Creek Timber properties.

(2002) Louise Venne – UW, Stevens Point. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife and chemistry in 2003. Immediately she moved to Lubbock, TX and began a research project to obtain a Master's degree in Environmental Toxicology at Texas Tech University. Her research focused on the effects of land use on amphibian community composition in playa wetlands. She graduated with the Master's degree – March 2006. Then she was employed with MACTECH Engineering and Consulting, Inc. in Georgia working on numerous projects involving contamination, ecological risk assessments, and feasibility studies. Continues to work for MACTECH on a limited basis at Gainesville, FL, but is now at the University of Florida in the Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Department to begin the PhD program. She is also enrolled in a National Science Foundation funded 'Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship program which trains PhD students to experience adaptive management techniques for waters, wetlands, and watersheds while still in school. This training has included experiences in the Everglades of south Florida, and Botswana, Africa.

(2003) Matthew Schmidt – UW, Stevens Point. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in chemistry and biology and Minor in natural resources management in 2004. In 2004, he entered the University of Iowa and enrolled in the PhD program in Medicinal and Natural Products Chemistry. This program and his PhD project looks for new chemicals in nature with biological activity and explore their therapeutic potential, to hopefully develop a new treatment for a given human ailment. He now continues field research at the University of Kansas where his major advisor moved to in 2007, and Matt expects to graduate in 2009. (Cold Case #3)

(2004) Ryan Schmitz – UW, Platteville. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in biology in 2004. Immediately after graduation he worked as a private consultant involving avian research projects along the Upper Mississippi River. Then worked in north-central Montana studying nesting success of mountain plovers and survival of sage grouse, then worked in Utah at the Great Salt Lake assessing snowy plover distribution and abundance. In 2006, he began a Master's degree program in Biology at Ft. Hays State University in Kansas. His research project involves investigation the influence of abiotic factors on habitat use by bald eagles wintering along the Upper Mississippi River corridor. He hopes to graduate in 2009.

(2005) Benjamin Pauli – Lawrence University. Graduated with a Bachelor's degree in biology in 2005. Upon graduation, he worked at the Cedar Creek Long Term Ecological Research Station in Minnesota evaluating the effects of prescribe burn regimes on small mammal communities. In 2007, he started a Master's degree project at Purdue University pursuing a degree in Forestry and Natural Resources. The project involves investigating raccoon recolonization of forest habitat that had been removed.

(2006) Amy VanderVoort – UW, Madison. Graduated with 'two' Bachelor's degree (1) wildlife ecology and (1) plant pathology in 2006. Since graduation she has worked with Colorado Division of Wildlife assisting with trapping and radio collaring Greater sage grouse; then worked with Utah Department of Wildlife Resources conducting black-footed ferret surveys and releases. Currently she works with Pennsylvania Game Commission trapping and radio collaring whitetail deer. Future plans include applying for graduate school in 2008.

(2007) Ashley Gramza – UW, Madison. Will graduate with a Bachelor's degree in wildlife ecology in May 2008. Upon graduating she has a job awaiting with Minnesota DNR working with timber rattlesnakes in southeastern Minnesota. This will include capturing and tracking gravid females as well as doing a road mortality study and conducting landowner workshops to educate them on the importance of these reptiles as part of the natural environment. Future plans still include an interest of working in the Peace Corp, and then graduate school.

(2008) Linda Christine Lyon – UW, Madison. Currently is working on a second Bachelor's degree this being in wildlife ecology. Previously received a Bachelor's degree in anthropology from UCLA in 1992. Since arriving in Madison she has conducted independent research projects involving waterfowl and disease. Also, she does volunteer work for the USGS – National wildlife Health Center in Madison on a avian cholera project. Upon graduation she hopes to continue studies in wildlife health and disease.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude and Thank You to all these students for providing us (WCTWS) this information. Your education and work experiences can inspire other students to move forward with their goals to become educated and work in the wildlife profession.