



Embargoed Until:

October 7, 2009

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National Innovation Grant Establishes Beidler Forest as Research Station for Threatened Prothonotary Warblers

Funds Support Continuation of Volunteer-Supported Project PROTHO

One of 48 *TogetherGreen* national Innovation Grants will support wetland restoration and conservation volunteerism to increase the number of threatened Prothonotary Warblers, whose population has suffered a 50% loss in 40 years. Audubon South Carolina, the Clemson University Master Naturalist Program, and Orangeburg Consolidated School District #3 are teaming up to continue the Project PROTHO initiative by restoring wetland habitat and helping to bolster the threatened Prothonotary Warbler's population, while engaging the local community in the entire process.

The \$20,000 grant will allow Project PROTHO to restore 103 acres of breeding habitat within Four Holes Swamp, attracting and encouraging Prothonotary Warblers to stay and nest—and improving the health of the local environment for wildlife and humans alike. Student and naturalist volunteers will also help make and place 300 nest boxes made out of recycled materials, providing the warblers with the nesting cavities that have gone missing throughout the forest due to logging.

Engaging Orangeburg County elementary school students in building nest boxes for Prothonotary Warblers and having the local Master Naturalist groups install the boxes in degraded habitat will involve young and old in the restoration of this bird's breeding habitat," said Jeff Mollenhauer, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon South Carolina.

With healthier habitat and more nesting spaces, the Prothonotary Warbler population will grow; and with more experiences to get outside, experience the beauty of Beidler Forest, and work with Prothonotary Warblers up close, community members will become a group of dedicated environmental stewards. By combining restoration of ecologically-important wetlands ecosystems with education and engaging community members, Audubon South Carolina hope to ensure the survival of the iconic Prothonotary Warblers.

"The Coastal Master Naturalists are delighted to offer their membership the opportunity to fulfill their citizen science volunteer hours by helping with The Prothonotary Warbler Project," said Judith Kramer of Coastal Master Naturalists.

The South Carolina innovation grant is part of \$1.1 million awarded by the *TogetherGreen* initiative this year. Audubon and Toyota launched the five-year *TogetherGreen* initiative in 2008 to fund conservation projects, train environmental leaders, and offer volunteer opportunities that significantly benefit the environment. Grantees were selected from scores of applicants across America. Funds were awarded to Audubon organizations that demonstrated exceptional innovation in working with other groups on projects that will produce tangible benefits for environmental quality.

“Conserving wildlife through hands-on learning is of utmost importance, and we’re proud to be able to help these groups achieve that,” said *TogetherGreen* Project Manager Judy Braus.

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About *TogetherGreen*

Audubon and Toyota launched the five-year *TogetherGreen* initiative in 2008 to build the promise of a greener, healthier future through innovation, leadership and volunteerism. Nearly 90 projects totaling more than \$2.5 million dollars have received Innovation Grants to protect land, water, and energy resources nationwide. For more information, visit www.togethergreen.org.

About Audubon

Now in its second century, Audubon connects people with birds, nature and the environment that supports us all. Our national network of community-based nature centers, chapters, scientific, education, and advocacy programs engages millions of people from all walks of life in conservation action to protect and restore the natural world. To learn more, visit www.audubon.org

About Toyota

Toyota (NYSE: TM) established operations in the United States in 1957 and currently operates 10 manufacturing plants. Toyota is committed to being a good corporate citizen in the communities where it does business and believes in supporting programs with long-term sustainable results. Toyota supports numerous organizations across the country, focusing on education, the environment and safety. Since 1991, Toyota has contributed more than \$464 million to philanthropic programs in the U.S. For more information on Toyota's commitment to improving communities nationwide, visit www.toyota.com/community.