



Embargoed for Release:
October 7, 2009

Contact:
Taryn Martinez (212) 979-3185 / tmartinez@audubon.org
Doreen Whitley (614-545-5481) / dwhitley@audubon.org

National Innovation Grant Engages Volunteers to Increase Columbus Biodiversity

Support Will Launch Campaign That Helps Community Members to “Save Our Shrubs”

One of 48 newly-announced *TogetherGreen* national innovation grants will enable the Grange Insurance Audubon Center to launch a creative new program that will reduce invasive Amur honeysuckle, boost the health of native plant and wildlife species, and provide local students and residents with opportunities to learn valuable skills, while increasing the safety of their neighborhoods.

Amur honeysuckle, while not posing any problems in its origin countries of China, Japan and Korea, is incredibly invasive in the United States. All across Columbus, Ohio, Amur Honeysuckle dominates the native forest, choking out native shrub species that birds and other wildlife depend on for survival.

A \$50,000 grant will power a partnership between Grange Insurance Audubon Center, the Columbus Urban League and Franklin County Metro Parks to launch the Save our Shrubs campaign to target backyards for honeysuckle removal within a 5 mile radius of the Scioto Audubon Metro Park. Backyards will be identified by capturing aerial data and homeowners will be invited to participate in a series of workshops, trips to the Audubon center and a tool kit to remove the honeysuckle and replace it with a native shrub. At the same time, local high school students will assist the Audubon Center staff in mapping the Important Bird Area’s response to the ongoing Amur Honeysuckle removal and native plant replacement. Students taking part will be able to receive high school and intern credit.

“This grant allows us to expand the geographic scope of our work by reducing the seed bank of honeysuckle,” said Doreen Whitley, Conservation Program Coordinator for Grange Insurance Audubon Center. “This is a great benefit to birds and their nests, as well as to Columbus residents and their families.”

The partners have been working to control honeysuckle within the park and learned the best methods by using mapping technology. Since the removal, more than 250 new native plants replaced honeysuckle in park and there has been a reduction in crime at the site. The Columbus Urban League and other downtown settlement house and community centers will host Save Our Shrubs workshops to participants and assist in providing outreach in the community.

“We are so excited to partner with Audubon to beautify the City of Columbus one backyard at a time, while continuing to protect our new park,” said Ovell Harrison, Director of Education and Prevention at the Columbus Urban League.

The Grange Insurance Audubon Center 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.

“The real innovation here is involving community members in hands-on conservation efforts, and we’re excited to be able to support it,” said *TogetherGreen* Project Manager Judy Braus.

###

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 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 about Audubon’s nationwide efforts to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, 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.