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National Innovation Grant Supports Community Efforts to Conserve Urban Birds

Support Will Recognize Communities That Help Protect Declining Urban Bird Populations

One of 48 newly-announced *TogetherGreen* national innovation grants will enable the Milwaukee Audubon Society to bring together Wisconsin communities to protect declining bird populations through hands-on conservation activities. Successful urban bird protection will give those communities another honor: Bird City Wisconsin recognition through Audubon Milwaukee's creative new initiative.

In development by Milwaukee Audubon Society, Bird City Wisconsin is modeled on the successful nationwide program Tree City USA, a community improvement project sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation. The Bird City Wisconsin program will address an increasing problem in Wisconsin and elsewhere: the decline of urban bird populations. Chimney Swift populations in Wisconsin, for example, have declined by more than two percent annually for the last 28 years, while the Purple Martin – which nests in colonial boxes often near water – has declined by six percent over the same period.

The \$8,000 grant will power the partnership among Milwaukee Audubon Society, the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, Wisconsin Audubon Council, the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison Audubon Society and the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin to develop the criteria for Bird City recognition, identify five communities interested in working towards the certification, and prepare for a public launch of the program in 2010.

“Recognition as a Bird City will be a feather in the cap of any Wisconsin community,” said Andrew Struck, president of the Milwaukee Audubon Society. “This program will recognize conservation efforts already under way and spur other cities, counties, towns and villages to adopt the best practices we will spotlight,” added Struck, who also is director of the Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Department.

Bird City Wisconsin participants can learn how to protect and manage green space, landscape with native plants in backyards and parks, adopt architecture and lighting systems that reduce collisions, and many other tools hospitable to breeding, wintering, and migrating birds which seek safe places to spend time and find food.

“We are excited to see this program taking flight,” said Noel Cutright, past president of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. “It’s an innovative idea we have long supported and are grateful to *TogetherGreen* for making it part of its national initiative.”

The Milwaukee Audubon Society 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 efforts is critical, and we’re proud to be able to help Wisconsin communities 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 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.