

## 2013 Tudor Richard Award

*As presented by David Ries at the New Hampshire Audubon Annual Meeting, September 28, 2013.*

New Hampshire Audubon's Tudor Richards Award is presented each year to someone who best exemplifies Tudor's love and knowledge of the outdoors, and who works tirelessly and effectively for conservation in the state. The 2013 award goes to Francie Von Mertens.



If Tudor Richards were here today he might well observe, "It's about time!" Francie's life is all about commitment to the natural world. She's a land conservation activist, a natural teacher, a writer, and a doer. When she takes something on, Francie sees it through.

Francie was key to the success of the latest additions to New Hampshire Audubon's Willard Pond Wildlife Sanctuary including fundraising to, at long last, complete the protection of the entire shoreline of the pond. In her various local capacities, Francie has spearheaded land conservation campaigns in Peterborough, where, as Meade Cadot of the Harris Center puts it, she has served conservation "for an eternity." According to Meade, Francie's involvement and support for Cobb Hill area protection led to the largest fee interest gift of land the Harris Center has ever received.

Francie never hesitates to act on behalf of the natural world, even when that action is challenging. The state Site Evaluation Committee hearings in which Audubon participated this past fall are a case in point. Francie was one of four people to testify on behalf of our petition before the State Committee concerning a proposal for industrial wind turbines on land adjacent to Willard Pond, a sanctuary she has championed.

But Francie isn't just protecting land and advocating for wildlife! Like Tudor, she shares her love and knowledge of birds, wildlife, and the outdoors with all who are interested. Francie leads many birding related field trips in the Monadnock Region each year and teaches a very popular short course, Birding by Ear. According to Hunt Dowse, who served on the Board of the Harris Center with Francie,

*"Her knowledge of the outdoors is close to legendary. Taking a hike with her is a treat, there's so much information passed on while on the trail. More importantly, Francie has a clear vision of the big picture of the goals for conservation in New Hampshire".*

Peterborough Town Administrator Pam Brenner echoed these thoughts in observing that Francie not only sees and acts on a conservation need, but she takes the time to explain to town officials why the action is important.

Francie also uses her skills as a writer to help people better understand and appreciate the natural world. She writes all the Something Wild scripts for NH Audubon's Chris Martin and for nearly two decades she has written a widely read column in the *Monadnock Ledger* called The Backyard Birder. Her first column on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1994 opened with,

*“Beginning birders discover new species all the time. Once we start looking, we find a world we never knew about not far from our back doors. I started a few years ago— in the backyard at first... Yardbird #116 showed up not long ago... a cuckoo, my first ever—a life bird...”*

A decade later, her June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2003 column was titled: “Monadnock’s birds—in the Steps of a legend.” It began,

*“Twice this past week I climbed Monadnock early, paper in hand, counting birds heard along the Dublin Trail on the first climb, and then Pumpelly today. Pumpelly Trail is a long haul. Some 40 years ago, Tudor Richards—a legend in the New Hampshire birding world—did a count of Monadnock’s birds. His route is the one I follow in an attempt to make a comparison. I did counts in 1995, 1996 and 1999 with some helpers along. I imagine Tudor striding across the mountain, making quick work of it, and decided that two climbs by a normal human would be the best approximation of Tudor’s one traverse up the Dublin Trail and down Pumpelly... This morning at times, Pumpelly seemed too great a physical challenge. I worked hard to concentrate on the company of Winter Wrens, Hermit Thrushes (six), Henry David Thoreau, and the Mountain....”*

With motivation like hers, Francie cannot help but be a natural leader for conservation issues. Hunt Dowse described Francie as,

*“a tireless organizer for whatever organization she's involved with, showing her strong leadership qualities in many ways. Her inspirational thinking cuts across any number of organizations large and small. But it's her persistence in keeping others focused on the goals that makes her so special. Anyone who has had the joy of working with Francie knows that she rarely backs away from a position that is clearly in the best interests of conservation.”*

She served on the Board of New Hampshire Audubon for ten years and was made an honorary trustee in 2006, remaining active in a variety of capacities. She served on the board of the Harris Center during some important times in the growth and development of the organization and afterwards was elected the second honorary trustee in the history of the Harris Center. Francie understands the importance of philanthropy and raising money for the causes she cares about. When on the Board of the Harris Center she co-chaired the major capital campaign that resulted in the complete restoration of the Harris Center building into the green, energy saving, open delight that it is now.

She is quick to appreciate when something needs to get done, and she does not hesitate to step into the breach, sometimes as a lead advocate, sometimes as an educator, and sometimes simply as another hand to get the job done. And it seems like virtually nothing goes unattended, from her vigorous war against invasive species on protected Peterborough properties to her annual potluck for supporters and volunteers of the Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory. Francie’s love of the natural world shines through in big and small ways.

It is with great pleasure that New Hampshire Audubon presents the 2013 Tudor Richard’s Award to Francie Von Mertens.