

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Presentation Speech for Margot Johnson, 6/4/05

The Volunteer of the Year Award is presented annually by New Hampshire Audubon in recognition of exceptional volunteer service to the organization. It has taken us more than five years to persuade this year's recipient to accept this award which she so well deserves. Service without recognition is a central part of Margot Johnson's character. She has been coming in faithfully once a week to volunteer in the Concord office since April of 1989. Most of the time she has been in my office, spending countless hours doing tedious office work for NH Bird Records and chipping in on any of the various jobs I come up with. I hate to think how many times she has handled or copied rare bird documentation forms over the years. If by any chance I don't have enough to keep her busy, she is willing and able to do for other departments whatever needs to be done. I've heard her say she has volunteered in just about every office in the building at some time or other, and neither of us want to remember how many times she has helped me move my office with its multiple file cabinets and boxes. Whether it is stuffing, labeling, copying or whatever the task, she always responds with a smile – although the copier provides challenges even to her optimistic demeanor.

Margot's volunteering for Audubon goes beyond the Silk Farm center. For many years she was a Winter Eagle Survey volunteer, enduring the frigid New England winters searching for brown blobs on the banks of the Merrimack River. She has also been the chief cook and bottle washer for the White Mountain National Forest Survey Teams. This meant hauling not only food but often water into camp and cleaning out the debris that had accumulated over winter. There's nothing like opening the oven door to cook, only to find dead mice that need to be removed first unless they're to become a part of the crew's first breakfast. Over 7 years she cooked the equivalent of at least 105 individual meals, feeding 15 people for 5 days each training season, in weather that varied from hot and buggy to cold and blowing snow in unheated buildings.

She has also been a volunteer for Harrier Day, Great Blue Heron rookery counts, and Osprey Weekend. She is a Friend of Lake Umbagog and still ventures up North to lend a hand. She often can be seen at the Annual Meetings, as well as helping set up the Book Sale – although that might not have been exactly what she was expecting to do that day. The Christmas Fair and Enchanted Forest can always count on her as one of their bakers.

Dependable is another word to describe her – if it's Wednesday you know Margot will be here. She even kept up her rigorous volunteering schedule despite a broken wrist one winter. What others might have considered a reason to retire she looked upon as a challenge. The staff can also count on being treated to some of her delicious home-baked goodies every week, and we have been known to plan our lunch visits around Margot's schedule. Many times she has brought a pot of homemade soup, or an apple pie for all to share. Lunch time provides everyone an opportunity to listen to her many stories of times past at Audubon or the trips shared with friends.

Margot always has a smile on her face and her pleasing demeanor, with a twist of her English accent, make her a delight to be around. She won the hearts of every crew she cooked for in the White Mountains, all of whom invited her to move to their summer base camp and cook for them. In the words of one crew member's poem, "starving birders want to say, we're sure glad Margot came our way!" Though in her eighties, her energy and enthusiasm are far beyond most of us who are half her age. We are grateful to Margot for her help over the years, and also for her spirit and commitment which inspire all of us to keep working towards the New Hampshire Audubon goals that we all share.

I am delighted to finally be able to present Margot Johnson with this year's Volunteer of the Year Award. [R. Suomala presented, nomination by K. Palfy]