

2014 Tudor Richards Award

As presented by Paul Nickerson at the New Hampshire Audubon Annual Meeting, September 20, 2014.

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 2014 award goes to Eric Orff.



Eric Orff (right) receiving the 2014 Tudor Richards Award from Paul Nickerson.

For 40 years, Eric Orff has championed New Hampshire's wildlife, often as the lead voice for changes both in attitude and public policy. Eric was hired as the state's first bear biologist in the 1970s, back when there was a year-round open season on just about any animal that could be shot or trapped, bears included. He worked to establish a closed hunting season that directly led to black bear recovery, and closed seasons for furbearing species soon followed, including fishers and trapping coyotes.

Talk with Eric about his advocacy for wildlife once viewed as varmints and you'll hear him say, "I just wanted to get them some respect," along with hunting limits that led to population recoveries.

Eric's support for unpopular animals included bats, many, many years before white nose syndrome and concern about population collapse. Back when the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department could issue permits to spray attics with DDT for bats, Eric took action. As a first step, he started a bat exclusion business, sealing off attic access to bats so they couldn't return and take up occupancy the next spring. As a second step, when updating NH Fish & Game's rules for wildlife control companies, he added a few key words: that killing bats was prohibited; exclusion was the only option for bat control.

For decades Eric's license plate was BATMAN, and remember that this was years before bats became a concern known to all. Bat phobia was scarier than DDT, a pesticide that can persist in a house for decades. Once again, Eric was ahead of his time. That's not always easy.

When he retired from NH Fish & Game in 2007, Eric joined the National Wildlife Federation staff out of a shared concern for the impacts of climate change on wildlife. As a frequent speaker at sportsmen's gatherings, he talks about those impacts—and he admits the reception has been mixed. In his words: "Well, it's been a battle, way tougher than I ever imagined." Fortunately Eric doesn't mind a battle.

His science-based background as a wildlife biologist and strong ties with the hunting and fishing community give his advocacy great credibility and effectiveness with sportsmen and women, and in Washington, DC and Concord, NH. As a Governor-appointed member of the NH Fish & Game Commission, his focus on climate change has changed some minds there, too.

His talks on climate change often include a panel of specialists that he assembled, including New Hampshire Audubon's Pam Hunt, speaking to the impacts on birds. He also leads the National Wildlife Federation's "Save the Moose" campaign that focuses on the charismatic moose. He hands out a small stuffed-animal moose with an attached tag that tells it like it is, in straight talk typical of Eric:

Moose have already begun to feel the negative effects of climate change. Not only is summer heat stress leaving some moose too thin to give birth to calves, warmer winters have caused spikes in the number of (winter) ticks—devastating moose populations.

Climate change is already impacting moose.

We must take immediate action and major steps to reduce carbon pollution—the cause of climate change.

Just like Tudor Richards, Eric is a straight shooter who holds strong views. He often is the first to advocate changes in policy or to raise awareness among state agencies, the public, and legislators about pressing natural resource issues.

It is with great pleasure that New Hampshire Audubon presents the 2014 Tudor Richards Award to Eric Orff.

