

ILLINOIS



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FINK MEMORIAL AWARD WINNER ANNOUNCED

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois Conservation Foundation (ICF) has named Shawn Duncan of Carbondale, Illinois as this year’s recipient of the Todd Fink Memorial Award, presented annually to a student from Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) for graduate research excellence focusing on threatened and endangered species of plants and animals.

Duncan is a graduate student in the Department of Zoology at SIUC and will receive a \$500.00 stipend from the ICF for travel costs associated with research and registration costs.

“The ICF is proud to support research efforts like those in which Mr. Duncan is involved, furthering our knowledge and understanding of the ways we can protect and enhance populations of threatened and endangered species,” said Mark Spangler, executive director of the Illinois Conservation Foundation.

Shawn Duncan’s thesis work involves studying changes in the grassland bird assemblages on reclaimed mined lands. Grassland birds face considerable conservation challenges. The majority of prairie and pasture grasslands in Illinois have been lost to habitat destruction. Recent work has shown mined land grasslands can provide habitats comparable to Midwest grasslands. Additionally, mined land grasslands have been identified as refuges for rare grassland bird species like the state-listed Henslow’s sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*).

Duncan’s research involves characterization of habitat use by Henslow’s sparrows and developing a habitat model for reclaimed surface mines. SIUC continues to do important research on Illinois state and federally endangered species.

“Studies leading to better protection and management of grassland birds and their habitat are a high priority of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources,” said Don McFall, chief of the IDNR Division of Natural Heritage. “Todd Fink certainly had an interest in grassland birds, so supporting Mr. Duncan in his research seems appropriate for this fund.”

The fund was established to honor Todd Fink, a highly-regarded biologist and ornithologist with the IDNR, who died in 1995 at the age of 36. Since 1996, fifteen graduate students from SIUC have received stipends from the Todd Fink Memorial Fund to support research on Illinois’ rarest species.

To contribute to the Todd Fink Memorial Fund or to learn more about the Illinois Conservation Foundation, a 501(c)(3) not-for profit corporation, contact the Illinois Conservation Foundation, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271, phone 217/785-2003.