

## **Memorial Resolution for Mara McDonald**

**October 11, 1947 – July 3, 2016**

Mara MacDonald, a former staff member in the Department of Genetics and Administrator of the James F. Crow Institute for the Study of Evolution, passed away unexpectedly in July of 2016. Mara will be remembered by both her academic and nonacademic friends and colleagues as a quintessential educator. In her administrative position in the Laboratory of Genetics, she provided unofficial counsel for numerous graduate students. As a master bird bander, she created the Biocore Prairie Bird Observatory, a program to provide student opportunities for ornithological field experience and research projects. At her field station in the Lakeshore Nature Preserve, students and assorted citizen scientists not only learned how to band birds, but also received a wealth of information about bird ecology, evolution, and conservation.

Mara received a Master's degree in ornithology from UC California-Berkeley and a PhD from the University of Florida, and conducted post-doctoral research at UCLA. Her fieldwork was done in the back country of Haiti, where she studied speciation among the palm tanagers of the Caribbean. Among her major discoveries was that palm tanagers aren't tanagers at all, but a distinct family of songbird.

After moving to Madison, Mara taught in the Department of Plant Pathology, and subsequently held an academic staff position in the Department of Genetics. There she was instrumental in organizing the annual Darwin Day Symposia, and helped to establish and served as Administrator of the Jim Crow Institute. Through all these activities, Mara was noted as a quintessential boundary crosser, bringing together scientists from many disciplines. She also went out of her way to support students. As one student noted, whether as part of Darwin Day, bird banding, grant/fellowship writing, or just checking up on students in passing, pretty much every grad student in genetics or the evolution community interacted with Mara at some point

Mara's passion for science and evolutionary studies was expressed in many ways both within and outside the University community. For example, she facilitated a Zoology and Evolution Reading Group in the Department of Genetics, organized a series of classes on evolution for the First Unitarian Society of Madison, and presented classes on bird ecology to summer land management interns in the Lakeshore Nature Preserve.

As a strong advocate for the place of women in science, Mara also felt passionately about gender equality in the broader culture. She was active in the fight for civil rights and social justice. In addition to her passion for birds, Mara was actively involved with the Dane County Humane Society, and gave a safe home to many problem pets.

Mara MacDonald was a positive presence in both the UW-Madison and broader Dane County communities. She is missed by colleagues and friends in each of these arenas.

*Respectfully submitted by Patricia Becker, Helen Denne Schulte Professor Emerita, UW-Madison School of Nursing; and David Baum, Professor, UW-Madison Department of Botany*