



In Memory: Dr. Hugh Iltis

In December, the world lost a great conservation champion, and The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin said goodbye to the last of its three founders, Dr. Hugh Iltis.

“Hugh was a force of nature and for nature. He inspired us with his passion for Wisconsin’s special places,” said Mary Jean Huston, who directs the Conservancy’s work in Wisconsin. “In addition to being one of our three founders, Hugh is also personally responsible for making the case to conserve many of Wisconsin’s best places; places like Chiewaukee Prairie, Spring Green Prairie and the Baraboo Hills.”

In 1960, together with Gene Roark and University of Wisconsin Madison professor Joseph Hickey, Hugh founded The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin. Aware that special places were being lost and, along with them, the plant and animal life they harbored, he joined with others who firmly believed in the importance of conserving our native habitats for future generations.

Hugh served on the Conservancy’s board for 16 years, when the organization was entirely led by volunteers. His knowledge of plant taxonomy and systematics was invaluable in helping the fledgling organization identify and prioritize the natural areas it would seek to protect.

In April 2017, he was inducted into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of

Fame posthumously in recognition of the tremendous impact he had on conservation in Wisconsin, nationally and globally. We share a few comments from friends and colleagues who supported Hugh’s nomination.

“Hugh stressed conservation from the time he first set foot on the University of Wisconsin campus. Carrying on in the tradition of John Muir and Aldo Leopold, he made everyone who would listen aware of the beauties of Wisconsin, of the way they had been ravaged, and of the importance of conserving them and creating a stable state that would remain beautiful for generations to come.” **Peter Raven, President Emeritus, Missouri Botanical Garden**

“Dr. Iltis was the co-describer of the fourth known species of *Zea*, namely *Z. diploperennis*, a perennial species found in 1978 in the Manantlán mountains of Mexico. Subsequently he was recognized as the godfather of Mexico’s newly established Manantlán Biosphere Reserve. That discovery of perennial corn has had a profound influence on the selection and adoption of new disease resistant varieties of corn for Wisconsin and other parts of the globe.” **Orie Loucks, Former Chair, the Scientific Areas Preservation Council of Wisconsin**

“Hugh Iltis has been a friend of ours for over 40 years. If you’re a friend of his, you are,



LEFT: © Brent Nicastro ABOVE: Hugh Iltis (right) and Phil Sander at Chiewaukee Prairie in 1966. © The Nature Conservancy

by default, a student of his because not a moment goes by when you aren’t learning something. It is because of our association with a force like Hugh that in 1988 we bought a 120-acre woods and fallow crop field surrounded by a nice fringe of remnant prairie and savanna with a nascent population of state-threatened, federally-endangered Kameron blue butterflies. We have dedicated our retired lives to its restoration and management. The butterflies have increased 200 fold.”

David and Shelley Hamel

A distinguished scientist, teacher, environmentalist and passionate spokesperson for conservation, Hugh dedicated his life to understanding our natural world and conserving it. We miss his passion and the bold voice he gave to the lands, waters, plants and animals we love and work so diligently to protect.

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