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Wildlife specialist to retire from UW-Stevens Point

From birds to bats and everything in between, zoologist James Hardin has captured, identified and studied wildlife with his students and colleagues since joining the faculty in 1978. A professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point's (UWSP) College of Natural Resources (CNR), Hardin will retire this month.

As a young man he could not get enough of the eastern Kentucky woods and the wildlife found within that forest ecosystem. Youthful curiosity ultimately led Hardin to become a zoologist.

His career highlights include time spent at CNR summer camps. He spent seven summers teaching wildlife courses for CNR majors at the Clam Lake Research facility, then Hardin's summer work shifted in the mid-1980s from Clam Lake to the Treehaven Field Station, where he has taught wildlife courses and plant identification each summer.

Hardin helped craft UWSP's captive wildlife minor in the late 1980s. He began capturing wildlife as a boy and it carried over into his adulthood when in his mid-20s, he became certified in wildlife banding by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He first captured and banded bats, now he mostly does bird banding. Today there are about 90 students pursuing a minor in captive wildlife at UWSP.

The spring 1991 semester found Hardin leading a UWSP semester abroad program to Australia and New Zealand. "This was a rewarding experience for my wife, Ellen, and me," said Hardin.

"We both became enamored with the people and the diversity and richness of wildlife in that part of the world and one of our retirement goals is to go back for a lengthy visit to the South Pacific," Hardin says.

It's not uncommon to find him spending time with his students beyond the classroom. Hardin has advised the student Wildlife Society for more than 10 years and UWSP's student chapter has on numerous occasions been named the top chapter in the nation. Each year students in the society devote well over 2,000 volunteer hours to wildlife programs throughout Central Wisconsin.

Throughout the years, Hardin and his students have researched many different species of wildlife including the endangered Karner Blue Butterfly, striped skunks, flickers,

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white-tail deer, bluebirds, Foresters Terns, Venezuelan Black-hooded Red Siskins and greater prairie chickens. The largest mammal he has studied is the Key Deer in Florida and his master's work was on the endangered Indiana bat.

Hardin also has shared his time with the governance of both the CNR and the campus. Through the years, he has served on the Faculty Senate, Graduate Council, Animal Care and Use Committee, and various search and screen committees, to name a few. In addition, he has been a consultant on wildlife to Sentry Insurance, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the city of Stevens Point, the Portage County Humane Society and the Raptor Education Group, Inc.

A 1982 and 2001 UWSP Excellence in Teaching Award recipient, he was named the CNR's Outstanding Faculty Member in 1982, 1989, 1996 and 2001. He was the recipient of the 1989 and 1996 National Association of Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture Teaching Award of Merit.

"I've worked on three other campuses besides UWSP, including a Division I school, and I've never witnessed greater collegiality and enthusiasm among the faculty and students as I have here in Stevens Point," Hardin says.

He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in zoology from the University of Kentucky and a Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University.

An avid birder, Hardin has his own aviary that includes siskins, finches and many other types of birds. He and his wife also plan to continue to raise golden retrievers and stay in the area. They are planning some trips beyond Wisconsin, including a return visit to Australia and New Zealand. In addition, he will continue to tinker on his property with bird banding, wetland upkeep and watching Karner Blue Butterflies grace the landscape.