

EUGENE P. ODUM AWARD

The Eugene P. Odum Award for Excellence in Ecology Education is a new award recognizing an ecologist for outstanding work in education. It was generously endowed by the distinguished ecologist Eugene P. Odum, Callaway Professor Emeritus of Ecology at the University of Georgia, Athens. This award draws the attention of the discipline as a whole to the education-related work accomplished by our colleagues who, through teaching, outreach, and mentoring activities, relate basic ecological principles to human affairs and contribute to a better world.

The winner for 2000, and first recipient of the Odum Award for Excel-

lence in Ecology Education, is Dr. Peter Feinsinger, Adjunct Professor of Biology, Northern Arizona University. Feinsinger has a distinguished record of research in ecology (including work on hummingbirds, foraging, and pollination ecology), but his devotion to and leadership in ecology education at all levels (locally, nationally, and internationally) is simply outstanding. Peter was an innovator in inquiry-based teaching and learning in college biology courses well before such approaches became widely known (e.g., in the late 1970s and early 1980s). Colleagues and students regard Feinsinger as an inspirational mentor in ecological education for students at all educational levels, and it is clear to those who have worked with him that he is motivated by his



Peter Feinsinger

love and enthusiasm for the natural world, rather than personal ambition. Moreover, he is admired as an excellent communicator and collaborator.

Feinsinger has played a key leadership role in promoting excellence in ecological education for young children for at least 20 years. What began as a concern for the education of his own children has led to years of commitment and action, broadly influencing ecological literacy throughout our hemisphere through the education of thousands of teachers and children. In an influential essay published in *TREE*, Feinsinger questioned the value of teaching young children about ecology through books and TV specials that featured enchanting animals living in faraway places. He suggested, instead, that teaching children to observe and learn about the habitats in their own neighborhoods would both be more interesting for the children and lead to deeper understanding of ecology and ecological relationships (Feinsinger 1987). At the Annual Meeting in 1987, held in Columbus, Ohio, he formed the Committee for the Education of Young Children, and became both a catalyst and leader in the Society's outreach efforts in this area.

Putting his philosophy into action, Peter began working with graduate students at the University of Florida to compile a suite of investigations, focused on schoolyards, that teachers could use to catalyze ecological teaching and learning. Through his leadership and inspiration, the schoolyard ecology movement was born (e.g., Feinsinger et al. 1997a, b). Feinsinger produced a book with M. Minno, *Handbook to Schoolyard Plants and Animals of North Central Florida*, and an accompanying text, *The Schoolyard and Wildlife Activity Guide*. These books included detailed information about local biota, highlighted key ecological principles and concepts, suggested imaginative questions to motivate outdoor explorations, and helped teachers formulate investigative inquiry approaches for teaching children about ecology. These books formed the centerpiece of the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission's

education initiative and have inspired similar approaches around the USA. In the mid 1990s, Peter was a collaborator on the NSF-funded project, *Schoolyard Ecology for Elementary School Children*, and more recently, he has championed the schoolyard ecology movement throughout Central and South America.

Dr. Feinsinger is quite unique in his appreciation of fundamental principles of ecology, their relevance to conservation biology, and the importance of translating this knowledge in ways that can be appreciated and understood by young children and the general public alike. Peter serves as a model for how an ecologist can contribute effectively to promoting ecological literacy for people of all ages. He has done this in his own humble way by working behind the scenes and, with great passion and enthusiasm, inspiring his colleagues to get involved. In the spirit of this award, Peter Feinsinger has, through his teaching, outreach, and mentoring activities, related basic ecological principles to human affairs and contributed toward a better world. It is with pleasure that we honor him as the first recipient of the Eugene P. Odum Award for Excellence in Ecology Education.

Literature cited

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