

INTRODUCTION: In October, 2007, Birding Magazine published an interview with the then-unknown-to-me African American nature photographer, Dudley Edmondson. He expressed a passionate desire to get more minority folks, particularly young people, involved in outdoor activities. I invited him to Pittsburgh to send this message in person to the public, particularly the minority community. In the interim, TRBC and five other organizations joined together to co-sponsor his visit on October 8th. One of the panelists, John Robinson, is also African-American, now a wildlife biologist and accomplished birder, who leads ABA-sponsored trips. He also has an article in an upcoming issue of Birding. Here's a thank-you-note I sent to participants in the Event. The evening program is also posted with this piece. DLG

09 October 2008

TO: SPONSORS, PANELISTS, VOLUNTEERS AND
DUDLEY EDMONDSON, TECHNICAL SUPPORT STAFF

FROM: Donald L. Gibbon

SUBJECT: THANKS FOR JOBS WELL DONE AND FOR SUPPORT

I wanted to let all of you know as individuals and as a group that your work was uniformly appreciated and admired. We did a good thing last night, together. We brought together what is probably the largest strongly diverse audience in Pittsburgh history devoted to honest appraisal of the role of the natural world in our collective health, emphasizing minority health, and we did it in an atmosphere of mutual caring, respect and honesty. There was a great deal of authenticity in the presentations. No one was hiding anything personal. And there was celebration of both the wonders of the natural world and of each of the panelists' accomplishments in and with it. The journeys described were very different, but all important and interesting. The speakers were succinct and articulate. It was one of the most interesting panel discussions I've ever heard, with no "flat spots." It really moved along.

We learned some important lessons. One of them was how to save money on advertising. Our paid radio advertising produced not one attendee. We might have planted some seeds that way, but they were expensive seeds. Internal organizational advertising by sponsors (Sierra Club, Venture Outdoors, Three Rivers Birding) - plus the fine article in the Post-Gazette on October 7th by Don Hopey - turned the most tricks. One of the attendees, LaVerne Baker Hotep, almost guaranteed us a better turn out next time through her AM talk-radio program. Now that's the kind of help we need!

Dudley Edmondson is the real thing: a fine nature photographer and an open, friendly, thoughtful, articulate, sometimes very funny speaker. His description of spending pre-dawn to post-sunset winter weekend days alone in a tiny photographic blind for three whole years was mind-bending. And the photographs he shared were just stunning, amazing. His presentation was warm, self-revealing, beautiful. His personal honesty set the tone so that panelists were also encouraged to reveal their own struggles and journeys.

A large crowd milled around the speakers and thronged the organizational display tables for at least an hour after the program. People were making important connections. People who had

never been in the same room together quickly found acceptance for their offers to work together. It was exactly what we wanted.

Dudley's vision of a future in which the minority community is committed to public land preservation and the personal joy of the natural world challenges us of all races to work harder, to reach out, to make our passion for the natural world truly inclusive. As Thoreau said, and as we believe, "In wildness is the preservation of the world."

Thanks again to all involved.