

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN—MILWAUKEE

FIELD STATIONS BULLETIN



Vol. 2, No. 2

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Fall, 1969

WHY SUPPORT A FIELD STATION?

Our world today is more tightly knit than even the most prescient of our forefathers had dreamed possible. In the brief span of a few score years men have attained the ability to influence by their actions the lives of those on distant continents of whose existence they know little and seemingly care not at all.

A Strontium atom turned loose tomorrow by a manmade explosion in Siberia may several years hence cause the death by leukemia of a child born to a mother in Japan, Saskatchewan or Connecticut.

A Wisconsin farmer spraying his fields with DDT may unknowingly create a thin shell on an eagle egg in a Missouri nest. The egg shatters before the embryo is grown and the farmer's son may never see an eagle in flight. Or, perchance, a molecule of spray born on an errant wind dips into the North Atlantic where it may progress from water to alga, to copepod, to fish rendering useless the homing dash of an Atlantic salmon up the rapids of the Mirimanche.

Thus man through technological advance has gained the ability to influence his life and those of all other organisms with unforeseen and often fatal results. In many less dramatic and equally subtle ways the environmental independence of each of us has been eroded until we depend upon hosts of our fellows not only for food and other of our necessities but for health and survival.

Will technological man eliminate himself and his less advanced but often happier compatriots or can he use his abilities and knowledge to prevent catastrophe? This is no longer an academic question

nor will it be answered by rhetoric, faith, or crash programs with short run gains. In the face of the ultimate question — that of survival — all talk of an increasing GNP, of property taxes and states rights etc. takes on a paler cast. Enlightened action we must have to survive. The cost in dollars will be high but the returns are in life and its quality.

These are days for action if we are not to depend on instant solutions. Where then does a University field station fit in the struggle to avert environmental degradation and the calamity which will inevitably follow? I suggest that there are many relevant functions for the field station of which the following have major importance.

The need of control is universally recognized in scientific experimentation. However, in the application of modern technology to the environment of man, control and evaluation have been largely ignored. A field station provides a sample, albeit small, of the natural systems adapted to the area. Against these the artificial systems imposed by man can be compared and assayed. In this way environmental change can be documented, the rate and direction of change explored and the biological effects of change determined.

Where is the student to contact in his own person the visual impacts, textures, smells, flavors and integrating nuances of the natural systems of which he reads and hears in class? Physical contact with living communities, natural and artificial, is essential to full understanding; thus the field station serves a vital function in biological education.

Vast deficiencies exist in our knowledge of the functional lives of most plants and animals—specific knowledge which is available can often be converted into better understanding of all organisms. A field station provides many opportunities to search for knowledge concerning a single species and its relationships to the functional environment; likewise the interactions of species within the community are available for investigation. The search for basic knowledge is a prime function of a well supported station.

Thus the field station serves the manipulator and technologist as a control; student and teacher find it a living sample to examine; and, the investigator gains multifold opportunity for research. Even the casual visitor may gain perspective, while for the human community a field station by its physical presence serves as a reminder of the overwhelming importance of holding land use alternatives open for the future. Surely, a field station earns its way and needs only support - - not apology.