The First Female Field Biologist

Elizabeth “Betty” Losey

*Seney National Wildlife Refuge, Schoolcraft County- Michigan*  Many people have not heard of Elizabeth B. Losey, “Betty” to her friends, but she played an important role in the history of conservation in the United States. When Mrs. Losey graduated from the University of Michigan with a master of science degree in wildlife management and conservation in 1947, it was deemed unsuitable for women to work and stay overnight in the field. She changed that when the US Fish and Wildlife Service hired her as a waterfowl research biologist at Seney National Wildlife Refuge outside Seney, MI. Although she only worked at Seney for three years, Mrs. Losey became the first female research biologist in the country.

Seney Refuge applied scientist Greg Corace recalls her “willingness to think on her own. When she was working here, she would go to the field with men to do surveys and she was ridiculed. Her passion for what she did drove her to overcome social norms. Betty was a leader in the way she thought and acted and held herself.”

Born in East Orange, New Jersey in 1912, Mrs. Losey graduated high school in Lynn, Massachusetts before earning her bachelor’s degree in 1934 and her master’s degree in 1946 from the University of Michigan. From there, she started her job at Seney studying duck brood behavior, living in a sparsely furnished cabin on the refuge. She also worked as a part-time research assistant for the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources from 1946 to 1952.

“My favorite workplace was right in the middle of a marsh, listening to the birds and finding waterfowl nests and ducklings.”

- Elizabeth B. Losey

Although she only worked at the Seney National Wildlife Refuge from 1947 to 1950, Mrs. Losey continued to live in the area at least part-time until her death in 2005 at the age of 93. When her husband, Everett, died in 1996, Mrs. Losey returned to the Seney National Wildlife Refuge as a volunteer, calling herself a biological historian. In 2003 the National Wildlife Refuge Association named her Volunteer of the Year.

**About the Seney National Wildlife Refuge**

Established in 1935 by Executive Order under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, Seney National Wildlife Refuge consists of over 95,000 acres of breeding grounds for migratory birds and habitat for other wildlife, including beavers, moose and black bears. After forests in the area were heavily logged in the late 19th century, developers burned, ditched, drained and cultivated the wetlands in an attempt to convert them to farmland. Despite repeated attempts, the soils and harsh conditions of this country would not provide a hospitable environment for sustained settlement and agriculture. Much of the property was then abandoned and reverted to government ownership for unpaid property taxes. Today, almost two-thirds of the refuge is classified as wetland: marshes, swamps and bogs, while the remaining lands are grasslands and forests. The refuge contains the Seney Wilderness Area and the Strangmoor Bog National Natural Landmark, a patterned bog.

**More Information**

https://www.fws.gov/refuges/about/conservationheroes/ElizabethBettyLosey_07202012.html
