

Moscow professor finds unique view in southwest

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Staff Writer

BIG STONE GAP — Sometimes it takes someone from outside to help give an appreciation to what is on the inside. That's just what visiting professor Sergei Polozov is doing in Southwest Virginia.

Polozov, an associate professor of zoology and ecology, is on sabbatical from Moscow Pedagogical University. During his spring semester visit, he is teaching Insect Control, Conservation of Natural Resources, Environmental Factors in Plant Growth, and Introduction to Environmental Science and Technology.

This is his fifth trip to the United States, and he admits that he's becoming addicted to the visits.

"Going to a different country to work is so different from just a tourist visit. You are actually able to learn about the country better that way. I have found it very supportive here," Polozov said.

Polozov is interested in getting people outside to discover what can be found "in your own backyard".

"There are a lot of books written, but we are not ready for the real nature. We go on vacations and go into nature for recreation, but we are not ready for more," Polozov said.

Polozov first became interested in nature, he said, during hunting trips he took with his father.

"My father was a hunter, but I don't think he liked to hunt as much as liked nature. We spent days and days in nature without shooting once. It was simply a special feeling of being inside nature. It's hard to describe," Polozov said.

Polozov has written over 90 publications including manuals, books, articles, and scripts for television and radio. His academic work includes environmental science, zoology, ecology and land management. Polozov considers ornithology — the protection of rare species and ecology of birds in man-

transformed landscapes and specifically, the impact of human activity on natural ecosystems and bird populations — his main field of study and work.

Field work for Polozov, he said, has taken him across Russia, Middle Asia, India, Canada and the United States. Polozov is also a member of the Commission on Education and Communication of the World Conservation Union.

Polozov's experience in environmental education includes scientific consulting for an international television and radio company, "Ostankino," and author and television host of the program "The World of Wild Animals," an environmental program broadcast over the entire area of the former USSR.

"I see how important it is to attract kids' attention," Polozov said. He said once a child watches a program, they go to their parents and explain the program — teaching the child's parents as well.

"I have received so many letters from parents and grandparents telling me that they learned of environmental problems through the children," Polozov added.

On "The World of Wild Animals," Polozov said, you won't find any African creatures.

"That's the trouble. Many Americans know better the African exotic animals than their own Appalachian Mountains, and it's the same in Russia. People have no idea of species that are so near their house. On my program, I don't try to touch exotic things in New Zealand, I try to explain to people what they would find if they went for a walk," Polozov said.

Polozov is a leader in several environmental organizations including his pet project of which he is president, EcoPol Ecological Centre, a private, non-profit organization for environmental consulting, education and research.

One of his favorite places, EcoPol Ecological Centre is set up in Smolensk National Park.

Smolensk National Park contains 35 lakes, 200 species of birds, 28 species of fish, and 54 species of other vertebrate animals. Wild berries, mushrooms, nuts and herbs grow wild. Its mud and springs of mineral water attract Russian tourists, creating a natural spa for tourists.

"It is so beautiful," Polozov said of EcoPol, where Polozov does the majority of his research in his home country.

Polozov is one of the Russian leaders of the environmental exchange "Russia-USA: Ecology and Education," which is organized by Neil Murphy, chairman of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park Commission and director of academic and instructional support at Virginia Highlands Community College. It was through this program that Polozov found his way to Mountain Empire Community College.

Polozov is impressed with the area and with Mountain Empire Community College for having a foreign visiting professor.

"I'm not sure, but I don't think many invite foreign professors to come to their college. They are ahead of many other schools," Polozov said.

Since being in the region, Polozov has spoken at several elementary and middle schools. Even though he is there to discuss the environment, Polozov is bombarded with other kinds of questions.

"I love it. When I am there, I am asked hundreds of questions from them on what kind of shoes do we wear, what kind of food do we eat, and how much snow falls in the middle of Red



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Sergei Polozov, an associate professor of zoology from Moscow, has added a new dimension to Mountain Empire Community College staff.

Square," Polozov said.

While in Southwest Virginia, Polozov is participating in scientific work on the impact of human activity on natural populations through the Powell River Project, an environmental science study begun by Dr. Chuks Ogbonnaya, associate professor of environmental science at Mountain Empire Com-

munity College. Ogbonnaya is currently in Ghana, South Africa, as a result of his achieving a 1993 Senior Fulbright Award.

Polozov will also be looking into the impact of reclamation on migratory bird populations after mining.

"All ecosystems are transformed. Now, we need understanding on how to manage them," Polozov said.