

# Bird's-Eye View

April  
May  
1999



## The Newsletter of The Peoria Audubon Society...

A Chapter of National Audubon since 1981

Ornithological-Audubon Chapter of The Peoria Academy of Science since 1930

## Courtship Displays and Behaviors

by Brenda Onken

A-H-H-H SPRING! There is more daylight now, trees will be budding and wildflowers will be blooming. Time for renewal and the migration of birds. The male Cardinal starts singing at 5:50 AM in the back yard I have fed him and his mate all winter and pretty soon he and she will nest in the tall hedge that borders the fence. And occasionally they will bathe and drink from the birdbath. They don't stray very far from my house. Last year they had two successful broods. Watching them feed their fledglings was a delight.

In the Spring I like to watch the birds doing their courtship displays. It's interesting seeing the different actions and maneuvers they go through. I would like to share a few of my observations with you.

When a male bird sings, usually from a high perch, he is saying "Here I am, I'm looking for a mate," or to reestablish a bond with his regular mate. Singing is very important to birds. It helps with attracting a mate and defending their territories. A male House Wren built a nest in the wren house in my yard. He sang and sang every six seconds, to be exact. When a female arrived she inspected the nest but did not accept it. Too bad for this little guy. He continued singing for a few more days then flew off. Better luck some place else!

Some males impress females with their pretty plumage and physical attributes. Peacocks and Turkeys spread their tails and strut their stuff. There was a study done and it was found that female Peacocks were attracted to the male with the prettiest and biggest tail!

Male Prairie Chickens really go at each other on their booming grounds. Face to face, bill to bill, these birds challenge each other for the right to court females. They hold their wings downward, inflate their orange neck sacks and make their long neck feathers (called Pinnae) erect, and they stamp their feet. Round and round they go. The females are usually on the fringe of this commotion, going about their business nonchalantly.

The Sandhill and Whooping Cranes do courtship dances, with wings spread and head bobbing, they bow to one another and leap up and down in the air. This is fun to watch, but to them it is serious business. It strengthens the bond between them. These birds are monogamous.

On lakes, male ducks bob their heads up and down in front of the females. Male Mallards are pros at this. The male Common Goldeneye throws his head way back—his way of getting attention from the females.

Bald eagles perform fantastic aerial displays. They lock talons in mid air and do something similar to a somersault, while a male Redtail Hawk will soar in circles above his female.

Male Prairie Horned Larks take off from the ground, fly straight up several hundred feet, all the while singing, then dive down with wings folded. I'm impressed!

The tiny male hummingbird does a pendulum type flight for his mate. From one side to the other, he swings back and forth, up and down. I felt privileged to see this spectacular display just once.

A discussion on aerial displays would not be complete without mention of the American Woodcock. This long billed, plump looking bird can really show off. At dusk, he heads for an open field where he performs his courtship flight. His call is a nasal "eent," then he ascends making a high trilling sound with his wings. I can speak from experience, this is a thrill to see and

hear. On the way down, he falls like a leaf and the sound changes to a bubbling tinkle. Then he walks stiff-legged over to the female. Do you think that she appreciated the effort?

Woodpeckers chase each other around the trunk of a tree. The male swings his head from side to side and fans his tail. The Downy Woodpecker forms a small crest on his head to show his interest.



These are just a few of the interesting courtship behaviors that birds perform, there are many more. Yes, there will be a lot of singing, displaying, and pursuing going on in the next few weeks. The result of these efforts... More birds to enjoy! Happy Spring!

## Upcoming Meetings...

**April 14, 7:00 PM, Forest Park Nature Center**

**Membership Meeting** -Ross Adams, Refuge Manager with the USFWS Illinois River Refuge System will give an overview of the status of the 4 refuges along the Illinois River

**May 12, 7:00 PM, Forest Park Nature Center**

**Membership Meeting** – Sharing of Spring Count info and Slide Presentation on Warblers of North America

**There will be no meetings in June, July and August. We will start again on Wednesday, September 11**

**Peoria Academy of Science Annual Banquet**

**Friday, April 16, 1999**

**At Fairview Farms, in Belview**

**6:00 PM Social, 6:30 Dinner, 8:00 Program**

Author Raymond Wiggins will present "Coal Swamps, Coral Reefs, and Continental Glaciers, A look at Prairie State Geology"

Dinner is \$15.00 per person. Contact Greet Princen, (309)691-0519 for more information

## Bird Walks at Forest Park Nature Center...

Whether you are an avid birder or just beginning, We have a hike for you:

### Early Worm Bird Walks

Sunday's April 25 through May 16, 6:00 AM

### Birdwalks for Beginners

Saturday May 15, 9:00 AM

All hikes are free and open to the public. Call (309)686-3360 for more information.

## Birdathon, Saturday, May 15

Several teams will be scouring central Illinois in an all out effort to see as many species as possible. This is an annual fund-raiser for our local club. We challenge each member to take a pledge from a friend or fellow employee. We will also be donating 25% of the proceeds to the Partners in Flight Project— an international organization dedicated to the protection of neotropical migrating bird species.

We hope to see a total of 150 species in combined totals on this year's birdathon. The competition is getting pretty fierce! To make your pledge, fill out the enclosed form and mail it to Greet Princen.

### Here's a pledge for the Birdathon:

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
City,State,Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone# \_\_\_\_\_

I will pledge \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per species for the cumulative count total  
OR

I will pledge a flat amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for the cumulative count total

Mail pledge form to Greet Princen, 677 E High Point Terr,  
Peoria, IL, 61614.

You will be contacted after the Birdathon and notified of the number of species seen and the total of your pledge donation..

**The Bird's Eye View is published bimonthly by Peoria Audubon.**

Layout and Editing by Mike Miller

Deadline for submissions to next issue: **May 15.**

Send submissions to:

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## Spring Count! Saturday May 8

Peoria Audubon Members will be coordinating the counts for Peoria Tazwell, Woodford, Mason and Fulton Counties and will need able-bodied and willing birders to participate. Come and Join us. For the phone number of a count leader in your local area, call 691-0519



**Peoria Audubon Society**  
**677 E High Point Terr**  
**Peoria IL 61614**



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