

BIRD'S-EYE View



March
2004

Mark your Calendars
for **March 10:**
The Sanctuary Initiative Auction &
Dessert Social Fundraiser at Jumer's

The Newsletter of The Peoria Audubon Society . . . Chapter of National Audubon since 1981
www.peoriaaudubon.org Chapter of The Peoria Academy of Science since 1930

Audubon Calendar...

The Annual Peoria Audubon Society Sanctuary Initiative Benefit Auction is 7:00 pm on **Wednesday, March 10.**

This year, the auction will be held at Jumer's Castle Lodge, 117 N. Western in Peoria.

Audubon members: invite your friends to join us for an evening of fun and some **great bargains** on nature books, artwork, binoculars, plants, and other surprises. **Jumer's famous desserts** will be for sale. There will be complimentary beverages of your choice, and also a cash bar.

All proceeds benefit the **Sanctuary Initiative** - to establish a sanctuary to protect migratory and breeding bird habitat in the Peoria area. Last year's event raised over \$1900.

So far, items have been donated by Bushwacker, Greenview Nursery, The Trailhead Nature Store, Wild Birds Unlimited, Luthy Botanical Garden, Kelly Seed and Hardware, Lakeview Museum, Peoria Camera. Items include binoculars, plants, bird feeders, wonderful gift packages, walking poles, and much more. There is also artwork donated by Wonders of Wildlife, Junction Gallery & Fast Frame, Jim Miller, Bill Hartin, and several others, and also certificates for dinner at various restaurants and even message therapy at Balanced Health Concepts. And this doesn't even list all the private donations. It is bound to be an enjoyable evening for all.

March 21 and 22 @ Peoria Civic Center:
The **Clean Water Celebration** is an educational experience for the whole family.

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Join us for a **waterfowl-watching field trip** to the Metropolitan Sanitary District near Canton on **April 3**. Meet in downtown Farmington (intersection of Rts 116 and 98) at 8:00. Call **Bert Princen**, 691-0519 for details. This is an excellent chance to view and photograph a variety of waterfowl in a wetland environment. Free.

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Membership Meetings:

Wednesday, April 14 @7:00 Forest Park Nature Center

Tom Lertzak, Preservation Specialist with the **Illinois Nature Preserve**

Commission will give a slide show presentation on the 800 acre Dirksen-McNaughton Land and Water Reserve of the Pekin Park District. The program will cover the history of the reserve, the long and short term restoration potentials, and the ecological importance of this reserve to the people of this region and to the many species of plants and animals that inhabit the area.

Refreshments directly following.

Wednesday, May 12 @7:00, FPNC

Jeff Brawn, Program Director of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Illinois will present a program on

(Continued on the back page)

F.A.Q.'S about our March 10 Fundraiser.

Q. What are funds being raised for?

A. Bird habitat is dwindling in central Illinois.

The auction raises funds to establish a sanctuary to protect migratory and breeding bird habitat in the Peoria area. Peoria Audubon started its Sanctuary Fund to position itself to act when a suitable property for a bird/bird-watching sanctuary becomes available.

Q. What is the agenda?

A. The evening will feature live bidding, silent auctions, and opportunities to bid on smaller items using \$1 tickets. These \$1 tickets will also get you one of Jumer's famous desserts! Sanctuary committee members will explain the Sanctuary Initiative, and recent developments in seeking a property for the Sanctuary.



Q. Where do the items come from?

A. From members like you. We're looking for gently used books, recordings, and optics. We're accepting feeders and nest boxes as well as birdbaths, artwork, and other interesting nature-related items.

Q. How do I donate something?

A. Items can be brought the night of the auction, or dropped off beforehand at Forest Park Nature Center.



Q. Is my donation tax-deductible?

A. Yes. Peoria Audubon is an incorporated non-profit organization in the State of Illinois.

Conservation Notes...



GOVERNOR'S BUDGET CUTS THREATEN RARE BIRDS AND PLANT COMMUNITIES

Maury Brucker, Conservation Chairperson

Dear Peoria Audubon Members,

The proposed elimination of all money for the Natural Heritage Program, the Nature Preserves Commission and the Threatened and Endangered Species Protection Board will cause the firing of all 45 people who work to protect and maintain rare species and the highest quality natural areas in Illinois. The work of these biologists with Illinois ecosystems – built up over 15 years – will be destroyed. This will affect such Illinois species as the Prairie Chicken, Short-eared Owls, Northern Harriers, Upland Sandpipers and Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchids.

The budget proposal also zeros out the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund with two positions to purchase key high quality areas when they become available so that they will not be lost forever. The Legislature dedicated 15% of the real estate transfer tax to this purpose in 1991; however the Governor's budget now diverts these funds to general revenue.

It is imperative that you contact your legislators now to protest the proposed elimination of the capacity to protect and maintain the small remaining high quality natural areas of Illinois and the species that depend upon them. Do not allow the Governor to shirk the State's responsibility to maintain Illinois's biodiversity.

The following letters are from our fellow conservationists at The Nature Conservancy

Dear Friends of the Volunteer Stewardship Network,

If you have not heard already, Governor Rod Blagojevich has announced his proposed FY05 budget for Illinois which includes the elimination of all funding to the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund and the elimination of every program and biologist attached to this fund. This means no exotic and invasive species control, no endangered and threatened species program, no more field biologists responsible for managing our flora and fauna, no more natural areas protection, no more nature preserves protection, no more Natural Heritage Program. The entire Natural Heritage Program, Endangered Species Program, the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, and the Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Fund will NO LONGER EXIST. The staff associated with these programs (District Heritage Biologists, Regional Administrators, Natural Area Preservationists, etc.) will be fired. This proposed budget cut will also include the elimination of the annual funding INPC provides to volunteer groups within the VSN for tools, herbicide and stewardship projects.

State legislators and the Governor must hear from constituents NOW! This also includes contacting friends in the media to explain the devastating effects of this action. For talking points, a fact sheet from The Nature Conservancy is attached (see below).

To reach IL Gov. Rod Blagojevich: 207 Statehouse, Springfield, IL 62706; 217-782-0244

Karen Billo, VSN Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy

Reprinted courtesy of Karen Billo, The Nature Conservancy

For information and contacts for your state elected officials: www.elections.state.il.us/dls/pages/DLSAddresscrit.asp

Ramifications of the Governor's Budget Proposal 2/20/04 – by Genie Ehnis-Lester, The Nature Conservancy gehnis-lester@tnc.org

Reprinted courtesy of Genie Ehnis-Lester, The Nature Conservancy

The following are the ramifications of the visceral elimination of these programs:

- **Open Space Protection:** Currently the State of Illinois ranks 47 among the 50 states in public open space, per capita. With the proposed cuts and elimination of conservation funding, Illinois will fall even further behind.
- **Neighboring States support Green Infrastructure:** Our neighboring states of Michigan and Wisconsin understand the benefits of investing in green infrastructure. Protecting open spaces enhances the quality of life for residents, engages businesses, and provides additional economic opportunities through tourism and related businesses. It is a commonly known fact that Illinois residents take vacations and own second homes in Wisconsin and Michigan, choosing to locate there due to the parks, preserves and nature related recreation such as cross country skiing. Every day, Illinois loses revenue to Michigan and Wisconsin.
- **Natural Heritage program: Dedicated Revenue Source Diverted by the Governor.** This program is responsible for protection, management and restoration of endangered species, natural areas and critical wildlife habitat on public and private lands. The biologists are the frontline staff responsible for implementing on-the-ground conservation

programs. All 30 professional biologists and three clerical staff positions will be permanently lost.

- **Nature Preserves Commission: Dedicated Revenue Source Diverted by the Governor.** The Commission is responsible for the dedication of high quality natural areas and endangered species habitats, placing protection of these lands as their highest and best use, the strongest protection for land in Illinois. All 15 positions will be permanently lost. It oversees 319 nature preserves in 79 counties (43,290 acres) and 106 land and water reserves in 48 counties (33,317 acres).

In FY '03, nearly 3,200 privately owned acres were dedicated as nature preserves, saving the state \$3,640,000 that would have been needed to acquire these sites, fully three times the annual Commission budget.

Illinois was the pioneer, the first state to legislate a Nature Preserves Commission, signed into legislation during August 1963. The late George B. Fell, a dedicated conservationist from Rockford who founded the Natural Land Institute and was a leader of The Nature Conservancy, authored the legislation.

The Commission has been used as a model by other states, and was recognized for its far-sightedness at one of the most important inter-

national meetings held on economic, environmental and social development – the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during June 1992.

- **Natural Areas Acquisition Fund: Dedicated Revenue Source Diverted by the Governor.** This fund is used by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) for the protection of natural areas including habitat needed by endangered and threatened species, wetlands and other high quality natural communities. The fund has enabled the IDNR to acquire more than 20,000 acres and has paid for the staffing of the Natural Heritage programs at the IDNR and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Two realty staff positions responsible for acquisitions will be lost.
- **Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Fund: Dedicated Revenue Source Diverted by the Governor.** This program provides grants to local units of government for the acquisition of open space, parks, and the development of park facilities and forest preserves. Six staff who work directly with local units of government to evaluate and process grant proposals will be eliminated. Voters have consistently voted to increase taxes to support land acquisition at the local level.

Much of what has been achieved has been through matching funds from this program.

- **Endangered Species Protection Board: Zero funding 2005.** This fund zeroed out in 2004. The board is responsible for the listing of species of plants and animals as endangered or threatened, and advising the IDNR on the conservation of listed species.
- **Tourism: promotion budget cut 50%.** Tourism in Illinois produces \$22 billion in annual revenue. Tourism is promotion, marketing of the wonderful opportunities that Illinois has to offer to internal and external visitors alike. The budget was previously cut by 30%.

With this additional cut the ramifications will be critical not only to the Tourism budget, but will have negative economic impacts on businesses that benefit from and rely on tourists such as hotels/motels, restaurants, golf courses, recreation facilities, shops, equipment sales and rentals, etc.

The States around us, competitors for tourists dollars, will reap the benefits of our lost sales and our lost market. It's extremely difficult to recapture customers that have become loyal to the competition.

Bald Eagle Day & Count

January 24 was **Bald Eagle Day** at Forest Park Nature Center, co-sponsored by Forest Park, Fondulac Park District, and the Peoria Audubon Society. More than 60 people listened as Mike Miller talked to the group about the characteristics and habits of Bald Eagles. Afterward, the group was directed to several designated stops – displays and viewing points – to learn about and to view Bald Eagles in their winter home along both sides of the Illinois River.



Meanwhile, Audubon members participated in the 44th **Annual Midwinter Eagle Count**. 493 Bald Eagles were counted between Henry and Havana along the Illinois River. Four teams of observers searched and counted from shore, and **six teams** counted from boats this year. One boat team continued south to Beardstown, and counted an additional 209 Bald Eagles. This year's count was down from last year's record count of 739. Bert Princen, local Eagle Count coordinator, attributed the decrease to the weather.

Wintering Eagles in the Illinois River Valley have increased significantly over the past twenty years; in 1990 less than 100 Eagles were counted. The Eagle Nature Foundation (www.eagle-nature.org) coordinates the January count each year, with counters covering the Illinois River and Upper Mississippi River.

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Look for the final numbers from the Christmas Bird Count in our next newsletter.
Thank you to all who participated!
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From the President by John Mullen

This past December 28th was the 30th anniversary of a piece of federal legislation that has become a model for conservation legislation worldwide. Because of the **Endangered Species Act**, eagles, otters, condors, whales, butterflies, and many other creatures that we share this earth with have been brought back from the brink of extinction.

It's easy to take such laws for granted, even while we are out enjoying the majesty of bald eagles soaring along the banks of the Illinois – a sight that would have been hard to come by in 1990 when there were less than 100 counted between Henry and Havana on the Illinois River. The rebound of this species to over 700 counted in 2003 along this same stretch of river is testimony to how essential the money and effort put forth to save species and their habitat has been.

Yet, other species have not been so lucky. Just this past week two species of birds were removed from the Endangered Species List due to extinction: the Guam broadbill and the Marana mallard. Fortunately, only nine of the 1300 plants and animals listed have disappeared. Part of the success of this act has been the recognition of the importance of habitat to a species' well-being. As they say in real estate business: location, location, location. And what we've learned in the past 30 years is how the loss of any one or two species in an area is typically a precursor to that ecosystem's collapse.

While the current administration in Washington attempts to whittle away at this critical piece of legislation (in the name of reform), some movements on the local level pose grave ramifications. As highlighted in this issue, there is an attempt in the Illinois State Capitol to undermine the progress made in preserving critical habitat for both native plants and animals alike. The habitat that is lost is just that; and we cannot create more of that which we do not have. The passenger pigeon, which required large tracts of woodlands, and the Carolina parakeet, which was associated with wooded rivers and streams, are both extinct now and will never again fill our trees and skies.

The remainders, including ourselves, are only saved, in any real sense of the word, by what we keep intact. The relatively small natural areas left in Illinois are the critical pieces that are left. Without them we lose the cleanest waters in the state and the finest natural refuges that many plants and animals have remaining. And, without them, we lose the remaining refuges that we have – to seek a place where our touch has gone lightly.

Audubon Calendar(continued)

the ecology of Oak Savannas. He will discuss the interactions of the plants and animals that inhabit these rare habitats, highlighting several bird species including the red-headed woodpecker. Refreshments directly following.

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Illinois Audubon Society Field Trips

March 12-13 I.A.S. annual trip to **Prairie Ridge State Natural Area**, the booming ground of Illinois' only remaining prairie chickens. View the courting prairie chickens, woodcock, the short-eared owls, harriers, and migrating waterfowl. For information on registration fees and travel arrangements, contact Vern Kleen at 217-787-3515 or kleen@quixnet.net

May 21-23 I.A.S. annual trip to **Southern Illinois**. For information on registration fees contact Vern Kleen.

Don't miss these spring programs at Forest Park Nature Center:

There is no admission fee but donations are always appreciated!

Signs of Spring

Explore the woods with a Forest Park naturalist and experience the unfolding of spring.

Day-Dates Time
Sundays: 4/18, 5/2, 5/9 1:30 pm

Early Worm Bird Walks

Join a Forest Park naturalist on our early morning bird hikes to see the influx of beautiful songbirds that grace the forests and prairie in the spring. Experience in bird watching is not necessary. Please bring binoculars. Age: older children and adults

Day-Dates Time
Sundays: 4/18-5/23 7:00 am

International Migratory Bird Day

A day for the birds! Come celebrate and appreciate the wonders of birds as Forest Park presents bird walks, displays, and pre-

sentations on those most beautiful and graceful of animals. There will be something for all ages on this day to marvel at the miracle of migration. Stay tuned for a detailed description of events.

Day-Date Time
Saturday: 5/15 8:00 am-4:30 pm

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P.A.S. Banquet is April 23

The Peoria Academy of Science Annual Banquet is at 6:00 P.M., at Barrack's Cater Inn. Mark your calendars for this special event.

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**Watch for the
Hummingbird Festival - coming
to Peoria this summer!**
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To contact Board President John Mullen, call 686-3360, or email jwmullen@juno.com

For membership, call Bert Princen at 691-0519 or email l.princen@worldnet.att.net

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