

Bird's-eye View



WINTER 2012

Mark your calendars!
BIRDING IL RIVER FIELD TRIP
SAT. MAR. 3, 2012

Newsletter of The Peoria Audubon Society. . . Chapter of National Audubon since 1981

Chapter of The Peoria Academy of Science since 1930

www.peoriaaudubon.org

Contact the Peoria Audubon Society at audubon@peoriaaudubon.org

Peoria Audubon meets at 7:00 PM on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May, at the Forest Park Nature Center (FPNC). It's a relaxed, friendly evening with an interesting presentation followed by refreshments. Free and open to the public.

These are just a few of the upcoming events listed at www.peoriaaudubon.org/calendar

Wed. Feb. 5, 2012, 7:00 PM
Monthly Membership Meeting at FPNC

Tom Hintz, Site Superintendent at Jubilee College State Park, 10 miles west of Peoria, will speak on prairie restoration, birding, and other recreational opportunities at the State Park. Tom promised to bring a large number of slides to showcase the wonders at the park.

Tue. Feb. 21, 2012, 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM
Owl Prowl at Camp Wokanda

Meet a Forest Park Naturalist at the lower parking lot of Camp Wokanda for a walk into what has been great owling territory. For directions and more information, call 686-3360.

Feb. 17 - 20, 2012
Great Backyard Bird Count

More information inside the newsletter and at www.birdsource.org/gbbc/

Sat. Mar. 3, 2012, 7:30 AM - 4:00 PM
Birding the Illinois River Field Trip

Take in some of the spring migratory hotspots along the Illinois River Valley. Locations typically visited include Spring Lake, Chautauqua, Emiquon and Rice Lake. Registration includes transportation in a Peoria Park District van, lunch and snacks. Trip Leaders: Mike Miller and Maury Brucker

Pre-registration required Call Forest Park Nature Center @ 309-686-3360 to register. Fee; \$35/person, FPNC and Peoria Audubon Members discount price \$30/person. Meet at FPNC @ 7:00 AM, return by 4:00 PM.

Wed. Mar. 14, 2012, 7 PM
Monthly Membership Meeting at FPNC

Jason Beverlin, Site Supervisor at Emiquon, will speak about the new amenities and recreational opportunities at The Nature Conservancy's Emiquon Restoration near Havana along the Illinois River.

Wed. Apr. 11, 2012, 7 PM
Monthly Membership Meeting at FPNC

Vern Kleen, one of only two people in Illinois licensed to band hummingbirds, will be sharing The Hummingbird Story with us. Verne will tell stories and sharing all types of information about these tiny feathered powerhouses.

April 20 - 22, 2012

Illinois Audubon Spring Gathering

Hosted by Middlefork Audubon Chapter, Danville, IL. Days Inn Conference Center.

Sat. Apr. 28, 2012, 7:30 AM - 3:00 PM
MSWRD Field Trip & Bird Survey

Thad Edmonds will lead a spring birding trip to the 15,000 acre Chicago MSWRD wetlands, just southwest of Canton, IL Thad is to gather data and assist in the effort to determine the effect of the oil spill on wintering grounds of waterfowl. Bring your lunch. **Reservations are required** minimum three weeks in advance. Contact Thad Edmonds at 309-243-1854.

Sat. May 5, 2012

Illinois Spring Bird Count

Peoria Audubon participates in the statewide Illinois Spring Bird Count. Multiple teams will go out into the field to take a census of migrating birds in our area. Contact Mike Miller, 309-657-8788, to volunteer for this event.

Wed. May 9, 2012, 7 PM

Monthly Membership Meeting at FPNC

Don Chamberlain, from DEC Mind Meld Photography Decatur, IL, will be speak on bird photography and share photography tips gleaned during several in-the-field photography workshops taken during the 2009 and 2010 Space Coast Birding Festival in Titusville, Florida.

Sat. May 12, 2012, 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Hennepin Hopper - Oak Bluff Savannah Field Trip

Maury Brucker will lead this spring trip to the wetland restoration at Hennepin Hopper and an Oak Bluff Savannah Restoration, both near Henry, IL. Meet at Forest Park Nature Center. Be prepared for a dutch treat lunch in the vicinity. Contact Maury 309-696-5490 to sign up.



FPNC = Forest Park Nature Center,
5809 N. Forest Park Drive, Peoria Heights

A Note from our President

State of the Birds 2011

Dennis Endicott

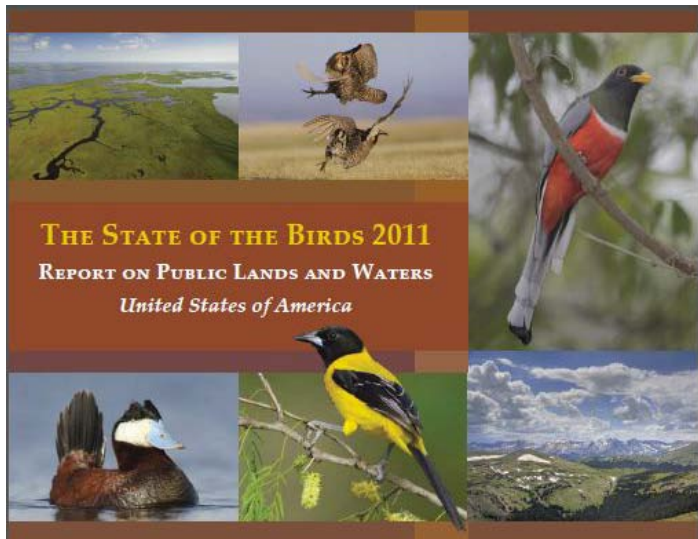
After participating in two of our three local Christmas Bird Counts this year, I started wondering about how the data in the bird counts and other types of citizen science could be used to provide a bigger picture of large trends in the environment. One of the more in-depth examples was a report that was released this past May – The State of the Birds - 2011.

A few months ago, the US Fish and Wildlife Service released a 48-page report, produced in collaboration with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in conjunction with several wildlife and conservation agencies. The purpose of this report was to “provide important scientific data to a broad audience with a call to action on improving the conservation status of birds and the environment.”

Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior, released the 2011 report in May stating that, “This report concludes that America’s public lands and waters, ranging from national wildlife refuges, to national parks, to national forests, offer significant opportunities to halt or reverse the decline of many species. More than 1,000 bird species inhabit the U.S., 251 of which are federally threatened, endangered, or of conservation concern.” One of the interesting aspects of this report is that it uses a significant amount of data garnered from citizen science. This report, along with the previous two annual State of the Birds reports are online at www.stateofthebirds.org.

These reports are highly graphical and easily perused with lots of photos. This report assessed the distribution of birds on nearly 850 million acres of public land by relying on high-performance computing techniques to produce detailed bird distribution maps. And much of the data was garnered from citizen-science data reported to ebird.

This Newsletter and an Archive of past newsletters are available on the website:
www.peoriaaudubon.org



... continued from page 1 *State of the Birds - 2011*

Among other information, the report indicates that with over 300 species of birds in the US, half of their distribution is on public lands. One of the significant conclusions is the critical dependence of birds on public lands and the need for careful management.

The report details several types bird habitats and with each habitat, successes and challenges are highlighted. Locally, two types of habitat may be of particular interest:

- **Wetlands:** The nation's waterfowl species and many other wetland-associated bird species depend on the network of National Wildlife Refuges and other publically protected wetlands. Yet demand and competition for freshwater by numerous agencies continues to be a concern. The board of the Peoria Audubon Society is continuing to work to create a local wetland habitat sanctuary for birds.
- **Grasslands:** As a group, grassland species are among the nation's fastest declining species as only a small amount – 13 percent – of grassland is publicly owned and managed. This results in somewhat of a gap in available habitat as "97% of the native grasslands in the US have been lost, mostly because of conversion to agriculture." One positive example of a success is cited: the Bartel Grassland Restoration Project near Chicago where 900 acres of grassland and wetlands are being restored.

Conservation challenges for these and other habitats are listed, along with lists of many species which are highly dependent on a specific habitat.

Although there are significant and fundamental challenges ahead, the State of the Birds reports also shows how citizen science, such as the Christmas Bird Count and the ebird database, can help to define the issues and illuminate the progress toward improving our environment. In short, your participation in events such as the Christmas Bird Count can have a fact-based impact into how our government goes about establishing rules.

One of the next opportunities to use citizen-science comes with the Great Backyard Bird Count on Feb. 17-20. Learn more at <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>. Learn more about ebird at www.ebird.org. In May, the Spring Bird Count will also provide an opportunity to have fun and help generate the data needed to establish pragmatic guidance.

Successful 2011 Bird Seed Sale

by Joe VanWassenhove

Thanks to all the supporters of Peoria Audubon's annual bird seed sale. We experienced record sales in 2011 (~8,000 lbs.) of quality bird seed supplied by Kelly Seed & Hardware benefiting the Peoria Audubon Society and the Friends of the Rock Island Trail. We very much appreciated your orders and I'm sure the birds have enjoyed the seed. If you missed the 2011 sale, don't despair -- we'll start taking 2012 orders in October...

Christmas Bird Count Results

The 112th Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count has concluded. The longest running Citizen Science survey in the world, Christmas Bird Count provides critical data on population trends. Tens of thousands of participants know that it is also a lot of fun. Peoria Audubon Society participates in three Christmas bird count circles each year, sponsoring the costs of all the participants. The Peoria CBC was held on Saturday, Dec. 17, 2011 with 15 participants, sighting 67 total species. Among the notables were:

Two flocks of Eurasian Tree Sparrows, with 52 individuals, were sighted at the Greater Peoria Sanitary District plant in SE Peoria.

A flock of approximately 1000 Brown-headed Cowbirds was seen in the Creve Coeur/North Pekin area.

All teams reported Ring-billed Gulls to end up as the greatest total number of a single species.

32 Bald Eagles were reported for Peoria

The Chillicothe CBC was held on Saturday, Dec. 31, 2011. Tracy Fox, Chillicothe Count Compiler claimed that:

"Thanks so much to all fourteen participants who made this the best count for which I have records (since the 1992-1993 season).

We hit 80 species, easily besting the 78 species achieved with 20 participants in 1999-2000. We had 17 species of ducks and geese including Greater White-fronted and Cackling geese and Woodies, Wigeon, Canvasbacks, Lesser Scaup and Ruddies.

The absence of mergansers was somewhat surprising. An American White Pelican (possibly injured) was seen south of the Chillicothe island several times during the day.

Both Thayer's and Glaucous gulls turned up and Eurasian Collared Doves and Tree Sparrows were found on the east side of the river.

Three species of owls and all the woodpeckers were found as well as the typical variety of winter songbirds were accounted for. Singleton Winter Wrens and Hermit Thrushes were seen on the east side along with an Eastern Towhee.

With the mild weather, it was surprising that no snipe or mockingbirds were found. Results in other areas had left me hoping for a warbler species beyond Yellow-rumped, something that did not appear.

It was interesting to note that only two of seven teams found robins, with only 4 reported for the entire count compared to 804 last year. Talking with Matthew Winks about it, he indicated the robin populations fluctuate with the hackberry crop. There isn't much fruit on the hackberries in my yard so maybe there's something to that.

Thad Edmonds and Kelly McKay really cleaned up with 54 species, including 11 that they were the only team to see. Kelly is doing a marathon Christmas Bird Count season and has raced up and down the state to participate in a count every day of this year's CBC season: December 15-January 5. Special thanks to Kelly for helping Thad coax even more out of a great territory!"

The Chautauqua CBC was held on Dec. 23, 2011. Sigurd Bjorklund, Chautauqua compiler, reported the results from 12 volunteers on six teams, plus one feeder count. The Chautauqua teams recorded a total of 37,927 individual birds and 87 species. The most numerous species were European Starlings, Canada Goose, and Mallards, respectively. Other species noted include Bonaparte's Gull, a Herring Gull and a single Cape May Warbler.

Details of all the bird counts are on the Peoria Audubon website at: www.peoriaaudubon.org/bcs.htm

Thanks to all the volunteers and a special thank you to our CBC Leaders Thad Edmonds, Dick Bjorklund and Tracy Fox.



Cape May Warbler
Photo Courtesy of USFWS



Mikitcha
Bald Eagle at Forest Park Nature Center

Adventures with Eagles

by Susan Grana

On Saturday, January 7, over 100 people attended Forest Park Nature Center and Peoria Audubon Society's Eagles on the Illinois River event. Gathering in the Nature Center prior to eagle viewing along the river, visitors of all ages enjoyed a presentation on bald eagle biology and conservation by PAS Vice President and Program Chair, Mike Miller. Especially encouraging was the discussion of data taken by Peoria Audubon members during recent eagle counts, which show the strong presence of these once endangered birds along our part of the Illinois River.

A highlight of the day was a live eagle presentation inside the Nature Center. Volunteer Joe Hand from Wildlife Prairie State Park brought along a special guest: ten-year-old bald eagle Mikitcha. Although Mikitcha - who was shot in the left wing and disabled as a juvenile - is certainly a wild animal, her special bond with Joe enables the pair to travel the state teaching its citizens about the majesty of bald eagles. Visitors were thrilled with the opportunity to see such an impressive bird up close! Following the indoor presentation, visitors caravanned over to a nearby site overlooking the river, where they enjoyed a great view of bald eagles in their natural habitat. Many viewers expressed joy at the abundance of eagles along our river, since they could recall a time when few (if any) eagles were present in the area.

Although Eagles on the Illinois River and the annual PAS Eagle Count are over, these magnificent birds of prey can be seen along the river for the rest of the winter. Be sure to see them while they're still around!

Snowy Owl Mass Migration

by Deb Roe

A marked number of snowy owls have been seen this winter in a mass migration. It is typical for the owls to move south for the winter, but this year excessive numbers have been spotted from coast to coast as far south as Oklahoma.

It is speculated by ornithologists that an increase in the lemming population, the owls' main food source, produced an extraordinarily large brood of new owls, who now need to move further south to find food in the winter.

Keep an eye out for the large birds, they are easy to see, white 2' tall birds usually spotted low to the ground hunting for voles and mice.



The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes

as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants count birds anywhere for as little or as long as they wish during the four-day period. They tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time. To report their counts, they fill out an online checklist at the Great Backyard Bird Count website. <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>. Lots more information about the count is available on the webpage.

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or anywhere in the United States and Canada. They can also see how this year's numbers compare with those from previous years. Participants may also send in photographs of the birds they see. A selection of images is posted in the online photo gallery.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada and sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited.

January Meeting Recap

by Deb Roe

Peoria Audubon met in January for the annual pot luck dinner and slide show. Great food was enjoyed by all who attended.

Following dinner, members shared pictures they had taken throughout the year. Mike Miller gave an informative demonstration on electronic field guides for iPhone and droid mobile devices. The demonstration showed members the features and what to expect with a mobile field guide application.

Annual Eagle Count

by Deb Roe

On Saturday, January 28, the Peoria Audubon Society participated in the Eagle Nature Foundation mid-winter Eagle Count. The volunteers counted Eagles along the Illinois River from Henry to Havannah. There were four road teams and one boat team. Each team covers a designated area and records the time and specific location for counted birds to avoid overlapping data.

The raw data from this year count is 178 adults, 4 sub-adults, 75 immature and 21 unknown. The duplicates in the data have not been excluded yet.

This year weather was cold and sunny, a snowfall the evening before had covered the ground. Most of the river had open water with a few sheets of thin ice in the backwaters and edges.

A more detailed breakdown of the final local count data, including comparisons to past years' counts, will be available on the website: www.peoriaaudubon.org/bcs.htm

More information on the nationwide count data is available at the Eagle Nature Foundation website: www.eaglenature.com





PEORIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE
677 E HIGH PT TERRACE
PEORIA IL 61614

Inside: Christmas Bird Count Results

When does your annual membership expire?
Check the date on your mailing label

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Conservation

★ Mississippi River Initiative

Nearly half of North America's bird species — and about 40 percent of its waterfowl — spend at least part of their lives on the Mississippi Flyway. The flyway, with America's mightiest river at its heart, connects landscapes from the Canadian Arctic through America's heartland to the Gulf Coast and south as far as Patagonia. The Mississippi River itself is one of the nation's most important ecological assets. America's River is also a national treasure of tremendous cultural and economic importance.

But the Mississippi River and its vibrant grasslands, forests, and wetlands, which support a wide range of birds have been under sustained assault, enduring more than a century of abuse and exploitation. Between Minnesota and St. Louis, the river is managed with a series of 29 locks and dams. The lower river is straitjacketed by 1,678 miles of levees. It is confined to 10 percent of its historic floodplain, and at its mouth it can deposit barely any of the sediment needed to sustain its vast delta. As a result, 19 square miles of deltaic wetlands disappear each year. The BP oil disaster was the latest blow to a region already reeling from many other challenges.

What Audubon Is Doing:

- Audubon is a leader in creating a new vision for the Mississippi River watershed as a connected natural system that deserves greater attention from the nation.
- Audubon is advocating for major public investments to address the biggest challenges.
- Audubon is taking action to restore and protect critical habitat for birds, other wildlife and people on and around our Audubon centers and sanctuaries and in key local watersheds.
- Audubon has joined forces in Louisiana with the National Wildlife Federation, the Environmental Defense Fund and other conservation organizations to advance vital coastal wetlands protection efforts. We are working in similar ways with dozens of non-government organizations along the river's length.

This internationally important ecosystem can only be restored and protected if the public support and political will exists to make it a priority. Join us as we work to protect the Mississippi River for birds, other wildlife, people and communities.

Learn more at: <http://conservation.audubon.org/mississippi-river-initiative>



American White Pelican
photo by Bill Stripling