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SPRING IS MIGRATION TIME FOR 5 BILLION NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS

AUDUBON TIPS TO MAKE THEIR JOURNEYS SAFE ONES

New York, NY, April 3, 2008 - Each spring from March to June, birds of every kind – songbirds, raptors, shorebirds and others – make their way from their winter homes in the south to their summer breeding grounds in places as far north as the Arctic. Along the way they encounter a myriad of pests - storms, limited food supplies, and exhaustion. Compounding these natural threats are a myriad of additional ones created by humans, including the bright lights and tall structures of cities, prowling domestic pets and toxic lawns.

Fortunately, people can help ensure a safer journey for migrating birds. Backyards and parks, often key stopover points for many species, can become bird-friendly rest stops with a few simple steps. Audubon urges people to take the following actions this spring:

- Turn off lights at night: Birds become disoriented by artificial light, which often results in fatal collisions with buildings, homes, and other structures. To prevent this, turn off exterior and interior lights as much as possible each night during the peak migration period of April-June. Outfit exterior lights with top and side shields to direct the light downward, where it is needed. If you work in a high-rise, advocate for “lights out” during migration season.
- Keep cats indoors: It is estimated that cats – domestic, stray, or feral – kill more than a billion birds each year. Ground feeding birds, such as cardinals and quail, as well as young, immature birds, are the most vulnerable. Keeping cats indoors helps keep the birds outdoors safe, and it also reduces risks to cats, especially from predators.

Many of you may not be aware that the Greater Peoria Sanitary District is considering building a sewage treatment facility on the north side of Peoria, likely in the Dunlap area. This came to our attention late in 2007. Hopefully you saw an article on the front page of the Peoria Journal Star on Easter Sunday, March 23. If not, the article can be viewed at the following internet link http://pjsat.com/story/07132007B-P3-0434537882.html

The article describes a field trip organized by Peoria Audubon to the Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District (BNWRD). This is a sewage treatment facility south of Bloomington off of Route 51. It is a special place, because our neighbor city to the east included a wetland and over 200 acres of “buffer” land which includes the wetland, the Little Kickapoo Creek, wooded areas and trails, and a viewing platform for waterfowl in the wetland. BNWRD was built because forward-thinking staff in Bloomington-Knormal knew that in a decade or two, growth from the city sprawl would encroach on the area, and understood the benefits of waterfowl and wetland protection. Additional input came from John Wesley Powell Audubon members, and volunteer assistance in designing and developing the natural portion of the facility.

The intent of the field trip was to show how including a wetland as part of a sewage treatment facility could be accomplished, and discuss its challenges and benefits. It is our hope that Peoria would follow the lead of Bloomington. Several board members attended, plus Stan Browning (Executive Director of the Greater Peoria Sanitary District), and Clare Howard (the reporter from the Journal Star). The executive and retired directors of BNWRD Bob Carter and Mike Callahan, hosted the event.

We hope you support the conceptual idea, and will come learn more from Mike Callahan at our regular monthly membership meeting on May 14 at Forest Park Nature Center.

Log on to www.peoriaaudubon.org/calendar for more details on all of these events.
Like many animals in the wild, the high-pitched wheezy song of the blue-gray gnatcatcher is usually the first clue one gets of the presence of this small, very active bird that takes some follow up searching to locate amidst the tangled branches and vines that they hurriedly flit from one to another. The blue-gray gnatcatcher (Polioptila caerulea) is the most widespread member of its family as well as one of the few to inhabit the cold northern temperate region. It is also the only truly migratory gnatcatcher although some breed in Central America and thus are present everywhere. But, like other gnatcatchers, the blue-gray is a bundle of energy and a challenge to track through its constant hops, jumps and short flights.

As this printing, blue-gray gnatcatchers have begun to arrive in the Peoria area, seeming to prefer bottomland forest and riparian woodlands although they can be found throughout the local tree cover over bluffs. These diminutive blue-gray birds resemble tiny mockingbirds and indeed mimic songs of other species of birds. They have a prominent white eye ring and long tail that makes up over 40% of their total length. They often fan their black tail showing diagnostic white edges. Breeding males possess a seasonal narrow black line over their bill extending over and behind eye.

Their body language is complex with territory defense consisting of the tail held in a variety of upright and fanned positions accompanied by aggressive calling. Chases and “fights” can be frequent in the breeding season and if an intruder does not initially flee, aerial fights may follow-up searching to locate amidst the tangled branches and vines that they hurriedly flit from one to another. These insectivores primarily inhabit broadleaved trees and shrubs with a strong association to the oak-hickory woodlands in central Illinois, nesting most frequently in oaks (Cornell nests records). Arriving in Central Illinois in mid April, these relatively early nesters will build a small cup of plant down and lichens held together with spider silk, lined with fine materials, on a horizontal branch of a tree. They are monogamous, at least per season, and the female lays 4-5 pale blue to white eggs.

They are entertaining to watch, as they are in constant motion. They will hop and side-step along branches, assisting such movements with winged spreading and tail fanning. They will sometimes cling to tree trunks and rarely live on the ground. Periodically they will hover flutters mothlike in appearance while gleanng insects from the lower sides of foliage.

The population of this unique species seems to be relatively stable with the breeding range expanding to the north. This northern expansion seems to be a common occurrence in this day and age of where they’ve found take some time to study the habits of these wonderful little birds. It will not only be fascinating, but will help train your eyes and your search image as you attempt to follow the trail of the energetic blue-gray through the mosaic of woodlands and forest of this region.

The Peoria Audubon Society website is on the first screen of returned images.
Like many animals in the wild, the high-pitched wheezy song of the blue-gray gnatcatcher is usually the first clue one gets of the presence of this small, very active bird that takes some follow up searching to locate amongst the tangled branches and vines that they frequently hide from one to another. The blue-gray gnatcatcher (Polioptila caerulea) is the most widespread member of its family and is capable of inhabiting the cold northern temperate region. It also is the only truly migratory gnatcatcher although some breed in Central America and thus are residents there. But, like other gnatcatchers, the blue-gray is a bundle of energy and a challenge to track through its constant hops, jumps and short flights.

As this printing, blue-gray gnatcatchers have begun to arrive in the Peoria area, seeming to prefer bottomland forest and riparian woodlands although they can be found throughout the local tree covered areas. These diminutive bluish gray birds resemble tiny gray mockingbirds and indeed mimic songs of other species of birds. They have a prominent white eye ring and long tail that makes up over 45% of their total length. They often fan their black tail showing diagnostic white edges. Breeding males possess a distinctive breeding plummage.

These insectivores primarily inhabit lowland shrubs and trees with a strong association to the oak-hickory woodlands in central Illinois, nesting most frequently in oaks (Cornell nests records). Arriving in Central Illinois in mid April, these relatively early nesters will build a small cup of plant down and lichens held together with spider silk, lined with fine materials, on a horizontal branch of a tree. They are monogamous, at least per season, and the female lays 4-5 pale blue to bluish white eggs.

It also is the only truly migratory gnatcatcher although some breed in Central America and thus are residents there. But, like other gnatcatchers, the blue-gray is a bundle of energy and a challenge to track through its constant hops, jumps and short flights.

The original intent was to ship the sludge to the Canton facility for northern expansion seems to be a common occurrence in this day and age. Regardless of where they’re found, take some time to study the habits of these wonderful little birds. It will not only be fascinating, but will help train your eyes and your search image as you attempt to follow the trail of the energetic blue-gray through the mosaic of woodlands and forest of this region.

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As long as each team has one good birder in the group, others can serve well as spotters. In early May, the foliage on the trees can be quite dense and, as we saw during our initial outing, it is possible to find more than 100 species in a day. One year we got 118 species, but that is stretching it. We are still happy when we break 100 species.

PEORIA AUDUBON WEB SITE
Notes from our webinarmaster Dennis Endicott

We usually have 150-250 daily visits to our website. Our highest 1- day web activity volume was a little over 600 visits after publishing a new article about the Peoria Hummingbird Festival.

It is interesting that the single most frequent web search that brings people to the Peoria Audubon site is to use “images.google.com” as the search engine and type in “blue-gray gnatcatcher” for the search. The Peoria Audubon Society website is on the first screen of images that this specialized GOOGLE search returns. Note that using “images.google.com” is a convenient way to find multiple images of an individual bird species. Typing “ruby-throated hummingbird” into the “images.google.com” search engine also brings you a Peoria Audubon webpage on the first screen of returned images.

Note that with modern browsers, you no longer need to type “www” in front of most web address. Just go to your browser, type “peoriaaudubon.org” then hit Enter.

On March 26, 2008, National Audubon announced TogetherGreen, an innovative Audubon initiative, funded by Toyota. TogetherGreen is expected to provide the inspiration; the leadership and the opportunities to help people everywhere take active roles in the conservation of nature and help improve the health of the environment where we live.

TogetherGreen is a Toyota contribution of $5 million over four years which will allow Audubon to create programs and more diverse cross-section of conservation actions nationwide that will make a difference for the future of our environment. Specific investments will include:

- Fund Innovation Grants to expand outstanding on-the-ground conservation efforts already underway and to create new projects that address urgent environmental issues through innovative approaches and broad-based support.
- Train and promote promising environmental leaders, Fellows, who can serve as role models, experts in hands-on conservation.
- Generate a web site, tools, materials and outreach to inspire, empower and recognize conservation engagement.
- Educate and involve the concerned young people of today who will become the environmental leaders of tomorrow.
- Generate tangible and lasting results that can inspire future actions.

Exactly what this means for Peoria Audubon will become clearer in the future. Certainly, we are very interested in the possibility of utilizing available fund and volunteer resources.

To be contributed by Pete Fenner

Ruby-throated hummingbirds are winging their way back to your feeder! It is a fact that they fly back on the backs of Canada Geese. Thus is a remarkable trip from Central America across the Gulf of Mexico to Florida, about 525 miles, on their own power. The average humming bird weighs between 2.5 and 3.5 grams, a gram is equivalent to the weight of a standard paperclip. Hold three paperclips in your palm you gain appreciation of this fuel efficient Hummer! Check out the web pages listed to find for Spring migration updates.

THE JOURNEY NORTH HUMMINGBIRDS: www.learner.org/north

HUMMINGBIRDS.NET: www.hummingbirds.net/map.html

For information about the many hummingbird festivals held throughout Illinois, or for specific questions about Hummingbirds, contact, Illinois Audubon Society or Vernon Kleen, 1825 Clearview Dr., Springfield, IL 62704. or kleen@insightbb.com

Related to the blue-gray gnatcatcher, the `msd fieldtrip on saturday, April 5, 2008

Ben Princen of the Peoria Audubon Society, received special permission from the Chicago Metropolitan Sanitary District (MSD) to visit their private 20,000 acre facility just west of Canton, IL.

The private wetlands were originally purchased by the Chicago MSD (a.k.a. Metropolitan Water Reclamation District) 40+ years ago with the intent of using the formerly strip mined land as a location to transport sludge from the Chicago area.

The original intent was to ship the sludge to the Canton facility for use as a fertilizer for farming. Over the years, the shipment of sludge was stopped. In the interim, the lakes, wetlands, and woodlands serves as a wildlife refuge for migratory water birds. Some farming operations are going on, but much of the acreage simultaneously functions as a refuge.

With a limit of only 20 birders for the trip (Bert indicated that he had to turn several late requests away) we ganged up into 5 vehicles for covering the distances between lakes and habitats. Dennis brought 5 PGR radios, so that each vehicle could listen to Bert’s descriptions of what we were looking at. And, they could ask questions and communicate other sightings. Bert said that the more eyes, the better. Having the radios to communicate as a group was a big hit with the birding group.

18 people participated in the fieldtrip from 8:30 AM till 2:30 PM. On the premises they saw 55 species. They were as follows:

- Pied-billed Grebe
- Dickcissel
- Common Grackle
- Great Blue Heron
- Carolina Wren
- Snow Goose (1)
- Wood Duck
- Green-winged Teal
- Northern Shoveler
- Gadwall
- American Wigeon
- Redhead
- Ring-necked Duck
- Lesser Scaup
- Bufflehead
- Common Merganser
- Ruddy Duck
- Tufted Titmouse
- Carolina Wren
- American Robin
- Northern Mockingbird
- European Starling
- Northern Cardinal
- American Tree Sparrow
- Chipping Sparrow
- White-crowned Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
- American Crow (1)
- House Sparrow
- House Finch
- American Robin
- Northern Mockingbird
- American Crow (1)
- House Sparrow
- House Finch
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird

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Fortunately, people can help ensure a safer journey for migrating birds. Backyards and parks, often key stopover points for many species, can become bird-friendly resting spots with a few simple steps. Audubon urges people to take the following actions this spring:

- **Turn off lights at night**: Birds become disoriented by artificial light, which often results in fatal collisions with buildings, homes, and other structures. To prevent this, turn off exterior and interior lights as much as possible each night during the peak migration period of April-June. Outfit exterior lights with top and side shields to direct the light downward, where it is needed. If you work in a high-rise, advocate for “lights out” during migration season.

- **Keep cats indoors**: It is estimated that cats – domestic, stray, or feral – kill more than a billion birds each year. Ground feeding birds, such as cardinals and quail, as likely to get injured in a collision; at more than 30 feet, they are less likely to be attracted to reflections in the window.

- **Boat wisely**: If you work in a high-rise, advocate for “lights out” during migration season.

- **Create habitats**: Provide food, water, and shelter for birds. For more information on how to keep birds safe, visit the Audubon At Home website at www.audubonathome.org (go to the “Keeping Wildlife Safe” link on the left-hand side of the page).