

Birds-eye View



OCTOBER
2009

Mark your calendars!
BIRD SEED SALE
SAT., NOVEMBER 7, 2009

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

AUDUBON CALENDAR

Peoria Audubon meets at 7:00 PM on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May at the Forest Park Nature Center. 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. Oct. 14, 2009, 7 PM FPNC Conservation Success Stories in Illinois.

Monthly Membership Meeting. Dr. Jeff Hoover, Avian Ecologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey will be speaking on "Conservation success stories in Illinois and new revelations about bird behavior". Dr. Hoover was recently featured on the PBS program Nova Science NOW showing new information just discovered about the "mafia-practices" of the Brown-headed Cowbird.

Sat. Nov. 7, 2009

MSWRD Wetlands Field Trip

The Peoria Audubon Society receives special permission from the Chicago Metropolitan Sanitary Water Reclamation District to visit their private 20,000+ acre facility just west of Canton, IL. We typically see a very wide range of waterfowl and other bird species at all the lakes and woods in the closed facility. Since the area is closed to the public, it is a rare opportunity to go birding. The trip is free but pre-registration is mandatory. Contact Thad Edmunds at 309-243-1854 for more information and to pre-register.

Sat. Nov. 7, 2009

Annual Bird Seed Sale

Check out the flyer included in this month's newsletter. It covers the annual bird seed sale benefiting the Peoria Audubon Society and the Friends of the Rock Island Trail, kindly supported by the great people at Kelly Seed & Hardware in downtown Peoria. Orders can be submitted through November 4th and orders can be picked up at Kelly's on Saturday, November 7th from 9-11 am. For more info, call 309-278-5251

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

Wed., Nov. 11, 2009 7 PM Bird Conservation Network

Monthly Membership Meeting. Donnie Dann, of the Bird Conservation Network, will discuss "Chicago Region Bird Population Trends" A key goal of the BCN effort is to learn the regional trends of various bird species and help identify important habitat, improve current management practices, and monitor the continued effects of threats.

Wed., Dec. 7, 2009 7 PM Bats of Illinois

Monthly Membership Meeting. Joyce Hofmann from the Illinois Natural History Survey will give a presentation on the natural history of bats of Illinois, bat behavior, and the possible spread and consequences of white-nose syndrome.

Christmas Bird Counts

Peoria Audubon participates in the longest running wildlife census in the world. The count has become an annual tradition for citizen science volunteers in communities throughout the Americas. Peoria Audubon participates in three annual Christmas counts. Volunteers always needed:

Sat. Dec. 19, 2009. Chillicothe Count:
Contact Tracy Fox: (309)-579-3264
Sat. Dec. 26, 2009 - Chautauqua
Contact Dick Bjorklund: (309) 968-6502
Sat. Jan. 2, 2010 - Peoria Count:
Contact Thad Edmonds: (309)-243-1854.



Gangster Birds - Featured on PBS: Nova Science Now. Link to video at www.peoriaaudubon.org

A Note from our President

Gangster Birds by Dennis Endicott

In the last Peoria Audubon newsletter, I mentioned recent findings from field research conducted by Dr. Jeff Hoover, Avian Ecologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey. On August 25, Dr. Hoover was featured on the Public Television program NOVA Science NOW. The PBS program featured a 12-minute video on Gangster Birds.

During the research on breeding habits of the Prothonotary Warbler, Dr. Hoover made a number of observations that involved the Brown-headed Cowbird - noted for their parasitic nesting behavior. Birders have known for many years that the cowbirds parasitize the nests of other bird species by laying one of their eggs and having the "host" bird raise their young - unfortunately at the expense of the "host's" own brood.

During the warbler observations, Dr. Hoover noted that occasionally, he would observe a somewhat hidden female cowbird, near a parasitized warbler nestbox. And, the cowbird appeared to be simply watching the warbler feed and raise the cowbird nestling.

A little later, as part of the study to increase warbler nestbox success, Jeff started removing the cowbird eggs from some of the warbler nests. At this point, he started noticing that the

nests would become trashed - eggs destroyed. The usual, traditional suspects were raccoons, snakes and flying squirrels. But, after carefully excluding the usual suspects, all that was left were the cowbirds. Could this be revenge?

So, Dr. Hoover set up an experiment. He erected a large number of nest boxes, over water, in the swamps of Southern Illinois and then excluded the usual suspects by the generous application of axle grease over the poles that supported the nestbox. With the nestboxes that cowbirds laid their eggs, Jeff removed the cowbird egg.

continued on page 2...

....Gangster Birds continued from page 1....

From half of these parasitized nests, after removing the cowbird egg, Jeff had a trick up his sleeve. Jeff added an insert with a slightly smaller opening -- too small for the cowbird to go through, but large enough for the slightly smaller warbler to enter. Thus, the cowbird could return to the nestboxes that did not have the insert, but could not enter the boxes with the slightly smaller opening. The experiment was set.

After a few years of monitoring a large number of modified and unmodified nestboxes, the results spoke clearly. None of the nestboxes that received the cowbird-exclusion insert were trashed. But, a large number of the unmodified nestboxes were ransacked with the warbler eggs broken. It is believed this was the first time that evidence from a controlled experiment showed that another species, besides man, would seemingly exact revenge on another.

But what do the cowbirds have to gain? It's speculation at this point as to the benefits. It may be the cowbird's way of saying that, "If you don't raise my young, I'll come back and 'mess up' your nest."

Dr. Jeff Hoover will be the speaker at our Oct. 14 membership meeting. Come to the meeting and find out more fascinating information from his on-going research.

You can view or download the NOVA Science NOW video for free. A link to Gangster Birds is on the homepage at our www.peoriaaudubon.org website.

Re-cap of Birding the Illinois River Peoria to Emiquon and Back.

contributed by John Mullen

In mid August, nearly two dozen early risers appeared at the Forest Park Nature Center on a Saturday morning with eager anticipation of what the day would bring. The weather was clear, which was a good sign, and the so called "wild" turkeys that frequent the Center's bird feeders made their daily appearance. These were some of the first birds listed for this Birding the Illinois River tour, a joint production of the Peoria Park District (PPD) and Peoria Audubon Society (PAS).

While the attendees signed in and enjoyed a cinnamon roll, I began the proceeding with introductions all around. These included Maury Brucker, who is the backbone to this annual venture and the principal guide. We were also fortunate to have Mike Miller, Supervisor of the PPD Environmental Unit, as a guide, and Dennis Endicott, photographer and webmaster for PAS to assist. After an overview of what to expect, we headed out in two PPD vans, moving south to our first stop at Bartonville's Mendenhall Park, a complex of wetland pools separated by groves of bottomland hardwood. Along the edge of one of the first ponds we had the good fortune to view a black-crowned night heron roosting in a tree along with a green heron, and a snowy egret. Already, we were beginning to get the feel of the diversity of life along the Illinois River.

The next stop on our venture was Banner Marsh State Fish & Wildlife Area, a 4,363 acre freshwater marsh reclaimed from past mining and farming. Here we noticed that the swallows were massing together in anticipation of their migration south.

We continued south to one of the largest floodplain restoration projects on the continent outside the Everglades: The Nature Conservancy's 7000 acre Emiquon Preserve. We were fortunate to gain access to a levy and traveled atop this along the southern border of the property. Here we could look out over this extensive region of lake and marsh blending up to prairie, and beyond, the river bluffs with their scattering of trees, and truly get a sense of what this river basin is all about. With the historic Thompson and Flagg Lakes now brimming with over 2000 acres of water, huge numbers of waterfowl, waders and shorebirds have returned to this area that possibly supported their ancestors many generations past. On this day, the principal bird in sight was the egret. Great egrets were scattered throughout, like slender white beacons of light against the darkness of the surrounding marsh. The bird of the day was spotted here, a black-necked stilt, dapperly dressed in its dinner jacket amidst this banquet of life. We also played a modified game of leap frog with a flock of snowy egrets, who did not want to release their hold of the top of the levy as we pursued them on our return to the highway.

After a fine lunch in the Dickson Mounds Museum, and some additional birding at Emiquon and points north, we headed to a site on the south end of Peoria which is not your typical eco-tour stop and requires special permission to enter, the Peoria sewage treatment plant and settling ponds. It was on the latter that we finally got into the shorebirds for which this trip is targeted. Here we had some wonderfully close-up views of such birds as least, spotted, solitary, pectoral, and semipalmated sandpipers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, semipalmated plovers, killdeer, and a willet. A juvenile and adult Caspian tern were also seen here as they reposed on one of the levies.

While the vistas provided by Emiquon and associated places were wonderful to behold, and they held their fair share of egrets and other wading birds, it is ironic that the greatest numbers and diversity of shorebirds were witnessed at the settling ponds of southern Peoria. In the future, as the waters of Chautaugua National Wildlife Refuge once again are managed to expose the mud flats that in the past held thousands of shorebirds, our tour will head down that way, but till then, the combination of scenery and bird diversity found along the west side of the river will capture our attention as it did this late summer day in August.

Bluebird Suet Recipe

contributed by Pete Fenner

Loren Hughes and Michelle Keil developed a suet recipe that has been successful in Central Illinois feeding bluebirds throughout the winter. The recipe is as follows:

1 cup lard
1 cup chunky peanut butter
5 1/3 cup yellow corn meal
1 cup flour
2 cups old fashioned oatmeal
1 cup sunflower hearts (or peanut pieces)

Melt together lard and peanut butter, then remove from heat. Stir in remaining ingredients and store in 1 gallon ziploc bag in refrigerator.

Book Sale

by Maury Brucker



Thanks to Don Axt who donated 26 nice books for Peoria Audubon's operating fund, we had a used book sale at the Sept. meeting. The used value from Amazon was nearly \$200. We sold all but 7. These are listed on our web site and will be available at the Oct. meeting for sale. Thanks to all who participated.



Mike Miller points out the differences in swallow nests.



Black-necked stilt at Emiquon

2009 SPRING BIRD COUNT SUMMARY

by M. Miller, T. Edmunds, R. Bjorklund, et al

Peoria County Count had three parties in the field. The parties covered over 355 miles by car and 9 miles on foot. A total of 2,501 birds were observed representing 101 species. Notable observations for Peoria County include Bobolink and Peregrin Falcon. Warbler numbers were low this year and we only observed 14 species.

Thanks go out to our observers, Dennis Endicott, Steve Peterson, Henry Sinclair, Ralph and Sharron Scott, and Mike Miller. If you are interested in participating as a team member in the 2010 count, contact Mike Miller at W(309)681-2858

The Tazewell County Coordinator, Thad Edmunds, reported that 9 birders spotted 134 species on the day of the Spring Bird Count (May 9, 2009). This was a record both for the number of participants and for the number of species observed.

Dr. Richard Bjorklund reported 162 species counted in Mason County. Species of note included 3 LeConte's Sparrow and 3 Red Crossbills.

2009: A Great Fall for Warblers in Central Illinois

by Pete Fenner

The fall 2009 migration has been an interesting season for migrating warblers in central Illinois. First, I am struck by the number of Black-throated Blue Warblers that I and others have seen. I saw three (two males and a female) in the month of September alone and previous to this year had not seen one in Illinois since May 13, 2000! On Sept 3rd, Maury Brucker and I saw a Wilson's warbler at Ewing Park in Bloomington, and my last record previous to that in Illinois for that species was May 10, 1997!

The other interesting observation was the numbers of individuals of a select number of warbler species. At McNaughton Park in Pekin, Joe VanWassenhove and I saw more than 20 Black-and-White Warblers in approximately 2 hours! You know it's a good day for warblers when you brush off a bird sighting by saying "oh, just another Black-and-White warbler". And, there were 40 American Redstarts at Sugar Grove Nature Center south of Bloomington on September 13. I also heard that Ewing Park hosted "literally hundreds" of warblers during an early morning walk on September 26. Wish I had been there, but it has been a great fall for warbler migration nonetheless!



Black-throated blue warbler by
artist Steven D'Amato

TRUMPETER SWAN CITIZEN SCIENCE

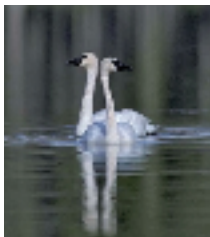


Photo by: Jess Lee

Though restoration of Trumpeter Swans throughout historic breeding areas of the Midwest and Great Plains has been highly successful, most of the flocks remain vulnerable. Historically much of the Interior population migrated to favorable sites south of the 40th parallel. Today, a small percentage of the flocks are exploring and possibly pioneering routes into their historic winter range. Trumpeter Swans are showing up in new locations, some they have not frequented for over 100 years. Audubon members and fellow birders are asked for help to document and then monitor winter habitat use in twenty states of the Central, Southern and eastern U.S. Observers are asked to REGISTER with TRUMPETER WATCH, a program of The Trumpeter Swan Society. Identification guidelines and data forms to be printed for field use can be found online. Photographic documentation is useful but not required. Find out more about this Citizen Science project on The Trumpeter Swan Society website (www.trumpeterswansociety.org) today!

Bird Conservation and the Bird Conservation Network

by Dennis Endicott



Nature always recognizes strength in numbers, a concept that works for organizations as well as with animals. As part of our overall mission for promoting conservation, in particular bird conservation, the Peoria Audubon Society is a Member Organization of the Bird Conservation Network, or BCN (www.bcnbirds.org).

The BCN is a coalition of about 18 organizations with an interest in the conservation of birds in northeast Illinois, southern Wisconsin, and northwestern Indiana. Although many of the group's projects are near the Chicago area, we

share a common interest in being an advocate for conservation.

So, how does a group of bird conservation advocates near the Chicago Region help Central Illinois? Well, with 18 organizations (bird clubs, Audubon chapters, ornithological societies and conservation organizations) sharing an interest in bird conservation, the BCN helps to coordinate and communicate information and data from a number of projects. The BCN helps provide a common voice and forum to inform public officials on policies that affect bird conservation and habitat management. This way, science and research can be used to determine the best public policy on complex issues.

Although there is no full time staff; the BCN board is made up of volunteer representatives from the member groups who carry out the needed work. Disseminating, science based information is key to promoting good policies. The BCN has put together information papers which help address many of the complex bird conservation issues we face now and in the future. For instance, at the BCN site, information is available in the form of green publications on the following and other topics:

"Minimizing the impact of wind turbines on birds and bats. When options are available, which ones work best?

"How to avoid window collisions in big cities. Tips on better protecting birds.

"Grassland birds and the importance of varied habitat. Tips on which conservation policies work best

"Concerns with deer overpopulation. Tips and policy on how to best manage an ecosystem to improve the health and sustainability.

"Migrant bird habitat. Information and recommendations on which tree species work best.

For one of the on-going programs, that gathers data and information on bird population trends, the BCN set up a bird monitoring program with a network of volunteer monitors. (bcnbirds.org/censusinfo.html) The monitors, which come from the pool of 35,000 members of the 18 organizations (Peoria Audubon included), identify Illinois birds by sight and sound. By having a set of standardized, scientifically proven, methods to gather data, the volunteers provide a wealth of statistically significant data. This data can then be used to assist land managers and conservation planners with their decision making.

At the November 11 Peoria Audubon Membership Meeting, Lee Ramsey, a volunteer with the Bird Conservation Network, will discuss "Chicago Region Bird Population Trends." One of the key goals of BCN is to learn the regional population trends of various bird species and then to provide sound habitat management guidelines for the policy makers.

Everyone is welcome to attend the meeting and to visit the BCN website at www.bcnbirds.org to learn more about the BCN effort.

SUET RECIPE

Inside:

When does your annual membership expire?

Check the
date on your
mailing label

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Conservation

THE BALD EAGLE'S AMAZING RETURN

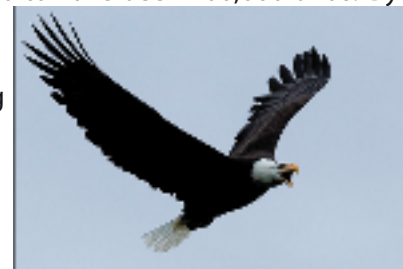
Endangered Species Act Success Story

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) has three major goals: protect plants and animals from extinction by listing species as endangered or threatened, preserve the essential habitat that these species need, and recover and restore the populations of listed species. As of mid-March 2006, there are 1,800 species on the endangered and threatened species list of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Because of conservation actions taken under the Endangered Species Act, dozens of species have been brought back from the brink of extinction with their populations stabilized and the recovery of the Bald Eagle is one of the great success stories of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

It is hard to believe that not long ago America risked losing its majestic national symbol to extinction. By the early 1970s this grand bird was in dire peril, and its survival and recovery are a result of the protections provided to it by the ESA. If lost to extinction, the Bald Eagle would have come to represent great loss and negligence, rather than the symbol of freedom and strength it has long embodied. Now, with the Bald Eagle strongly recovered, it is symbolic not only of our national ideals but also of sound stewardship and the benefits of sensible federal protections.

The pre-Columbian Bald Eagle population, in the area of the lower 48 states, is estimated to have been 100,000 birds. By 1963, there were only 417 known nesting pairs. Bald eagles had been devastated by years of hunting, habitat loss, and exposure to pesticides. By the early 1970s it was known that pesticides such as DDT were concentrating in the food chain and causing the thinning of the eagles' eggshells. The effects of DDT dramatically reduced breeding success because eggshells broke during incubation or young birds did not hatch. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1967 listed the Bald Eagle as endangered under the law that preceded the Endangered Species Act. Bald eagles qualified for federal protection in 1973 under the newly authorized ESA.

In 1972, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) banned most uses of DDT. Listing the Bald Eagle afforded greater protection for important habitat, and saw the beginning of intensive monitoring and management of bald eagle populations in the wild as well as an extensive captive breeding program. In 1995, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "downlisted" the Bald Eagle from endangered to threatened in most states. The FWS estimates there are 7,066 nesting pairs of bald eagles today in the continental United States.



"The recovery of the Bald Eagle, our national symbol, is also a great national success story."

— H. Dale Hall, Director, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, February 13, 2006

Endangered Species Success Story from:
<http://www.audubon.org/news/top10/esasuccess>.

2009 BIRD SEED SALE

PEORIA AUDUBON SOCIETY and FRIENDS OF THE ROCK ISLAND TRAIL

Support your local environmental organizations by ordering your bird seed now. Our seed is the same high quality seed sold by Kelly Seed & Hardware Company, who provides the seed to us at a reduced price and tax-free. Order plenty to last!

Please pre-order -- we don't want to run out!. For more information, please call 309-278-5251.

IMPORTANT DATES: Order deadline is November 4, 2008

Pick-up Day: Saturday, November 7, 9:00-11:00 am

PICK-UP LOCATION: Kelly Seed & Hardware Parking Lot

Washington Street and Hamilton Blvd. in Peoria

PERSONAL REMINDER: I ordered and will pick up on Saturday, **November 7:**

_____ bags of _____
_____ bags of _____
_____ bags of _____

_____ bags of _____
_____ bags of _____
_____ bags of _____

----- cut here -----

mail bottom portion with check -----

save top -----

ORDER FORM

<u>TYPE OF SEED</u>	<u>SIZE</u>	<u>PRICE</u>	<u>NO. OF BAGS</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Sunflower (black oil)	25 lbs.	\$9.25	_____	\$ _____
	50 lbs.	\$16.75	_____	\$ _____
Sunflower (striped)	25 lbs.	\$14.50	_____	\$ _____
	50 lbs.	\$26.00	_____	\$ _____
Sunflower Hearts	10 lbs.	\$12.00	_____	\$ _____
	25 lbs.	\$26.00	_____	\$ _____
Safflower	10 lbs.	\$8.75	_____	\$ _____
	50 lbs.	\$36.00	_____	\$ _____
Thistle (Niger) Seed	10 lbs.	\$10.50	_____	\$ _____
	25 lbs.	\$23.50	_____	\$ _____
Wild Bird (Premium) Mix	25 lbs.	\$8.75	_____	\$ _____
(Cracked corn, oil sunflower, white Proso millet, milo)	50 lbs.	\$15.75	_____	\$ _____
Songbird Mix	35 lbs.	\$16.75	_____	\$ _____
(Oil & striped sunflower, white Proso millet, safflower)				
White Millet	10 lbs.	\$4.25	_____	\$ _____
Peanuts (no shell)	10 lbs.	\$10.25	_____	\$ _____
Peanuts (in the shell)	25 lbs.	\$31.00	_____	\$ _____
Cracked Corn	25 lbs.	\$6.25	_____	\$ _____
Ear Corn for Squirrels	25 lbs.	\$9.25	_____	\$ _____
Suet Cakes (12 cakes)	Case	\$15.50	_____	\$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE

\$ _____

Good news --

No sales tax!

*By November 4th, mail order form
and check for amount due to*

***Make check out to
Peoria Audubon Society***

Peoria Audubon Society

9712 N. Cherry Bark Ct.

Peoria, IL 61615

YOUR NAME

ADDRESS

CITY, ZIP

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Thank you for your support!