Birds-eye View

Weekly Conservation News

**Bird Migration - what you can do...**

What Conservation can Teach Us: Don’t take them or the future for granted.

The bird you heard singing or saw overhead today? It’s pretty easy to take it for granted, but in fact, it might have traveled thousands of miles to get to your house. It might have been places where you’d need a passport and vaccinations to visit. Those ducks that show up every winter in your local park? They likely they were hatchled in the Arctic tundra. When you stop to think about it, birds are the last connection to the wild for many of us. And the arrival and departure of birds – particularly during their heroic migrations – is a link to nature’s rhythms.

But that bond can be broken. We are seeing fewer and fewer migratory birds, even many so-called common species. That’s because they depend on a chain of food and rest stops, whether they travel up the Mississippi River or along the Atlantic or Pacific coasts. Break enough links in the chain, and birds die – or are forever changed.

The Eastern Meadowlark’s four-note call (it sounds like we’ee SEE you) is a classic spring birdsong. Like a superhero’s costume, the meadowlark has a brilliant yellow breast emblazoned with a black V. The Eastern Meadowlark is an indirect victim of American dependence on foreign oil. As oil prices have skyrocketed, farmers have less need to attract songbirds by growing cover crops for ethanol. Cornfields make poor meadowlark habitats. The chain is broken.

The Rufous Hummingbird faces similar threats. The Rufous is a tiny, almost all cinnamon-colored bird (males have a red throat), found whenever flowers are near, from dense forests to sunny gardens in southern Alaska to northern California. Tiny and mighty, Rufous Hummingbirds migrate thousands of miles down the West Coast, to spend the winter in Mexico.

The Rufous Hummingbird breeds in Alaska and in the Pacific Northwest, where logging and urban sprawl have degraded its habitat. Current estimates suggest its numbers are crashing, having fallen by nearly 60 percent over the past four decades. In all, my colleagues at National Audubon Society have identified more than 20 birds, once common, whose numbers have plummeted since the mid-1960s. They are victims of a growing list of threats, including disruption in our climate, conversion of land to development, and a hungry human population.

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Fall Migration & How you can help!

by Suzan Grau

Program Specialist at Forest Park Nature Center

Each fall, approximately three quarters of the birds seen in Illinois will attempt to migrate to some other part of the state, country, or world to cope with the change of seasons. Migration is an exciting time for those of us who enjoy watching birds, but it can be a hazardous experience for the birds. This is especially true for young birds that have never migrated before. For many species, the majority of birds will not complete migration due to a variety of challenges - both natural and human-caused - along the way.

Fortunately, we humans can help migrating birds each fall (and spring) in numerous ways. Here are just a few things you can do to make the migratory journeys of birds more pleasant and successful:

1. Turn off your outdoor lights at night whenever possible. (unless safety is an issue). Excessive lighting can interfere with clear vision at night and will attract certain birds away from their migratory path. Even a motion-sensored light can be extremely helpful in reducing light pollution for migrating birds as well as other nocturnal animals such as bats and moths.

2. Provide food, water, and shelter in your yard or outdoor space. These provide important resting and refueling zones for birds along their migratory path. Many of their natural stopover areas have been lost to deforestation and development. Your yard can become a place to rest and refuel for the journey ahead.

3. Reduce litter and outdoor chemical treatments. Put trash in its place - even if it might not be your trash. Birds migrating from the pristine wilderness of northern Canada, for instance, might not realize that a candy wrapper or plastic 6-pack ring is something to be avoided. With that garbage as a vector for toxic pesticides and herbicides. Do what you can to eliminate their use wherever possible.

4. Help birds recognize that your glass windows are reflective surfaces. Even if a window strike does not kill a bird outright, it could impaire its flight so as to prevent it from completing its migratory journey. Use stickers, decals, window birdfeeders, or colorful blinds/curtains in order to make it clear to flying animals that your windows are not a threat.

5. Talk to people about birds. This might not seem like a big deal, but sharing what you enjoy about birds, especially with a young person, can help foster an interest in birds and a concern for their welfare. Often, an idea sparked by a conversation can lead to a lifetime of birdwatching. Parents can also reinforce the same.

The Crossley ID Guide

Imagine having 10,000 bird photos in a single field guide. Richard Crossley, the author of the recently released Crossley ID Guide has taken a new approach. He has designed his new guide to make it easy to compare the viewing of distant birds with the close-up details in larger images. What makes this guide different from the printed field guides? Crossley starts with an image of a bird in its usual habitat - then electronically layers additional images into the same background. The Eastern Birds version of the guide has 640 scenes with 10,000 photos, 1 scene per species. It's larger than the Sibley Guide to Birds.

This way, in a single page, you can view distant birds at middle and long distance, and then compare the look next to those at close range. Not only that, but Crossley also includes images of juveniles along with images that reflect the range of plumage variation among other individuals as well as in different seasons. There are lots of images, sometimes 10, 20, or even small flocks of the same species, all on the same page. Additionally, the Crossley ID Guide includes images of birds in flight.

Of course, the guide also includes text describing interesting aspects of bird behavior and range map. There is a lot of hype going around about the Crossley ID Guide, but the hype is well warranted. The Crossley ID Guide is a very impressive work. Whether electric or in print, these new field guides help to provide the birders with lots of good information, making for a more enjoyable experience.

Sample page Inside the Crossley ID Guide

Woodford Spring Bird Count 2011

by Matthew Winks

Despite a rather poor spring migration, we set yet another new high mark for species sighted on our annual Woodford County bird count. The Germans, formerly of the former compilers, bowered this out this year. They’re now residing in Hanna City. With fewer observers this year and the scarcity of songbirds, was not expecting a great count.

The April weather pattern was dominated by northerly winds, cool temps, and cloudy skies. Neotropical migrants in particular were held up by this weather pattern. We missed Eastern Wood-Pewee for the first time since I’ve been doing the count. In comparison, last year we recorded 21 pewees. This was an earlier count date than in recent years, but I don’t think this played a big factor. I was out in the field the following week and the number of migrants had not improved. We had a record low count of just 20 Tennessee Warblers. In 2010 we recorded 96. We recorded 30 American Redstarts vs 93 last year.

Highlights were numerous, including a remarkable high 28 species of warblers. We had every vireo with the exception of White-eyed. Pete Fenner found a couple good sightings in the Illinois River floodplain with a Black-necked Stilt and two Snowy Egrets. I believe these are both new count species. Lesser Scaup, Gadwall, Purple Finch, 1st recorded Blue-winged Warbler, 1st recorded Talbot’s Warbler, and Cape May Warbler were also exciting additions from this western territory. American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant were good Illinois River birds.

Ted Harttzed added two Blue Grosbeaks which are new to the count. This species is becoming increasingly common and probably colonizing suitable habitats in our area. Bell’s Vireo, Yellow-bellied Plover, Widow Skimmer, and Cape May Warbler were also excellent additions from Ted’s territory. That could be a count first for Bell’s. I’ll have to see if I can find the Garrapson’s historical data. The El Paso Sedge Wren was a very exciting addition from his western territory. American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant were good Illinois River birds.

Matt Fraker had an American Bittern, found for the third consecutive spring on wetlands in the Mackinaw Bluffs. I’m curious if this species is becoming increasingly common and probably colonizing suitable habitats in our area. Bell’s Vireo, Yellow-bellied Plover, Widow Skimmer, and Cape May Warbler were also exciting additions from this western territory. American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant were good Illinois River birds.

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Mary Jo Adams and Annette Raver added the count’s only Mourning Warbler which is always a good bird for the count. They also had the count’s only Bald Eagles, Common Nighthawk, Veery, Bay-breasted and Blackpoll Warblers. All this while spending the entire day on foot! They missed Cerulean Warbler on count day, but have since had a couple sightings.

We are pushing Woodford County totals toward the top of the class! This species is becoming increasingly common and probably colonizing suitable habitats in our area. Bell’s Vireo, Yellow-bellied Plover, Widow Skimmer, and Cape May Warbler were also exciting additions from this western territory. American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant were good Illinois River birds.

The Friends of Rocky Glen is a nonprofit organization advocating for the protection of an historic natural hiking area with unique geologic formations. In fact, some of the area is called “Pawnee Buttes.” For the Woodford Count, the Friends of Rocky Glen will be having guided hikes into Rocky Glen on a monthly basis.

To participate, check out their calendar at [link to calendar] and join them for a hike. You will hear how far into Mexico or Central America the birds go for the winter, where they stop during their travels, how long they stay in the area, etc.

The Annual Bird Seed Sale

Peoria Audubon will be taking orders for Bird Seed in October for pickup on Saturday, November 5, 2011. You can pick up your seed between 10 am and 11 am at Kelly Seed, 202 Hamilton Blvd., Peoria, IL.

This is our primary fundraiser each year, so we very much appreciate all the pre-orders. Order forms will be included in the next newsletter. Orders will also be available online at www.peoriaaudubon.org. Orders and checks should be received by Wednesday, November 9. Kelly’s has been very accommodating so extra seed will be available on the pick-up day at the special Audubon prices for people who did not pre-order.

Due to droughts overseas that are increasing demand and because many farmers are switching to corn due to recent corn prices (up 30%), sunflower seed prices have been climbing. We won’t know the final pricing for this year’s sale until October but current prices are up 10-40% over last year’s sale prices. Final info on this year’s sale will be available in early October so please check our website then for this update. Regardless of prices, though, our feathered friends will very much appreciate your continued support!
Fall Migration & How you can help!
by Suzie Grana

Each fall, approximately three quarters of the birds we see in Illinois will attempt to migrate to some other part of the state, country, or world to cope with the change of seasons. Migration is an exciting time for those of us who enjoy watching birds, but it can be a hazardous experience for the birds. This is especially true for young birds that have never migrated before. For many species, the majority of birds will not complete migration due to a variety of challenges - both natural and human-caused - along the way.

Fortunately, we humans can help migrating birds each fall (and spring) in numerous ways. Here are just a few things you can do to make the migratory journeys of birds more pleasant and successful:

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2. Provide food, water, and shelter in your yard or outdoor space. These provide important resting and refueling zones for birds along their migratory path. Many of their natural stopover areas have been lost to deforestation and development. Your yard can become a place to rest and refuel for the journey ahead.

3. Reduce litter and outdoor chemical treatments. Put trash in its place - even if it might not be your trash. Birds migrating from the pristine wilderness of northern Canada, for instance, might not realize that a candy wrapper or plastic 6-pack ring is something to be avoided. Trash and toxic pesticides and herbicides. Do what you can to eliminate their use wherever possible.

4. Help birds recognize that your glass windows are reflective. Hang a bird feeder off your windows so that birds can see you from above.

5. Talk to people about birds. This might not seem like a big deal, but sharing what you enjoy about birds, especially with a young person, can help to build an interest in a particular animal or group of animals. Such interest can lead to a lifelong desire to understand and protect birds and habitats in general - for a great example of this, see the story of Dr. Peter Marra and the Long Island Bird Banding Program. A group of people interested in watching birds is now a huge leader in conservation efforts throughout the world.

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Why should you care about that bird pecking in your front yard or about the Rufous or the meadowlark? Because thriving birds = pastures and meadows to farmland, urban sprawl, pollution, logging, and other human causes. That’s why we spend so much time understanding the effects of these threats and figuring out how to stop them. One way is to talk to kids and encourage them to identify their backyard birds and keep track of how their populations change from year to year. And that’s why I called this column “Bird Migration—What can you do?”

But the meadowlark is no super-hero. In fact, it is in mortal danger. Four decades ago, there were an estimated 24 million Eastern Meadowlarks. Now there are just 200,000. That’s a plummet of 97 percent. The Eastern Meadowlark’s four-note call (it sounds like we’ee SEE you) is a classic spring birdsong. Like a super-hero’s costume, the meadowlark has a brilliant yellow breast emblazoned with a black V.

But that bond can be broken. We are seeing fewer and fewer migratory birds, even many so-called common species. That’s because they depend on a chain of habitats for food and rest stops, whether they travel up the Mississippi River or along the Atlantic or Pacific coasts. Break enough links in the chain, and the birds die—or are never born.

The bird you heard singing or saw overhead today? It’s pretty easy to take it for granted, but in fact, it might have traveled thousands of miles to get to your house. But that migration, particularly during their heroic migrations—is a link to nature’s rhythms. And those rhythms can influence everything from the timing of your children’s school days to the arrival of the first wave of shorebirds this spring.

The bird you heard singing or saw overhead today? It’s pretty easy to take it for granted, but in fact, it might have traveled thousands of miles to get to your house.

This isn’t just about doing what’s best for birds; it’s about doing what’s best for our kids and the thriving ecosystems. And thriving ecosystems = clean air, clean water, abundant food and great habitat. And those are places where people thrive, too. This isn’t just about doing what’s best for birds; it’s about doing what’s best for our kids and the generations to follow.

Article by David Yarnold, President & CEO of Audubon

Birds-eye View

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 setting for dinner, followed by an interesting presentation followed by refreshments. Free and open to the public.

Inside:
Bird Migration - what you can do...

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

Wed. Oct. 12, 2011, 7PM
Monthly Membership Meeting at FPNC

Sat. Aug. 20, 2011, 7 AM - 4 PM
Birding Tour of the Illinois River

Sat. Nov. 5, 2011, 7:30 AM - 3:00 PM
MSWRD Field Trip & Bird Survey

Sat. Nov. 5, 2011, 8 AM - 10 AM
Hummingbird Festival at FPNC

Sat. Nov. 5, 2011, 7:30 AM - 3:00 PM
MSWIRD Field Trip & Bird Survey

Thad Edmonds will lead a birding trip to the 15,000 acre Chicago MSW RD wetlands, just southwest of Canton, IL. Thad wishes to do a bird survey of the waterfowl, and will update you to a survey next spring and the following fall. Goal is to gather some data and assist in the effort to determine the effects of the oil spill on wintering grounds of waterfowl by assessing the impact on this very important migration flyover stop. Should be an enjoyable trip as well as we will provide radios to stay in communications. Bring your lunch. Reservations are appreciated. Contact Thad Edmonds at 309-243-1834

Wed. Dec. 14, 2011, 7PM
Monthly Membership Meeting at FPNC

This Newsletter and an Archive of past editions are available to download without any cost to members. Projects in the Peoria Audubon Newsletter are copyrighted and I have included the notice that I respect copyrights and ask other writers to do the same. That is, when I synchronize my iPod to my computer, the software scans the entire file and permits the computer to read it to whatever device it is going to go on. So, what did the newer versions do for me? One of my first surprises came about a month or so after my original field guide purchases when I found out that newer versions of the electronic guides were available to download without any additional cost. That is, when I synchronized my iPod to my computer, the software scanned the entire file and permitted the computer to read it to whatever device it is going to go on. So, what did the newer versions do for me? One of my first surprises came about a month or so after my original field guide purchases when I found out that newer versions of the electronic guides were available to download without any additional cost. That is, when I synchronized my iPod to my computer, the software scanned the entire file and permitted the computer to read it to whatever device it is going to go on. So, what did the newer versions do for me? One of my first surprises came about a month or so after my original field guide purchases when I found out that newer versions of the electronic guides were available to download without any additional cost. That is, when I synchronized my iPod to my computer, the software scanned the entire file and permitted the computer to read it to whatever device it is going to go on. So, what did the newer versions do for me? One of my first surprises came about a month or so after my original field guide purchases when I found out that newer versions of the electronic guides were available to download without any additional cost. That is, when I...