Audubon is a leader in creating a new vision for the Mississippi River watershed as a connected natural system and dams. The lower river is straitjacketed by 1,678 miles of levees. It is confined to 10 percent of its historic range, 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 lowest river and wetlands are jettisoned 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 stand against critical habitat for birds, other wildlife and people on and around our Audubon centers and sanctuaries and in key local watersheds. Audubon Illinois has joined forces 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 protected and 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
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 Peoria Farm Field. 
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 had 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 Snowing geese and Woodies, Wigeon, Canvasbacks, Lesser Scap and Ruddies.

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

Both Thayer’s and Glaucous gulls turned up and Eurasian Collared Doves and Tree Sparrows were found on the east side of the river. Thayer’s Gulls and all the woodpeckers were found as well as the typical variety of winter songbirds were accounted for. 

Singleton Winter Wrens and Hermit Thrusbes were seen on the east side along with an American Robin. 

With the mild weather, it was surprising that no snipe or moose birds were found. Results in other areas had left me hoping for a warbler species or a Canada Goose, 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 604 last year. 

With Matthew Winkles about, it indicated the robin populations fluctuate with the hard corn crop. They were thick on the hoselimes in my yard so maybe there’s something to that.

Thad Edmonds and Kelly McKay really cleaned up with 54 species, including 21 that they were the only team to see. Kelly is doing a marathon Christmas Bird Count season and has raced and run up and down the state multiple times. They have 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 circuits: 37,927 individual birds and 87 species. The most numerous species were European Starlings, Canada Goose, and Mallards, stopover species for the winter. Also 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: http://www.peoriaaudubon.org/bcs.htm

Adventures with Eagles

by Susan Grand

On Saturday, January 7, over 100 people attended Forest Park Nature Center and Peoria Audubon’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 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 citizen about the majesty of bald eagles. Visitors were thrilled with the opportunity to see such an impressive bird up close! Following the indoor presentation, viewers caravaned 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 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 appeared in the east. Two weeks ago, a flock of 70 owls was picked up along the Idaho backwaters and edges. This year weather was cold and sunny, a snowfall the evening before may have aided the owl’s migration. Most of the river had open water with a few sheets of thin ice in the background.

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

More information on the national-wide count data is available at the EagleAlliance. infoFoundation website: www.eaglenature.com

Successful 2011 Bird Seed Sale

Thanks to all the supporters of Peoria Audubon’s annual bird seed sale. We experienced record sales in 2011 ($8,000). 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 appreciate everyone's support and I'm sure the birds have enjoyed the seed. If you missed the 2011 sale, don’t despair – we start taking 2012 orders in October...

...continued from page 1

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 of 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 result in a loss 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 to be 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 show 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 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 Count on Feb. 17-20. Learn more at http://www.birdscount.org/gbc. Learn more about eBird at: www.ebird.org. The Spring Bird Count will also provide an opportunity to have fun and help generate the data needed to establish pragmatic guidance.

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

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

January Meeting Recap

by Del 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 eBird and the opportunities for iPhone and Android mobile devices. The demonstration showed the members 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 count was conducted along the Illinois River from Henry to Havannah. There were four road teams and one boat team. Each team covers a designated area and provides a specific location for counted birds to avoid overlapping data.
The raw data from this year count is 178 adults, 4 sub-adults, and 2 immatures. The data is not yet available online.
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 Peoria Farm Garden). 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 1992-1993 season). We had 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 Scaup geese, Woodies, Pigeon, Canvasbacks, Lesser Scaup and Ruddies. The absence of mergansers was somewhat surprising. An American White Pelican (possibly injured) was seen south of the Chillicothe area 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. These and the typical variety of winter songbirds accounted for. Singleton Winter Wrens and Hermit Thrushes were seen on the east side along with a couple of Towhees.

Adventures with Eagles

On Saturday, January 7, over 100 people attended Forest Park Nature Center and Peoria Audubon’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 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 through the year. MIke Miller gave an informative demonstration on eBird, an online tool for reporting bird sightings. The show featured the most interesting examples and what to expect with a mobile field guide application.

Successful 2011 Bird Seed Sale

Thanks to all the supporters of Peoria Audubon’s annual bird seed sale. We experienced record sales in 2011 (~9,000 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 appreciate your support and I’m sure the birds have enjoyed the seed. If you missed the 2011 sale, don’t despair – we start taking 2012 orders in October....
This internationally important ecosystem can only be restored and protected if the public support and political will. One of the more in-depth examples was a report that released this past May – The State of the Birds – 2011. A few months ago, the US Fish and Wildlife 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 forests, and national parks, hold 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 two previous State of the Birds reports are online at www.stateofthebirds.org. These reports are highly graphical and easily parsed 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.