

# Bird's-eye View



Summer  
2015

Save The Date!  
Saturday August 15  
Birding The Illinois River

Newsletter of The Peoria Audubon Society . . . Chapter of National Audubon since 1981  
Chapter of The Peoria Academy of Science since 1930

[www.peoriaaudubon.org](http://www.peoriaaudubon.org)

Contact the Peoria Audubon Society at [audubon@peoriaaudubon.org](mailto:audubon@peoriaaudubon.org)

These are some of the upcoming events listed at  
[www.peoriaaudubon.org/calendar](http://www.peoriaaudubon.org/calendar)

Please join us for our monthly meetings at Forest Park Nature Center.  
Between the months of September and May, we meet the second  
Wednesday of the month at 7:00 PM.

## Saturday, August 15, 7:00 AM-4:00 PM Field Trip: Birding the Illinois River

Catch the peak of shorebird migration with this field trip led by Maury Brucker of Peoria Audubon Society and Mike Miller of the Peoria Park District. Destinations include Emiquon, Lake Chautauqua, Rice Lake, Banner Marsh and other great birding spots along the Illinois River south of Peoria.

Trip includes transportation in 15 passenger vans and a catered lunch. Pre-registration is required. Call (309) 686-3360 to register. Fee is \$35, with Forest Park Nature Center and Peoria Audubon Society members receiving a \$5 discount. This trip is best for ages 12 and up. Trip will leave from Forest Park Nature Center at 7:00 AM and return around 4:00 PM.

## Saturday, August 22, 9:00 AM-12:00 PM Peoria Hummingbird Festival, Forest Park Nature Center

Vernon Kleen, one of only a few licensed hummingbird banders in the US, will be on hand to demonstrate hummingbird banding and to discuss the fascinating world of hummingbirds. Come early for the chance to "adopt" a hummingbird. You will get up close views and even the chance to feel a hummingbird's heartbeat. This free event is fun for the whole family and will include games and activities for the kids.

## Wednesday, September 9, 7:00 PM Membership Meeting: Spring Bird Count

Tara Beveroth from the Illinois Natural History Survey will present "Illinois Spring Bird Count- 43 Years and Still Counting." History and highlights of past counts, in addition to how the count data is used to benefit birds will be covered.

## Notes From the President

Dennis Endicott

### Migratory Bird Treaty Act

As this is being written in July, only days ago, a "potentially devastating for birds" amendment to an annual appropriations bill was withdrawn. In conjunction with the American Birding Society and many other conservation organizations, Peoria Audubon joined forces to sign letters of protest toward the insertion of a simple line into a routine bill.

In June, without a recorded vote, a committee of the US House of Representatives included a rider in the Department of Commerce's and Department of Justice's budget appropriations bill that would prohibit the federal government from prosecuting anyone violating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (MBTA).

In real terms, the problem is that this simple rider would have defunded enforcement of the MBTA. Without the MBTA funding, the Department of Justice would not have been able to force BP to be responsible for and to pay multi-billion dollars in criminal fines and penalties from the oil damage and killing of an estimated one million plus birds following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

Along with smaller cases, the MBTA was also primary law used to force Exxon Mobil to work at restoration of the Alaskan coast following the Exxon Valdez disaster in 1989. But the breadth of the 1918 act goes significantly beyond enforcing

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action following major disasters. The MBTA also allows the US Fish & Wildlife Service to protect over 800 species including eagles, ducks, geese and songbirds. The act is also used by the FWS to regulate the hunting of game birds. This goes without saying that a law without teeth is more or less worthless.

So why was the amendment inserted in the first place?

Without getting too deeply into politics, National Audubon obtained documents linking Duke Energy, the largest electric energy utility in the country. Duke had been the first green power company to be prosecuted under the MBTA and plead guilty in 2013 to the deaths of more than 150 protected birds, including 14 golden eagles at two wind farms in Wyoming. Duke contributed \$23,000 to the Representative (along with several others) that sponsored the amendment.

Until 2013, no wind energy company had ever been prosecuted under the MBTA. According to the Justice Department, Duke was prosecuted because it “failed to make all reasonable efforts to build the projects in a way that would avoid the risk of avian deaths by collision with turbine blades, despite prior warnings.”

In short, the FWS has published guidelines on the development of wind farms, regarding (1) Preliminary site evaluation and screening of potential sites, (2) site characterization of project sites, (3) field studies to document site wildlife and to document potential project impact, (4) post-construction studies to monitor and (5) other post construction studies. Goals for the guidelines are to evaluate the risk and to minimize the impact on wildlife.

One of the ironies of all this scheming is that the FWS is already working to adapt the law to better deal with 21<sup>st</sup> century circumstances- including wind farms. The 1918 law was enacted at a time when hunting and fashion

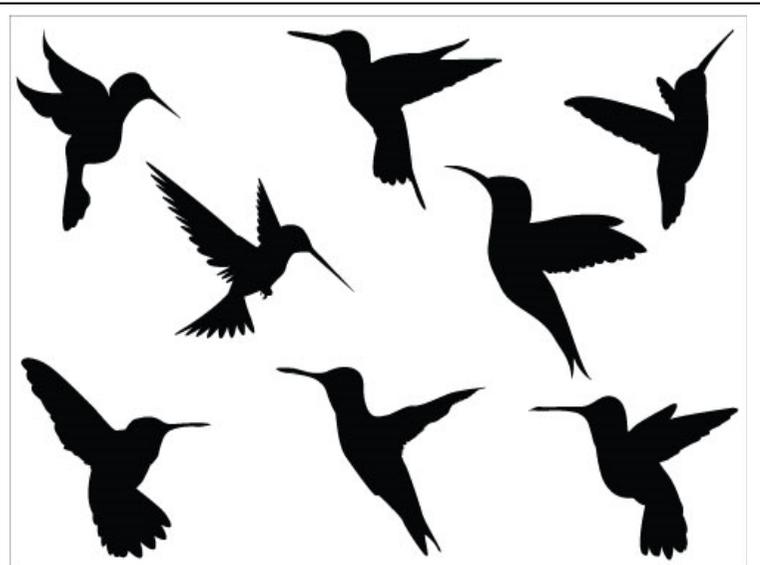
were the leading causes of plummeting bird numbers. It is interesting that the 1918 law came into effect before child labor laws and women’s right to vote.

Although the Migratory Bird Treaty Act is safe for now, the earlier amendment is still languishing in the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. The lesson learned is to use our voices (and pens) to contact our legislators.



Vernon Kleen demonstrates how to place a tiny band on a tiny hummingbird. The Peoria Hummingbird Festival at Forest Park Nature Center on Saturday, August 22, is the perfect opportunity to get a close-up look at hummingbirds and even have the chance to feel their extremely rapid heartbeat.

Photo by Dennis Endicott



## Cat Owners Turn a Blind Eye to Pets' Violence

Becca Cudmore, Audubon

Cats—cuddly companions or fine-tuned killing machines? The answer seems to depend on whether or not you own one.

Ecologists from the University of Exeter and Queen Mary University of London asked cat owners in more than 50 U.K. households if they thought their cats were harmful to wildlife. The team wanted to learn if pointing out the actual toll cats take on the local fauna (birds, reptiles, and small mammals) influenced how their owners felt about and managed their pets. The results: It did not.

Owners' opinions on their kitties' capacity for killing generally stood unswayed even when faced with hard numbers: as many as 10 kills per month by some cats (and that's just observed kills). This "ecological information," as the paper, published in *Ecology and Evolution* earlier this week, soberly puts it, "is unlikely to alter their attitudes." Owners tend to have foggy notion of their cat's prey tally and often don't see the hazy figure as a negative. "Several survey comments seem to suggest that owners see their pets as part of the natural ecosystem," the authors write. "But it's nature," one survey participant pleaded.

Except these "love sponges"—Ernest Hemingway's affectionate name for felines—aren't exactly natural. They're out in nature because of us. A 2013 study discovered that domestic cats—that includes both pets and feral cats—are likely the single greatest source of human-related U.S. bird and mammal deaths. The study, vastly exceeding previous estimates, suggests that cats kill 1.4 billion to 3.7 billion birds in the lower 48 states every year—more than buildings, vehicles, and poisoning combined.

At the end of the survey, the researchers asked participants what they thought of different cat management plans—namely, keeping them indoors or at least nearby.

Most owners were not receptive: 52 percent said they would not try to keep their pet on their property at all times, and 46 percent said they strongly disagreed with the idea. "My cat chooses for herself whether to stay in or go out," one participant wrote on the questionnaire.

Owners seem set on putting their cats first and nature second, the study authors concluded, despite the fact that keeping cats inside benefits both parties: Indoor cats are less likely to be hit by cars, get poisoned, contract diseases, get into fights, or fall victim to predators.

For those owners intent on letting their pets roam free, there's the BirdsBeSafe cat collar, which, with its bright stripes and jingles, is supposed to make the cat a less effective predator. Avian ecologist and conservation biologist Susan Willson told Audubon the device was "100 percent effective" on her own "professional killer cat." Alas, other owners, worried about burdening or endangering their pet with a collar, are reluctant to consider even this step, valuing their cat's comfort above conservation—or maybe even conscience.



Photo: Kirk Mastin/Aurora Photos

**Peoria Audubon Society**  
**PO Box 3535**  
**Peoria, IL 61612**

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Mark Twain included "prairie hens from Illinois" on his "rapturous list" of favorite American foods he missed while traveling in Europe. The prairie chickens came in just below "Canvasback duck from Baltimore" and "Missouri partridges, broiled." Each of these three delicacies came in just above 'possum. Photo by Chicago Tribune



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