



White Crowned Sparrow



Canadian Goose



Dickcissel

Great Blue Heron

Feathers in Flight

by Amy Groh ■ photography by Dennis Endicott and Sally Fenner



Great Egrets at Chautauqua

Baltimore Oriole

You might be a person who hardly notices the feathered bodies flying around you, or moans when the chirping outside your window wakes you up on the only day you get to sleep in. Or, you might be one who can't help but stare in amazement when a hawk swoops down to catch his dinner along I-474, or spends every free hour of daylight at locations throughout the area known to be heavily populated by birds. This pastime, which many know as *birdwatching*, is more correctly called *birding*, and draws new interest each day.

Looking and Listening

An initial look will show that the correct term to use when speaking about observing birds is not *birdwatching*, but *birding*. "Maybe some people don't see a huge difference, but for me 'birdwatching' indicates using your sense of sight only. 'Birding' uses much more than sight, predominantly hearing, but also knowledge of habitat, migration, feeding preferences, predators, flight behavior, nests, nesting behavior, etc.," said Pete Fenner, president of the Peoria Audubon Society (PAS).

Dennis Endicott, vice president and webmaster for the PAS, concurs. "The term *birdwatching* is a bit more aged and implies a more casual observation. People who describe themselves as *birders* seem to be more intense in their pursuit or focus on finding and studying bird species." As proof of this intensity, Endicott explained that "some birders will drive a hundred miles to see a rare or highly uncommon bird species."

There are several key things to look and listen for when birding. "With a myriad of bird species," Endicott said, "you attempt to look for the key markings that differentiate the numbers of bird species." Advanced and novice birders alike look to field guides, with their pictures of birds and descriptive passages pointing out each species' unique traits, to help them properly identify the birds they see. In addition, some birders listen to CDs of bird calls to help identify different species by the sounds they make.



With a tap from hummingbird bander Vern Kleen of Springfield, the adopted hummingbird flies away.

Many birders, including Fenner, keep a "life list" of all of the species of birds they have seen and identified. Database software can be used for individuals who wish to track all the birds they have spotted, but it "can also be useful for scientific benefit and for population studies and trends," according to Fenner. "I have sent [my life list] to Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York, for them to use for that purpose," he noted.

While there are no species native only to central Illinois, the Illinois Ornithological Society—*ornithology* is the branch of zoology specializing in birds—recognizes 351 different species which can be found throughout the state. Upon inquiring as to which species these were, I was instructed to simply look out my window. It makes sense—the birds I see the most each day are the ones most populous in the area. To gather specifics on just how many of each species there are in central Illinois, the Peoria Audubon Society encourages residents to participate in seasonal bird counts. They ask any willing residents to devote 15 minutes to counting the greatest number of individual birds of each species they see together at one time and report their findings online at birdcount.org.

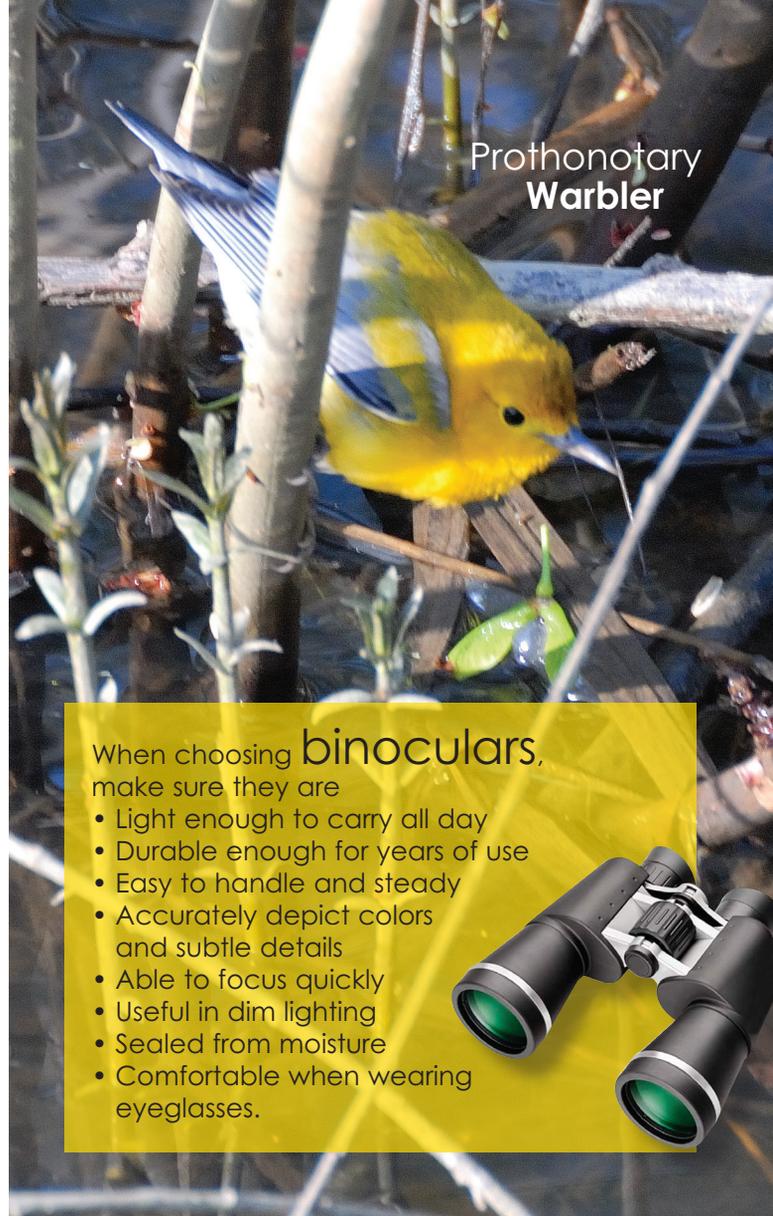
Organized Birding in Central Illinois

The Peoria Audubon Society is the main organization for birding and conservation in central Illinois. As part of the national Audubon Society, the Peoria chapter fulfills the mission “to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth’s biological diversity,” said Fenner. The national group offers community-based programs to advocate for sustaining bird populations and conserving natural habitats.

Numerous events are scheduled by PAS throughout the year, and each month they host guest speakers on birding and conservation topics. Beginners and non-members are always welcome.

Central Illinois is home to some fine feathered friends, as the saying goes. Breathtaking views of bald eagles soaring over the river or swooping down in prairies are not uncommon. Brightly colored hummingbirds can be found buzzing around gardens and back yards. The Peoria area has been blessed with many beautiful and varied birds; all you have to do is keep an eye—or an ear—out! ■

Turn the page for favorite birding spots and upcoming birding events in central Illinois.



Prothonotary Warbler

When choosing binoculars, make sure they are

- Light enough to carry all day
- Durable enough for years of use
- Easy to handle and steady
- Accurately depict colors and subtle details
- Able to focus quickly
- Useful in dim lighting
- Sealed from moisture
- Comfortable when wearing eyeglasses.



What is your favorite bird?



Eastern Bluebird

Peoria Audubon Society President Pete Fenner answers this question.

“In flight, it is probably the **American White Pelican**. This is a large bird, ungainly on the ground, not so bad on the water, but simply awesome to watch while soaring. It is mostly white with black wingtips and a broad wingspan approaching nine feet! It is graceful and expert at riding air thermals. The species has been seen much more regularly in central Illinois (usually near the Illinois River) in the last decade.

“In the woods, it is probably the **Pileated Woodpecker**. This is a crow-sized bird, black and white mostly, with a red crest. It doesn’t just peck at the trees, it really hits it hard. Wood chips fly everywhere, and you’d think it would have a massive headache. Colorful and big, it’s a very exciting bird to see and watch. Its call is somewhat reminiscent of a loud human laugh.

“In the open fields, my favorite is probably the *Eastern Bluebird*. The male has a deep blue color and is just striking. Naming a favorite bird is such a difficult question because there are so many more outstanding and interesting birds, such as the **Red-Headed Woodpecker**, **Ruby-Throated Hummingbird**, **Blue Jay** and **Wild Turkey**, just to name a few more.”



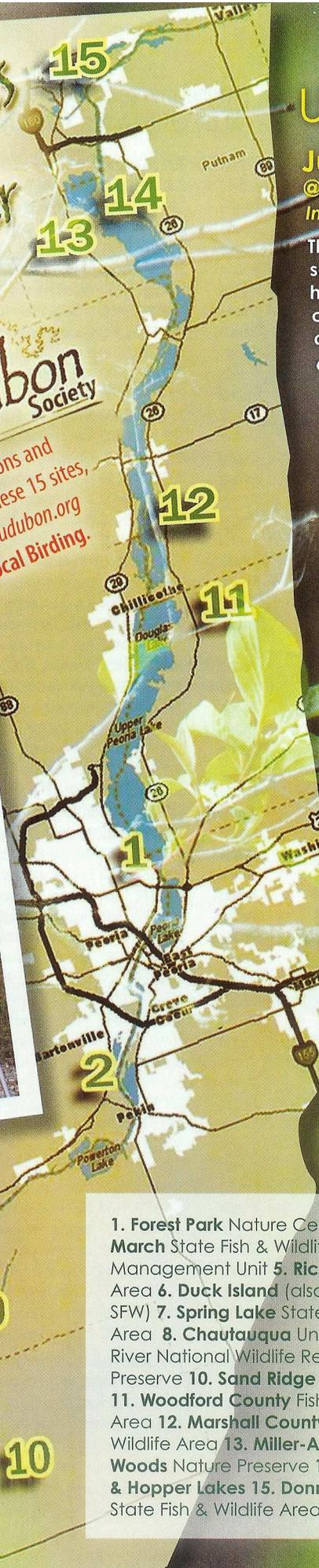
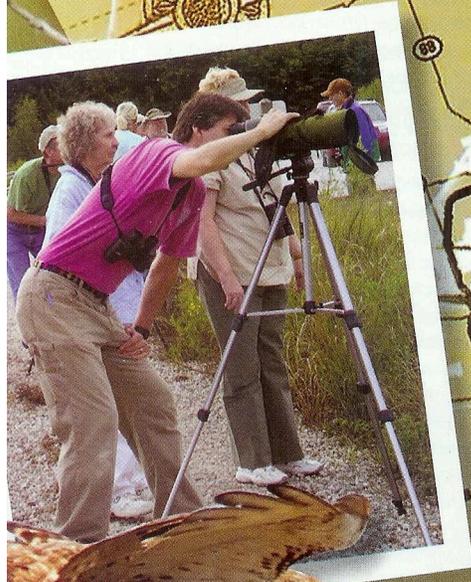
Pileated Woodpecker

Favorite Birding Spots along the Illinois River

Peoria

Audubon Society

For detailed directions and information about these 15 sites, log onto peoriaaudubon.org and click on Local Birding.



1. Forest Park Nature Center
2. Mendenhall Road
3. Banner March State Fish & Wildlife Area
4. Copperas Creek Management Unit
5. Rice Lake State Fish & Wildlife Area
6. Duck Island (also part of Rice Lake SFW)
7. Spring Lake State Fish & Wildlife Area
8. Chautauqua Unit of the Illinois River National Wildlife Refuge
9. Emiquon Preserve
10. Sand Ridge State Forest
11. Woodford County Fish & Wildlife Area
12. Marshall County Fish & Wildlife Area
13. Miller-Anderson Woods Nature Preserve
14. Hennepin & Hopper Lakes
15. Donnelley Depue State Fish & Wildlife Area & Complex

Upcoming Birding Events

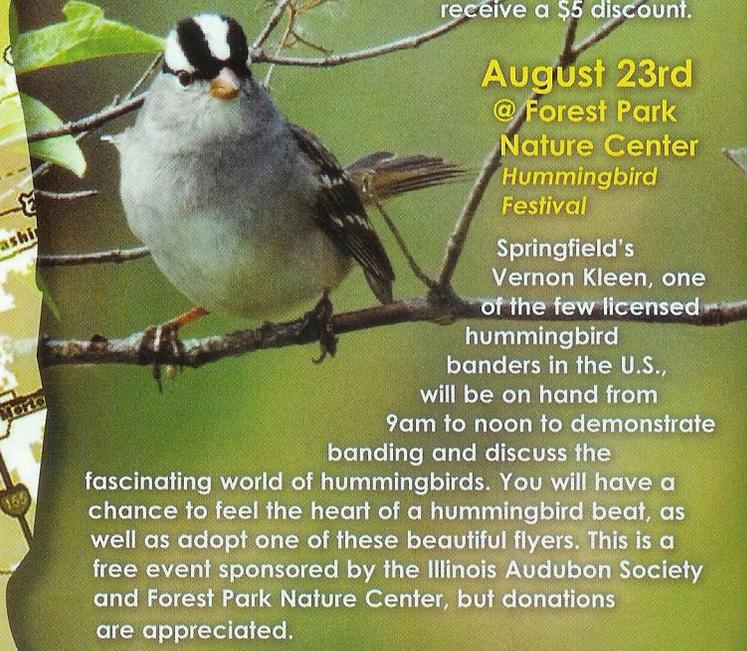
July 5th
 @ Forest Park Nature Center
Introduction to Backyard Bird Watching

This program will include everything from feeder and feed selection and backyard habitats to binocular basics and a history of common backyard birds. Bring binoculars if you own them. The event will begin at 10am and is free, but donations are appreciated. Contact John Mullen at 686-3360 for more information.

August 16th
 @ Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge
Birding Tour of the Illinois River: Shorebird Migration

Maury Brucker and John Mullen of the Peoria Audubon Society lead this trip to take in the scenery and catch the peak of shorebird migration in central Illinois. The event will last from 7am to 3pm, and transportation and lunch are included in the \$35/person fee. Pre-register by calling 686-3360; Peoria Audubon members receive a \$5 discount.

August 23rd
 @ Forest Park Nature Center
Hummingbird Festival



Springfield's Vernon Kleen, one of the few licensed hummingbird banders in the U.S., will be on hand from 9am to noon to demonstrate banding and discuss the fascinating world of hummingbirds. You will have a chance to feel the heart of a hummingbird beat, as well as adopt one of these beautiful flyers. This is a free event sponsored by the Illinois Audubon Society and Forest Park Nature Center, but donations are appreciated.

