



WingTips

A Publication of the Lake/Cook Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society ♦ August 2014

On the Fly

Every week, it seems, I receive at least one conservation alert in my inbox. Whether it's "Stop the Slaughter of 16,000 Cormorants," "Change Glass, Save Birds!" or "Take Action: Save the Red Knot!", each email is a reminder of how much work is needed to protect birds as well as the planet. You can help Lake/Cook Chapter do its part, either by filling a new conservation chair position on the board or by becoming our third representative to the Bird Conservation Network working on local issues. Please contact me if you're interested. Meanwhile, check out the enclosed Walks & Talks brochure for our new 2014-2015 calendar. From birds to bees and beavers, and from greater Chicago to New Mexico, it's going to be a busy year both in and out of the field.

— Rena Cohen, Chapter President



1st Program of the Season Aug. 19: Birding Lake Michigan's Pelagic Zone

The middle of Lake Michigan is a largely untapped birding site, yet it represents the majority of the lake's area. Recently birders have organized several mid-lake sorties to check out the birdlife, and researchers have also begun surveying the lake to assess the potential impact of offshore wind farms on migrating and wintering waterbirds. (See page 3.) Local birder Geoff Williamson will share what is known about Lake Michigan's pelagic zone and opportunities to explore this exciting new local hotspot.



Long-Tailed Duck

Join us at 7 pm on Tuesday, Aug. 19, at Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road, Highland Park for 'Adventures in Lake Michigan's Pelagic Zone.' For directions and a list of other upcoming programs, see www.lakecookingaudubon.org.

i The State of the Birds Chicago-Style: Report Identifies Population Trends

Every nesting season for the past 17 years, Chicago-area bird monitors have fanned out across the six-county region to measure breeding bird populations and provide data that will help improve land management practices for birds. The latest Bird Conservation Network/Chicago Audubon Region analysis shows some interesting trends.



In grasslands, populations of Bobolinks, Henslow's Sparrows and Dickcissels – all species of high conservation concern nationally – climbed 2-5% regionally from 1999-2012 due to restoration work in areas like Rollins Savanna in Grayslake and Bartel Grassland in Cook County. But Grasshopper

Sparrows (above) – with a similarly fragile population – suffered a 6% regional decline, suggesting a need for the drier, shorter grasslands used by this species.

In shrublands, populations for priority species like Field Sparrow and Brown Thrasher that require moderate moisture levels appear to be stable. But Willow Flycatchers that depend on wet grassy areas have declined 2%, perhaps due to encroachment of buckthorn or overly aggressive grassland burns.

In woodlands, Wood Thrush and Ovenbird populations have fallen 10% and 13%, respectively. Possible causes range from loss of shrubs and leaf litter where these species nest when the understory is cleared out and burned to remove invasives like garlic mustard, to grazing and predation by deer, to overall declines. Wood Thrush, for example, have declined 43% nationwide since 1966 and are now experiencing high nest failure rates.

On the other hand, species like Eastern Bluebirds (+8%) and Orchard Oriole (+6%) that are at risk nationally are thriving in the Chicago region. The full report – covering 277 sites monitored by over 250 volunteers – can be found at <http://www.bcnbirds.org/trends13/index.html>



Member You Should Know: Carla Schmakel

When Lake/Cook Chapter member Carla Schmakel gazes into her garden, she visualizes a palette of colors from the array of native plants, flowers, birds and butterflies. Being surrounded by nature inspired her to learn how to sketch, led to two Illinois Audubon magazine cover illustrations including the Dickcissel watercolor in the current issue as well as appearances in multiple art shows, and segued into many volunteer bird and butterfly monitoring activities.



It all started 21 years ago, when Carla and her husband Bob Stempel moved from Chicago to Round Lake Park. Their vision was to have a backyard wildlife refuge filled with native plants. They were so successful that they won first prize in the wildlife garden category in a 2000 Chicago Tribune/Chicago Botanic Garden contest, and twice earned a spot on a statewide butterfly garden tour.

In 1999, when she wasn't busy working in the garden or teaching piano, Carla began to sketch the plants outside her back door. She started art classes at the Morton Arboretum and earned a Botanical Art Illustration Certificate in 2002.

That same year, Carla joined the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network and was assigned to Grant Woods South and North in Lake Villa as well as parts of Rollins Savanna in Grayslake. Six years later, with birdsong skills acquired in part through her musical ear ("I hear bird voices in musical sounds"), she added bird monitoring at all three sites. More recently, she began volunteering at the Illinois Beach State Park Hawk Watch, requiring a whole other set of skills to identify raptors when they are just a speck in the sky.

Along the way, Carla's art work has appeared in juried shows at the Chicago Botanic Garden, Peggy Notebaert Museum, Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum and others. It's been an interesting journey from classical pianist to gardener to artist to birder/citizen scientist. Most of us would be happy with just one of those talents ☺



3-Hour Raptor ID Workshop with Vic Berardi – 9am-12, Sat., Aug. 23

If you have trouble identifying raptors in flight (and who doesn't?), join us from 9am-noon on Sat., Aug. 23, for a three-hour intensive workshop with Vic Berardi – well-known local raptor authority, photographer and founder of the Illinois Beach State Park Hawk Watch. The morning will be followed by an optional field trip to Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve, an ideal hawkwatching spot. To register, email vbirdman@aol.com and rena@sspr.com.



Monarch Movie at Chicago Museum

Don't miss "Flight of the Butterflies," a movie about the monarch migration playing through Feb. 19, 2015, at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry.



Welcome New Members

Surekha & Suresh Abad,
Glenview

Linda Ahrens, Chicago
Jane Ballengee, Glenview

Kim and Dan Beck, Lake Forest
Julie Boatright, Cary

Arlan & Linda Bushman,
Chicago

Kelly Cartwright, Lake Villa
Pamela Feldman, Chicago

Les Gaskins, Chicago
Karen Gibson, Chicago

Joan Goliak, Evergreen Park
Adriana Greisman, Mundelein

Jeff Skrentny & Lynn Haywood,
Chicago

Kate and Ben Julian, Evanston
Todd Katz, Vernon Hills

Takayuki Kawakami, Palatine
Annika & David Kazmierczak,
Chicago

Melinda Keck, Wheaton
Linda Kellough, Highland Park

Don Darnell & Michelle Kern,
Highland Park

Stuart Koch, Highland Park
Linda Kowalzyk, Skokie

Jeff Kritzman, Buffalo Grove
Erik Larson, Green Oaks

Elizabeth Marquardt, Highland
Park

Deborah Marron, Highland Park
Heather McGreevy, Libertyville

Kathy Michas, Wauconda
Linda Mislove, Arlington Heights

Doug Reitz & Charlotte Pavelka,
Green Oaks

Claire Price, Evanston

Andrew Roberts, Grayslake
Ira & Tammy Sanders, Golden,
Colorado

Daniel Schwartz, Northbrook
Joan B. Slater, Morton Grove

Daniel Smith, Wauconda
Mary & Brian Stevens, Chicago

Charles Stickels, Buffalo Grove
Mary Stalzer & Joan Stohl,
Chicago

Frank & Angela Washelesky,
Chicago

Maureen Wells, Glencoe
Margaret Wieboldt, Winthrop
Harbor

Linda & John Woodson, Deerfield



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i Great Lakes Wind Farm Proposals Raise Questions about Bird Mortality

With debate still raging over the impact of land-based wind turbines on bird mortality, the issue is now moving to the water – including the Great Lakes. Bird advocates have expressed concern about proposals ranging from a Lake Michigan wind farm designed to reduce Evanston's carbon footprint to a Lake Erie project in a key migratory flyway between Ohio's Magee Marsh and Canada's Point Pelee. Both projects are shelved for now, but the effect of offshore wind development on birdlife remains an open question.

On land, estimates of annual bird deaths caused by wind turbine collisions vary from 20,000 to 573,000. One recent study looking only at monopole turbines – which will eventually replace older lattice tower models – put the number between 140,000 and 328,000 and predicted that will climb with the use of taller turbines that will provide more efficient energy generation. The same study estimated the death toll will rise to 1.4 million birds annually if the U.S. Department of Energy achieves its goal of generating 20% of total energy from wind power.

Two Wyoming wind facilities alone killed 14 Golden Eagles and 149 other protected birds, including hawks, blackbirds, larks, wrens and sparrows, between 2009 and 2013. The U.S. Justice Department prosecuted Duke Energy Renewables for violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act in connection with those kills, marking the first case of its kind and resulting earlier this year in a million-dollar fine.

On water, the risk of close encounters between birds and wind turbine blades takes several forms. In the case of songbirds and other migrating passerines, those that are not stopping for food and rest will most likely be flying at altitudes above the height of the tallest turbine, but danger exists for birds that try to use wind farms as resting places or head to shore to forage during the predawn period. Poor visibility caused by low clouds and fog can substantially increase collision risk as the birds lose their way.

In the case of waterbirds, the concern involves both migrating and wintering species. **On a single November day in 2010, one aerial survey conducted in western Lake Michigan off the Wisconsin coast counted a staggering 25,600 Long-tailed Ducks.** Other one-day counts on the same project have yielded 9,300 Red-breasted Merganser, 6,700 Common Goldeneye and 1,100 Canvasback, plus Common Loons, White-winged Scoters, Horned Grebes, Bufflehead, Tundra Swans, Greater Scaup and Mallard.

There is also concern that bird avoidance of offshore wind facilities will indirectly kill birds by forcing them to fly farther for food and rest and/or causing loss of feeding and foraging habitat, both because of the wind farms themselves and because of disturbances from boats, helicopters and other human activity.



*Offshore wind farm near Copenhagen, Denmark
Kim Hansen, Wikimedia Commons*

Given the important role of wind power in providing a clean energy source, efforts are being made to determine how to site offshore wind farms while also protecting wildlife. In Illinois, for example, a report co-authored by the Bird Conservation Network led to a 2013 law that allows the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to approve or disapprove offshore turbine locations.

Regionally, a group of avian researchers, federal and state resource managers, offshore wind developers and conservationists met in Ann Arbor in May under the auspices of the Great Lakes Wind Collaborative to chart a course for safe offshore wind farm development. A just-released report from that Great Lakes Pelagic Bird Stakeholder Engagement Workshop recommended areas for further research as well as possible designation of open water Important Bird Areas in the Great Lakes to help safeguard key habitat.

Today, offshore wind farms power more than six million homes in Europe but none in the U.S. That is about to change. In June, the U.S. Department of Energy granted funding to offshore wind projects on the East and West Coasts. Wind power will undoubtedly come to the Great Lakes at some point as the country continues its quest for green energy. Minimizing the impact on birds and other wildlife will be an ongoing issue as the movement progresses.



What's a Prairie Warbler Doing in Lake Villa?

On June 13, while walking her nesting bird survey route at Grant Woods North Forest Preserve in Lake Villa, Lake/Cook member Carla Schmakel heard a song that wasn't part of the usual 'choir' at the site. It was the ascending *zeee zeee zeee zeee zeee* of a Prairie Warbler – a species that had been documented in Lake County only 10 times since 1969, and only once during the summer.

Searching for the source of the song, Carla discovered two very vocal males and reported them on her eBird checklist of the day's survey findings. Local birders learned about the find and flocked to Grant Woods to see the avian visitors.

Longtime birder Al Stokie, for example, found one of the Grant Woods birds on June 24. It was only his third record of the species in the county in 29 years, following 1985 and 2012 sightings at Illinois Beach State Park (IBSP). This time, as Al noted wryly, it was a mere two-year wait between sightings instead of 27.

Old records indicate that Prairie Warblers nested annually at IBSP during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Between 1969 and 2012, according to data supplied by local avian biologist Steve Bailey, there were five reports at IBSP and one each at Waukegan, Ryerson Conservation Area, Lyons Woods, Lake Villa and Bailey's own sighting at Lakewood Forest

Preserve in 2004. This year, a few weeks before Carla's discovery, local birder Beau Schaefer spotted a Prairie Warbler at IBSP on May 18 – which would have been #11 – but again a migratory rather than a nesting bird.



Prairie Warbler at Grant Woods 6/28/14 - KKoontz.com

That's because the Prairie Warbler's Illinois breeding range typically stops in the southern part of the state, where the habitat is more conducive.

It's unclear whether the Grant Woods birds found mates, since the only confirmed sightings were of two males, but at least one bird was reported at the preserve as late as July 4. Either way, the species was a summer highlight for a parade of area birders who made the pilgrimage to see and hear one of the rarest warblers in our area.