



# WingTips

A Publication of the Lake/Cook Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society ♦ August 2016

## On the Fly

At the height of spring migration three months ago, a friend sent me photos of two warblers that he found dead on the sidewalk in downtown Highland Park. Both were victims of window collisions – the cause of an estimated one billion bird deaths and countless other injuries in North America every year. With fall migration approaching, now is a good time to make your house windows bird-safe. Visit [birdmonitors.net](http://birdmonitors.net) to learn how and to read about the important work of the Chicago Bird Collision Monitors. And speaking of websites, you may notice that Lake/Cook's does not yet have a full 2016-2017 schedule posted. That's because we're launching a new site shortly. Meanwhile, the enclosed brochure has all the details. Enjoy!

– Rena Cohen, Chapter President

## Piping Plovers Nest in Waukegan: 2<sup>nd</sup> Year for Endangered Shorebird

Federally endangered Piping Plovers nested in Waukegan this summer for the second year in a row, not far from the Waukegan Beach site where they bred in large numbers a century ago. That indicates progress for a species that had declined to 17 pairs in the Great Lakes region by 1981 but rebounded to 75 pairs in the region in both 2015 and 2016.



In Waukegan this year, two pairs of plovers took up residence a short distance away from last year's breeding grounds at the former Johns Manville property in Waukegan, the site of a federal Superfund project where company buildings were leveled 15 years ago because of asbestos. The cleanup created ideal nesting conditions for the birds, which favor sandy beaches with sparse vegetation and small stones called cobble to breed.

Two of the birds that nested this year were among four that survived last year's local breeding effort, returning to the area to produce young of their own. Seven chicks hatched out of the two nests, but five were predated. The other two were banded but haven't been seen since mid-July. It is unknown whether they fledged or died.

Still, the nesting behavior is promising. Until 2009, no Piping Plover nests had been reported in Illinois for 30 years. That year, a nest with four eggs was discovered on Waukegan Beach. With no adults found, the eggs were rescued and incubated at Lincoln Park Zoo. The three chicks that hatched were ultimately banded and released at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Seashore in Michigan. It took six more years for the bird to nest again in Waukegan. The 2015-2016 nests bode well for 2017.

## 1<sup>ST</sup> Program of the Season Aug. 16: What's Next for Whooping Cranes?

This year has seen major changes in Whooping Crane conservation efforts with the suspension of the program using ultralight aircraft to help young cranes migrate from Wisconsin to Florida each fall. There are currently fewer than 600 Whooping Cranes in the world, both captive and wild – up from a population of just 14 in 1938.



In our first program of the season, The International Crane Foundation's Lizzie Condon will explain historic efforts to bring this majestic species back from the brink of extinction, ICF's new strategy for ensuring its survival, and the foundation's ongoing research efforts in this area. The program is at 7 pm on Tuesday, Aug. 16, at Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road, Highland Park.



## Members You Should Know: Charlotte Adelman & Bernie Schwartz

Many years ago, husband-and-wife Lake/Cook members Charlotte Adelman and Bernie Schwartz began a journey that has led them to become passionate advocates for birds, bees, butterflies, native plants and prairie restoration. The journey has resulted in books, public gardens, and land donations and bequests in five states – all dedicated to preserving native flora and fauna for future generations as well as reducing nonnative plantings that provide no sustenance for wildlife.

Locally, among the retired attorneys' most visible legacies is a nearly two-acre native prairie garden at Centennial Park in Wilmette. Initiated by the couple and created with the help of the Park District and Boy Scouts, the garden bursts into colorful bloom every year with Purple Coneflowers, Orange Coneflowers, New England Asters, Blue Vervains, multiple milkweed varieties crucial to monarch butterflies, and dozens of other native forb, flower and grass species.



In Wisconsin, the duo has protected a rare 1.6-acre hill prairie remnant on a lake near Whitewater by purchasing seven lots that would otherwise have been developed and then entering into a permanent easement with the Kettle Moraine Land Trust as well as donating the property to The Prairie Enthusiasts.

In North Dakota's Prairie Pothole Region, they have donated a 160-acre site that is premier waterfowl breeding habitat to Ducks Unlimited – the world's largest private waterfowl and wetland conservation organization. The donation included funds for enhancing the property with native plants to support other birds and pollinators.

Their conservation and education efforts have also included bequests to organizations in Nebraska, Illinois and Ohio as part of their estate planning; co-authorship of the state-by-

state *Prairie Directory of North America* and *The Midwestern Native Garden: Native Alternatives to Nonnative Flowers and Plants*; and countless presentations to enthusiastic gardeners, birders and environmentalists to spread the word that native plants improve air and water quality, reduce the need for pesticides, and provide food and reproductive sites necessary for birds and butterflies.

“Researching and writing about the prairie and native flowers, plants, trees and shrubs has provided me with an unexpected and magnificent education,” Charlotte says. It has also led indirectly to a love of birds and trips to see them. An island near Edinburgh, Scotland, stands out.

“Bernie and I were the only two human beings on it at that particular time, and we were amidst 40,000 nesting pairs of Atlantic Puffins, some of which were flying in with fish in their beaks to feed their offspring,” she recalls. “It was a truly memorable experience.”

Next up: the couple's third book, *Midwestern Native Shrubs and Trees*. Stay tuned; coming December!



## 1st Annual Lake County HawkFest Set to Debut Oct.14-16

A weekend of raptor watching and education is in store Oct. 14-16 at the first annual Lake County HawkFest, to be held primarily at Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve and Lake Forest College. Created by local raptor enthusiasts in collaboration with the Lake County Forest Preserve District, the event will include all-day hawkwatches at Fort Sheridan and Illinois Beach State Park, bird walks at multiple sites, up-close rehabilitated raptors, programs on topics ranging from hawk identification to bird photography, and family-friendly activities. Registration is required for fee-based events. A full agenda is posted at [www.facebook.com/lakecountyhawkfest](http://www.facebook.com/lakecountyhawkfest).



## Welcome New Members

John Adams, Chicago

William & Yvette Branson,  
Chicago

Nat Carmichael, Gurnee

Mark & Karen Flinchum,  
Chicago

Christy Gaples, Libertyville

Susan & Rick Gourley,  
Northbrook

Sharon Kardas, Chicago

Marcia Kittler, Chicago

Edward & Bonnie Koven,  
Highland Park

Monica Leffers, Burbank

Melody Metzger, Mount  
Prospect

Melissa Ramlow, Hainesville

Laura Ferrell & Grant Riedesel,  
Chicago

Kate & Rick Scott, Lake Zurich

Patti Solem, Highland Park

Rosemary Stadler, Chicago

Waukegan Park District

Steve Wilson, Libertyville

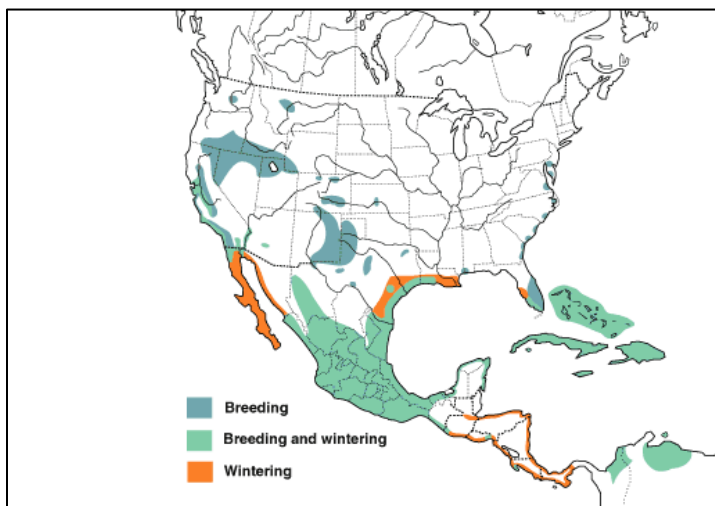
Linda Worchel, Round Lake

## Breeding Stilts Star at Emiquon



*For the last two years, Lake/Cook Chapter has helped fund research on the breeding ecology of waterbirds at The Nature Conservancy's Emiquon Preserve. This article by research supervisor Heath M. Hagy shares a few highlights.*

This summer, undergraduate researchers affiliated with the Illinois Natural History Survey discovered more than 40 Black-necked Stilt nests at Emiquon Preserve southwest of Peoria. The actual number may be in the hundreds, considering that field crews cannot view every inch of the acclaimed 5,000-acre restored wetland from their boats.



These nest numbers are noteworthy for two reasons. First, while a few individuals typically pass through the state each summer, Illinois is well outside this large and charismatic shorebird's primary breeding range on both coasts as well as interior areas of the western and southwestern U.S. Second, the data shows that Emiquon may be one of the most significant and northernmost locations in the central U.S. to host breeding colonies of this striking species.

The bird's breeding range has expanded northward from the Gulf Coast since the 1980s, with the first confirmed Illinois nesting in 1995 and inland breeding colonies detected as far east as the Cheyenne Bottoms of Kansas. But nesting remains very limited in the central and eastern U.S. except for coastal areas.

Black-necked Stilts commonly winter along coasts of the southern U.S. and across Mexico, Central America, and into South America. They have been documented breeding at Emiquon Preserve since 2013, six years after The Nature Conservancy's restoration work began.

Unlike songbirds that might build a nest high in a tree or ducks that often locate their nests far from water in a vast sea of grass, stilts build simple nests in wide-open areas

such as former ditch spoil piles, floating mats of detritus, and old muskrat lodges where the eggs are exposed to avian predators, waves, wind, and a variety of other risks.

The nest bowl is composed of a shallow depression in sand or rocks which is often scraped by the parents, and lined by just a few sticks and twigs. Both male and female stilts take part in building the nest and incubating the eggs, almost always with four eggs per clutch. Parents must ensure survival for more than three weeks until hatching, despite the fragility of the nest and the multiple threats from weather and other wildlife. The only protection seems to come from the camouflage of the cryptically colored eggs.

Yet in the last few years, INHS researchers at Emiquon Preserve have documented nest success rates exceeding 30–40% – as much as four times the 10-30% nest success of grassland-nesting birds.

The stilt story is just one of many successes at the site, where more than 250 bird species and 35 fish species have been documented and upwards of 200,000 migrating ducks, geese and other water birds may drop in on any given day. In addition, work conducted by INHS researchers and undergraduate interns during summers 2013–2016 has indicated that upwards of 500 waterbirds nest at Emiquon Preserve in some years. Among them are the state-endangered Common Gallinule and Black-crowned Night Heron, and the state-threatened Least Bittern, as well as American Coot, Sora, American Bittern, Green Heron, and others.

These numbers have led some environmentalists to call the site "Illinois' Everglades." It is certainly one of the state's most remarkable natural wonders.



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## Mixed Signals on Monarch Butterfly Populations

This past season, after a disastrous 2013-2014 and only moderately less distressing 2014-2015, Mexico's wintering monarch butterfly population made a comeback of sorts. An estimated 140 million monarchs roosted in 10 acres of trees during the winter months, up from 2.8 acres in 2014-2015 and just 1.66 acres the previous year. But that was still a fraction of the 1 billion that blanketed 44 acres in 1996. Moreover, the Center for Biological Diversity noted that the population increase was likely related to favorable summer weather conditions in the monarch's U.S. breeding areas.



Meanwhile, a study released this spring by the Monarch Conservation Science Partnership reported a significant probability that the iconic insects will decline to the point of "quasi-extinction" in the next 20 years, with numbers so small and scattered that species recovery will become

impossible. The study concluded that a fivefold increase over the 2014-2015 population would be required to halve the risk. Researchers called for active management to reverse the decline, which has been linked primarily to the loss of breeding habitat in the U.S. as agricultural practices, development and cropland conversion have the reduced the abundance of the milkweed where monarchs lay their eggs and where monarch caterpillars feed.

The need to bring back the butterflies has spurred a variety of strategies in recent years. The National Wildlife Federation, for example, launched the Mayors' Monarch Pledge asking cities and municipalities to commit to creating habitat and educating citizens to do their part. More than 100 towns have taken the pledge to date, locally including Carol Stream, Deerfield, Elmhurst, Evanston, Glenview, Island Lake and Lake Zurich.

At the federal government level, an initiative to create a 1,500-mile butterfly corridor supporting the monarchs' migration was adopted last year and has reportedly added 250,000 acres of milkweed so far. Part of the plan involves utilizing transportation and utility rights-of-way to provide hospitable milkweed stopping points. The September 20 Lake/Cook program – **"Rights-of-Way: A New Lifeline for Pollinators"** – will spotlight this effort.