



WingTips

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On the Fly

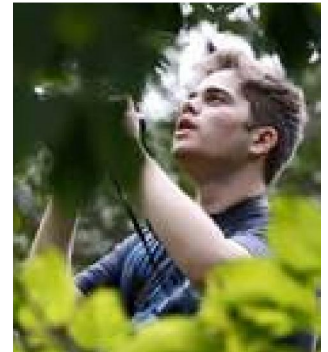
Recently, I visited the 1893 World's Fair exhibit at the Field Museum. As I scanned one of the exhibit cases of animal specimens that had been on display at the fair, I realized that I was looking at a Passenger Pigeon - a species that would become extinct 21 years later. On this, the centennial of the bird's demise, I encourage you to learn what happened. For a quick overview, consult the story in the New Yorker (available online). For details, read the new book by local naturalist Joel Greenberg - 'A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction.' You can also attend a 5:30 pm book signing on Thursday Jan. 23 at the Peggy Notebaert Museum in Chicago where the 'guest of honor' will be a 1901 specimen discovered by the author, and a 7 pm talk by Greenberg on Thursday Feb. 20 in North Chicago (register at www.lcfpd.org). It's a story with ample food for thought for environmentalists today.

- Rena Cohen, Chapter President



My Record-Breaking County Big Year by Aaron Gyllenhaal

Oak Park's Aaron Gyllenhaal spent 2013 trying to beat the 274-bird record set in 1990 for the number of species seen in Cook County in a calendar year. The 17-year-old high school junior broke the record on October 14 and wound up his Cook County Big Year with 281 species. This is his story.



I don't know exactly how the idea for doing a Cook County Big Year came about. Maybe it was my brother's incessant complaining about going to central Illinois for the 10th time last year, or maybe it was my love for the lakefront meshed with my love for listing, but I do know that when I got the idea, I went after it without any second thoughts.

I started by doing a bit of research on the birds in the county. I decided to make an Excel spreadsheet ranking birds by their perceived difficulty of acquisition. This allowed me to know what birds to get quickly so I wouldn't miss them. These rankings organized my birding trips for the whole Big Year effort. I went out specifically to see the harder birds and allowed the easier ones to come in naturally.

One advantage I had in trying to beat Eric Walters' 1990 record was eBird, the online database of bird sightings launched in 2002. eBird allowed me to search through years of records to get specific locations for the species I needed. Another was IBET, the Illinois listserv, which gave me constant real-time access to other people's sightings so that I could chase the birds that showed up. My Big Year was a team effort that involved all of the birding community.

The most memorable moment occurred on May 19 at Columbus Park, less than a mile from my house. My dad, brother and I were leading a trip there for Chicago Ornithological Society. We arrived 30 minutes before the field trip started and split up to scout.

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In the Field with East Africa's Birds & Gorillas: Program Tuesday, Jan. 21

The Albertine Rift - a 1000km-long stretch of mountains, valleys, lakes and rivers shared by six east African countries - is among the world's most biodiverse regions with over 700 bird and 400 mammal species, including the mountain gorilla and 40+ species of birds found nowhere else in the world. The Field Museum's Josh Engel will talk about the region and discuss the museum's recent bird research expeditions to Congo and Uganda.



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Join us at 7 pm on Tuesday, Jan, 21, at Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road, Highland Park for 'Of Greenbuls and Gorillas: Field Work in Africa's Albertine Rift.' Then mark your calendar for a story closer to home on Feb. 18, when local birder Jeff Skrentny will discuss his Big Day 'addiction' and how to see 175+ species in 24 hours.

For directions and a list of other upcoming programs, see www.lakecookingaudubon.org.

My Record-Breaking County Big Year

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About 10 minutes later, my brother Ethan called to say that he had flushed a nightjar that was not a Common Nighthawk, the most expected nightjar species in this area. I figured it was a Whip-poor-will, which I had seen a few days before at Douglas Park. I hustled over to Ethan, and together we relocated the bird. It was a Chuck-will's-widow, which had not been seen in the county for decades! That was species #241.



Chuck-will's-widow

Other highlights included an American Woodcock that landed in front of me at Douglas Park in March (#114), a Wilson's Phalarope in a flooded ballfield at Columbus Park in April (#155), and – all in May – four Red-necked Phalaropes near Techny Basin in Glenview (#251), five Red Knots at 63rd Street Beach (#254), and a rare-for-Illinois Black-headed Grosbeak in a birder's backyard in River Forest (#255). I broke the record in October with Surf Scoter (#275), and my last year bird was a Snowy Owl at 63d Street Beach in November (#281).



Red Knots on 63rd Street Beach

While this record was difficult to break in the first place, attending school made it even harder. I checked my email and IBET constantly throughout the school day. One time in the middle of a math test, I got a text about a Mississippi Kite and a Swainson's Hawk. Needless to say, it was hard to concentrate on the test after that.

I couldn't leave school to chase a bird, but luckily many of the rare birds that showed up stayed for at least one full day so I didn't miss them.

I did miss a few no-shows that usually appear in the county during the year, like Common Gallinule and Little Blue Heron, but I still broke the record by seven birds. Congratulations are also due to my fellow Big Year participant Jeff Skrentny, who ended the year two birds behind me but still broke the record by five.

Thanks to all of you in the birding community who helped me reach 281 species. I couldn't have done it without you.



'Rockin' Rock River' Weekend: Field Trip May 2-4

Spring is every birder's favorite season, and this year we're going to kick it off with a three-day trip two hours west to explore preserves including White Pines, Castle Rock, Franklin Creek and Lowden-Miller on a hunt for early migrants – including species like Kentucky Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush and Red-shouldered Hawk that are hard to find in the Chicago area.

We may also stop at Nachusa Grasslands, a remarkable prairie restoration success story. We'll carpool and have local birders who know the area to guide us. To register, email rena@sspr.com.



Welcome New Members

Jill Allread, Oak Park
Ward Burton, Lake Bluff

Nancy Ekstrom, Darien
Katherine Havighorst,
Homewood

Agata Lipka, Cicero
Rick Mullin & Mary Henry,
Winnetka

Judy Phelps, Northbrook
Marjorie Pries & Paul Baker,
Chicago

Simon Reeves, Chicago

Rebecca & Ed Rice,
Northbrook

Mary Seyfarth, Highland Park
Cynthia Soderman, Lake
Barrington

Jeriann & Michael Sweeney,
Palos Heights

Katherine Sutton, Northbrook
Polly Wilson, Round Lake
Beach

Ralph Zahorik, Waukegan



Are You on Our Email List?

Lake/Cook Chapter sends regular emails about upcoming field trips, programs, and local bird- and nature-related events. If you are not on our list and want to be, go to <http://www.lakecookaudubon.org> to sign up.



Climate Change in Chicagoland: Panel Paints a Disturbing Picture

On November 21, Ryerson Woods hosted a panel discussion on climate change moderated by Melinda Pruett-Jones, executive director of Chicago Wilderness. Expert panelists described what to expect in our region as climate change advances. As we wait out another fierce Chicago winter, a progressively warmer climate might sound inviting — but consider these adverse effects.

TREES: Since 2006, climate change has shifted Lake and Cook Counties from the 4B/5A to the 5A/6B plant hardiness zone (the previous zone for Champaign-Urbana). That will affect the local survival of tree species including the American linden, Norway spruce, Ironwood and Shagbark hickory, according to panelist Suzanne Malec-McKenna, director of the Regional Trees Initiative at the Morton Arboretum. Diseases and infestations by insects such as the emerald ash borer are also contributing to tree loss in our cities and urban forests. This will diminish our quality of life; reduce habitat for birds and other species; and even take a financial toll. One Morton Arboretum study estimated that Chicagoland's trees yield \$51.2 billion in benefits annually — including \$205 million in pollution removal and \$349 million in carbon storage.

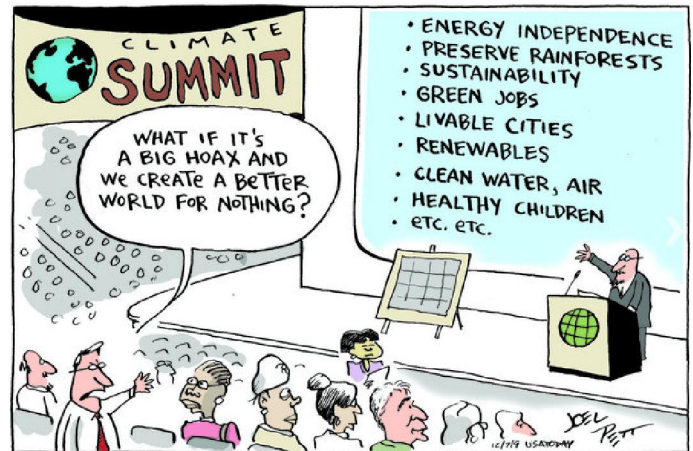
BIRDS: According to Doug Stotz, senior conservation ecologist at the Field Museum, warmer weather means we are already seeing different species such as the White-throated Sparrow over-winter here, and southern species such as the Northern Parula, Summer Tanager and Yellow-throated Warbler breed in the area. But with southern populations in decline, these species are shifting location rather than expanding their territory. That means we may lose our cheerful, prolific Black-capped Chickadee and *not* see the Carolina Chickadee move in in its place.

A related problem described by Stotz is the kind of climate-food misalignment that occurred in the spring of 2012. Unseasonably warm weather caused vegetation to leaf out and insects to appear 4-6 weeks earlier than usual. Warblers that rely on elm leaf beetle larva arrived at their usual time, only to find larva no longer available to them. Inadequate food can increase mortality and, ultimately, impact Chicago's role as a migration stopover.

BUTTERFLIES & OTHERS: While climate change may seem to be happening very slowly, evolution of plant and animal species and their ability to adapt is even slower. Hardest hit are butterflies and other insects that depend on a single type of host plant. When that plant disappears from a region, dependent species face extinction.

WEATHER: Lake and Cook County residents can expect precipitation to increase 25% over the next 50 years, said panelist Susan Ask, director of the Animalia project

(www.animaliaproject.org). That means more damage than flooded basements; it means flooded farm fields, crop damage, food shortages and price increases, overwhelmed sewage infrastructures, and diminished water quality. And we can expect more summer days with temperatures over 90° F with reduced air quality and soaring air conditioning bills.



Joel Pett for USA Today, 12/7/2009

So what can you do to help?

Plant native trees where you can and “well-behaved” non-natives for diversity’s sake. See suggestions at www.chicagobotanic.org/plantinfo/tree_alternatives.

Plan a “Meatless Monday” each week. Only 8% of Illinois agricultural land feeds people; the rest produces feed for cattle, pigs, etc. and it takes 20 times the calories of energy to create meat-based versus plant-based protein.

Engage your children and other young people in fun ways to reduce energy use. Plant a vegetable garden, ride bicycles on errands, track energy savings, etc.

For more ideas and guidance, visit:

<http://www.chicagowilderness.org/> – News on local events and initiatives such as Leave No Child Inside, Climate Action and Restoring Nature.

www.animaliaproject.org – Information for home use and educators, listings of eco-minded events open to the public, tips on gardening, preventing bird collisions, etc.

<http://www.epa.gov/climate/climatechange/students/basic/index.html> – A student’s guide to global climate change, with activities to be part of the solution.

<http://www.nature.org/greenliving> – Eco-tips for home, office, pets and garden plus a comprehensive carbon footprint calculator.

<http://climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/> – A wealth of educational tools and events for community leaders, educators and the general public.



They're Baaaccckkkk! Snowy Owls Stage Another Irruption

In the winter of 2011-2012, Snowy Owls arrived in historic numbers across the country as well as in Illinois, where 133 sightings were reported in 34 counties. It was the first major invasion from the species' Arctic home since 1996-1997, but this year it's happening again.

As of December 31, according to a tally by local birder Dave Johnson, 63 Snowy Owls had been reported in 24 Illinois counties – six more than during the same period two years ago. Locally, that has included as many as four in one day at Montrose, one at Waukegan Beach, three at O'Hare, and a remarkable eight (OMG!) seen at one time at 31st Street Harbor in Chicago on December 22.

Nationally, experts say we're seeing the largest migration south in two decades, with massive numbers across the Northeast and one observer in Newfoundland reporting a staggering 75 birds from a single observation point.

These are thrilling sightings for birders, but they may not be good news for the birds. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Chris Wood told the New York Times that the huge back-to-back influxes "raise significant questions about why this is happening. These Snowy Owls may well be sharing a message for us about conditions in the Arctic."

The usual explanations for Snowy Owl irruptions center around two phenomena: a cyclical drop in the lemming and vole populations that the birds feed on, and highly

productive breeding seasons that yield too many birds for the food availability. But an eBird report suggests that climate change in the Arctic may now be playing a role by affecting summer lemming cycles, winter prey availability, the owls' ability to hunt waterbirds in the Arctic in the face of shrinking sea ice, and more.



Whatever the reason, this year's invasion offers an opportunity to feast your eyes on the ghost-white owl that the Harry Potter movies made famous. Check IBET (<http://birding.aba.org/maillist/IL>) to see where Snowies have been reported, and make the effort to see one near you. This is a bird that takes your breath away – whether you're seeing it for the first time or the 21st.