



WingTips

A Publication of the Lake/Cook Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society ♦ January 2015

On the Fly

It may be January, but that's no reason to take a birding break! In addition to the chapter Bald Eagle program, Bald Eagle Watch Weekend and Junco movie mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, you can see chapter member Kim Beck's bird paintings at the new "Hear the Rhythm of the Birds" exhibit at Ryerson Woods' Brushwood Center (Jan. 11-Feb.26), join a chapter field trip to look for winter birds like Snow Buntings (Jan. 25), attend the all-day Wild Things Conference (Jan. 31 – register at www.habitatproject.org/WildThings2015/), and check out <https://www.facebook.com/lakecookaudubon> and www.illinoisaudubon.org for other ideas. Also watch your yards for Pine Siskins and other winter visitors. It's one of the great things about birding: there's always something new to learn or see.

– Rena Cohen, Chapter President



The (Bald) Eagle Has Landed in Illinois – Next Program Tuesday, Jan. 20

Last winter, Illinois hosted the second largest wintering population of Bald Eagles after Alaska. At 7 pm on Tuesday, Jan. 20, in our first program of 2015, Louise Clemency from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will discuss the reasons behind their presence, the species' life history and comeback from the DDT crisis, and current management strategies to protect our national bird.



Join us for 'The (Bald) Eagle Has Landed – in Illinois' at Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road, Highland Park. And to see live eagles, check out page 2 for information on Illinois Audubon Society's annual Bald Eagle Watch Weekend in Starved Rock Jan. 24-25.

Owls, Merlins & Cranes, Oh My: The Christmas Bird Counts of 2014

Between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5, birders across the country braved frigid temperatures to participate in Christmas Bird Counts designed to help measure changes in bird populations. If patterns follow those of 2013, more than 60,000 North American birders participated in the counts.



This year, that included a record 15 Lake/Cook members who shared their eyes and expertise on four different CBCs in the Chicago area. Participants included CiCi Birnberg, Rena Cohen, Donnie Dann, Bonnie Duman, Ethan and Scott Ellis, Mark and Lorraine Fritzmann, John Hockman, Todd Katz, Joe Rockey, Carla

Schmakel, Dan and Irene Weinman, and Jeff Sanders – a 52-year CBC veteran who founded the Urban Count in 1966, still compiles it, and once did eight CBCs in a year.

This year's highlights included six Eastern Screech-Owls heard by Joe and Jeff in Skokie Lagoons and Harms Woods as dawn broke on Dec. 27, all responding to Jeff's imitation of the species' distinctive descending whinny; a later visual sighting of a Great-horned Owl by Joe and Jeff behind Techy Towers in Northbrook; and a Northern Saw-Whet Owl (above) repeatedly tooting in the Ellis' and Weinmans' count group at a park in Bannockburn.

Other notable sightings by chapter members ranged from a cooperatively perched Merlin at Ryerson to a Hermit Thrush at Jarvis Sanctuary in Chicago, a heard-only Tufted Titmouse at Millard Park in Highland Park, a Yellow-rumped Warbler in Waukegan, a Purple Finch in Northbrook, a Belted Kingfisher in Deerfield, and multiple Brown Creepers, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Northern Flickers and bugling Sandhill Cranes.

None of these birds are rare, but they are uncommon in winter. As for the CBCs - same time, next year!



New Concerns Raised over Future of Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve

Almost three years ago, the Lake County Forest Preserve District finally buried the option to develop a golf course at the Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve. Shortly thereafter, the forest preserve board held a public open house to solicit input regarding the preserve's future.

Since then, parking spaces have been added to accommodate the preserve's popularity. Interim trails have been mowed to provide access to the prairies and woodlands. And invasive species are being managed. But there is still no master plan. That may be changing.



In November 2014, with no public input since the first meeting, initial concepts were presented to the board's planning & restoration committee. Representatives from Lake/Cook Audubon as well as homeowners from the Town of Fort Sheridan subdivision who were in attendance expressed some concern about the plans.

Most significantly, all the proposed options call for the planting of a savanna that would dramatically diminish the thriving grassland habitat and the wildlife that has found refuge here, including declining bird species such as Henslow's Sparrows and Bobolinks and rare visitors like Smith's Longspurs. Attendees emphasized the greater environmental value of cultivating a grassland habitat given the near-total disappearance of grasslands in Lake County.

Environmental considerations were not the only concern expressed. The proposed master plan also reduces the number of parking spaces as well as moving the entire parking lot further away from the lakefront and overlooking bluff. It was suggested that this was an effort by the Forest Preserve District to reduce access to the non-swimming beach as an implicit form of crowd management.

Forest Preserve staff is now reevaluating the master plan. To express your opinion, send an email to fort@lcfpd.org and copy your Lake County Commissioner as well.

To stay abreast of matters, join the Facebook Fort Sheridan group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fortsheridan/>



Birder's Estate Donates Book Collection to Lake/Cook Chapter

Many thanks to the estate of the late Robert Vanderpoel, a Des Plaines resident, world traveler and avid birder whose family graciously donated his extensive collection of bird books to Lake/Cook Chapter in November. The chapter received nearly 100 books, including field guides to locations as far-flung as Borneo, Chile, East Africa, Japan and New Zealand. The sale of these books at select chapter meetings will help fund future programs and guarantee that Robert's love of birds will be shared with others who have caught the 'birding bug.'



'Extraordinary Junco' Movie Jan. 15

The gray and white Dark-eyed Juncos that show up in local backyards every winter exhibit stunning diversity in feather color, body shape and behavior across the U.S. They have also played a starring role in a wide array of scientific discoveries. Learn all about it at "**Ordinary Extraordinary Junco**," an 88-minute movie airing at 7 pm on Thursday, Jan. 15, at Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road, Highland Park. Free, all ages.



Eagle Watch Weekend Jan. 24-25

The Illinois Audubon Society's annual Bald Eagle Watch Weekend will take place Jan. 24-25 in the Starved Rock area. Highlights include wild eagles fishing along the river, a live bird of prey show, storyteller Brian "Fox" Ellis performing as John James Audubon, children's activities and more. See www.illinoisaudubon.org for details and advance tickets.



Welcome New Members

David & Sue Barkhausen,
Lake Bluff
Bob & Ellen Black,
Highland Park
Margaret Cipolla & Richard
Hodgkins, Palatine
Diane Eubanks, Antioch
Dominique Galiano, Lake Villa
John & Judy George,
Highland Park
Rebecca Grill, Highland Park
George & Bernie Hossfold,
Wilmette
Jean Inouye, Chicago
Kathy Khadra, Highland Park

Stan Kirschner, Mundelein
Kathy Alred Lin, Lake Forest
Sheng Lou, Lake Bluff
Elizabeth Mach & Dick Shelley,
Highland Park
Zoe Mather, Mount Prospect
Gail Mikenas, Brookfield
Sid Padgaonkar, Streamwood
Judy Perkins, Wauconda
Carol Scher & Jason Battle,
Buffalo Grove
Beth Teschner, Palatine
Maura Tovar, Worth
Amy & Jason Weller, Wilmette

Fort Sheridan Hawk Watch Completes First Official Year

If you happened to stop at Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve just north of Highwood this past fall, you may have seen a line of birders, binoculars and spotting scopes scanning the skies from a picnic table at the edge of the parking lot. If so, you were witnessing **the birth of the second hawk counting site in Lake County**, just 16 miles south of the Illinois Beach State Park (IBSP) Hawk Watch in Zion.

Both count sites were established by local raptor authority and photographer Vic Berardi, who started the IBSP Hawk Watch in 2000. That site – now the longest-running organized hawk counting effort on the western shoreline of Lake Michigan – is staffed by volunteers every day from late August through Thanksgiving during southbound raptor migration and is a magnet for hawk lovers throughout the Chicago region.

The seeds for the new Fort Sheridan Hawk Watch were planted by Lake Forest birder Roy Peterson. In the early 2000s, Peterson began watching hawks from the cemetery at Fort Sheridan because of the relatively open sightlines and the proximity to his home. He discovered that the **raptor numbers and species seen at Fort Sheridan were frequently far different from those reported at IBSP.**

Several years ago, encouraged by Berardi, local birders Michal Furmanek and Adam Sell began occasional hawk watching at Fort Sheridan to replicate Peterson's experience. Their findings as well as Berardi's own Fort Sheridan sightings led to the official launch of the Fort Sheridan Hawk Watch last August.

For the 2014 season, because of limited manpower, the new site was staffed only in ideal raptor movement weather such as on days after cold fronts with strong westerly winds. Furmanek and Sell led the effort, aided by other volunteers along with drop-ins seeking to hone their raptor ID skills.

Again, the counts at Fort Sheridan and IBSP sometimes varied sharply. In August, for example, Fort Sheridan spotters observed 70 raptors in 15 hours on duty – more than twice as many as the 29 observed at IBSP in 17 hours. Even more significant, **32 of the Fort Sheridan sightings during the period were Broad-winged Hawks while IBSP had none.**

Seasonwide, Fort Sheridan hawk watchers spotted one Black Vulture and four Golden Eagles while IBSP volunteers came up empty on those species. And while the IBSP site yielded the only Mississippi Kites of the two locations as well as significantly larger numbers of species like Sharp-shinned Hawk, Merlin and Peregrine Falcon, the

total number of raptors seen at IBSP was only 14% higher than at Fort Sheridan (3,433 versus 2,960) despite three times the hourly coverage.

Berardi attributes the different sightings at each location to a combination of differing geographic flight patterns, differing fields of vision at the two sites, and heavier forestation at Fort Sheridan that limits the formation of thermals and therefore increases visibility because the birds are flying lower.

“There may be duplication between the two sites, but the mere fact that we are counting more raptors on any given day proves that we are seeing additional birds,” Berardi says. “Over time, having the second site will also provide tremendous opportunities for research about raptor migration along the shoreline.”

2014 Hawk Watches	Fort Sheridan	Illinois Beach
HOURS	198.25	591.5
Black Vulture	1	0
Turkey Vulture	537	501
Osprey	82	123
Mississippi Kite	0	2
Bald Eagle	67	53
Northern Harrier	137	155
Sharp-shinned Hawk	691	999
Cooper's Hawk	98	91
Northern Goshawk	4	4
Red-shouldered Hawk	17	16
Broad-winged Hawk	123	120
Red-tailed Hawk	854	781
Swainson's Hawk	1	2
Rough-legged Hawk	14	20
Golden Eagle	4	0
American Kestrel	14	32
Merlin	203	395
Peregrine Falcon	56	119
Prairie Falcon	0	0
Unknown Raptor	57	20
TOTAL	2960	3433

The only other active hawk counting site in Illinois is Greene Valley in Naperville, one of the few inland hawk watches in the country. All hawk watch sites in North America submit their data to Hawkcount.org, which in turn shares it with the Hawk Migration Association of North America for analysis of raptor population trends. Thanks to the Fort Sheridan initiative, Lake County now has the distinction of providing two data sets to these important efforts.

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Waukegan's Bowen Park Wins Restoration Award

To a passerby, Waukegan's Bowen Park is best known as the site of the Jack Benny Center for the Arts. But the park – located between Waukegan Beach and the Illinois Beach State Park South Unit – is also a mini-birding hotspot during fall and spring migrations as well as home to a rare ravine ecosystem and rich woodland habitat including 20 endangered, threatened or locally rare Plants of Concern.

Unfortunately, the natural areas were overgrown, starved of sunlight, and inundated with invasive species until the Waukegan Park District began restoration efforts in 2012 with the help of multiple grants, the backing of the Waukegan Harbor Citizens' Advisory Group, and the 2013 acquisition of a one-acre connector site at the park's north end funded in part by the Illinois Audubon Society.

In November, those efforts were recognized with a Chicago Wilderness Conservation and Native Landscaping Award to the Waukegan Park District. The work has included removing invasives such as garlic mustard and buckthorn; opening the canopy to promote growth of native shrubs and plants in the understory; clearing debris jams in Glen Flora Creek, a small tributary in the ravine that drains 2.1 miles of land in the City of Waukegan; and restoring the ravine slopes and bluff to improve the water quality of the creek and the downstream wetlands.

In addition to preserving habitat and providing an environment for important plants such as Solomon's Seal and Wild Columbine, the restoration is expected to enhance habitat for both migrating and breeding birds.



At one time, the ravine was a reliable spot to find Louisiana Waterthrush in early spring, and the park itself can produce virtually every species of warbler and other songbirds that migrate through the area without leaving the parking lot. A 2013 avian survey conducted in connection with the restoration even found a Bell's Vireo – a shrubland bird rarely seen in Lake County – nesting nearby. Once-degraded Bowen Park is springing back to life, and both plants and wildlife are sure to follow.