



WingTips

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On the Fly

Many years ago, a college classmate of my husband Sonny's invited us to go birding at Point Pelee during spring migration. It was our first birding experience, and I was so overwhelmed at the rainbow of warblers dripping from the trees after their night flight across Lake Erie that it didn't occur to me to worry about dangers to their survival. Now, of course, I'm aware of those dangers, the declining populations of many species, and the need to do what we can to make our local 'patch' hospitable to the birds who manage to find their way here.

If you want to help, Lake/Cook Chapter needs one more representative to the Bird Conservation Network (see adjacent story). You'll not only make a difference today but also for future generations of birders and nature lovers.

– Rena Cohen, Chapter President

Protecting Chicago's Birds: Bird Conservation Network in Action

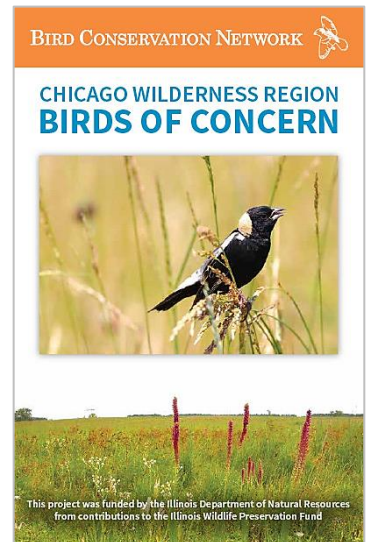
Until the late 1990s, efforts to protect birds throughout the Chicago region were both fragmented and limited. Breeding bird surveys required to measure and analyze species' land use were conducted in only a few counties by a handful of birders. Bird conservation advocates had relatively few resources to advise land managers on how to make their properties bird-friendly. They also lacked a mechanism to share information and a united front that would provide credibility as well as critical access to policy makers.

Those issues prompted the formation of the Bird Conservation Network (BCN), now a coalition of 21 organizations (including Lake/Cook Chapter) that serves as an advocate for birds and the habitat they need to survive in the seven-county area.

"A few years before BCN was established, Chicago had started the Lights Out program to reduce bird collisions during spring migration by encouraging managers and residents of tall buildings to turn off decorative lighting or close their blinds, but there was no cohesive local effort to address a broader range of bird conservation issues like habitat loss," recalls Donnie Dann, a founding BCN member and former BCN president who is still actively involved in bird protection. "We needed that voice to have an impact."

Early BCN initiatives ranged from transferring years of paper-based breeding bird survey data to Cornell's then-new electronic database to make it more accessible, to organizing conferences about habitat restoration to counter a Cook County moratorium on the practice that had been imposed because of a few residents' concerns about tree removal and prescribed burns.

Continued on page 2



Tales from the Museum Bird Crypt: Next Program Tuesday Jan. 19

Each of the 500,000+ specimens in the Field Museum Bird Collection tells a story. At 7 pm on Tuesday, Jan. 19, the museum's Josh Engel will share some of the most interesting in a never-before-seen program called – appropriately – 'Tales from the Museum Bird Crypt.'



Examples will range from specimens collected by Nathan Leopold and their link to the infamous Leopold & Loeb murder, to the pelican that was recently killed by the fish it was trying to eat. Josh will also discuss some of the rare birds that have crashed into Chicago's skyscrapers and research into birds killed by window strikes. The program is at Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road, Highland Park.

Protecting Chicago's Birds

Continued from page 1

Since then, BCN has promoted local bird conservation in myriad ways. It has developed a series of 'green papers' on issues such as how to conserve local habitat for declining grassland birds and how to minimize the impact of wind turbines on Lake Michigan's wildlife. It collaborated with the former Chicago Department of the Environment to create the Chicago Region Birding Trail Guide (now out of print) to help spread the word about local birdlife. It regularly engages in advocacy efforts including – in 2015 alone – opposition to the Illiana Tollway, intervention after the City of Waukegan disrupted the environmentally sensitive dunes on Waukegan Beach, and more.



Significantly, BCN has also built a network of some 200 volunteer bird monitors who document the birds seen and heard at more than 180 sites across the region. The results are submitted to eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online national database, and used to produce information on population trends of the Chicago region's breeding birds as well as periodic Birds of Concern brochures – including the newest published in January 2015 – that can help shape land management practices. The insights provided by this data are invaluable, says the Field Museum's Doug Stotz.

"BCN's bird survey gives us really good data about what is happening with the breeding bird populations around Chicago. I refer to this data and analysis all the time. It is a scale that is very helpful to thinking about conservation around the area," Stotz notes. "Their analysis of the data and the associated Birds of Concern list are really helpful in determining which species we should be focusing on when interacting with other groups doing on habitat work."

Through these and other initiatives, BCN has raised consciousness among local communities about the need to consider bird protection. It has also established itself as a

source of information on the topic for local officials as well as bird clubs and environmental groups in the region.

"We have become a respected voice on bird conservation and developed a lot of contacts over the years, so we can go directly to the people who make recommendations that lead to policy decisions. That wasn't possible 20 years ago," says founding BCN president Judy Pollock.

BCN has also raised awareness of the need for bird protection among the birding community at large. "When birders tell me they're only interested in looking at birds, I say, 'What are you going to be looking at when all the trees are gone and everything is developed and it's all concrete?'," says Dann. "You can't just sit in the boat. You have to grab the oars and row the boat, too."

To read more about BCN, visit www.bcnbirds.org.



NEW! Overnight Iroquois/Kankakee County Field Trip Added June 18-19

Join us for two days of intensive birding 65 miles south of Chicago in habitat-rich Iroquois and Kankakee Counties in Illinois as well as Newton County in Indiana. Led by well-known Chicago birder Geoff Williamson, this adventure will target species including Blue Grosbeak, Bell's Vireo, Lark Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Summer Tanager, Sedge Wren, Yellow-Breasted Chat, and Grasshopper, Henslow's and Vesper Sparrows; nighttime birds like Eastern Screech, Great Horned and Barred Owls as well as Eastern Whip-poor-will; and much more. Stops will range from the oak savannas and agricultural fields of Pembroke Township to the grassland, shrubland and wetland habitats of the Willow Slough Fish & Wildlife Area and Nature Conservancy's wonderful Kankakee Sands restoration area.

This trip is limited to 20 participants and registration is required. Email renabird3@gmail.com for details.



Welcome New Members

Diane Bounds, Winnetka
Tom Cicero, Buffalo Grove
Tony Coorlim & Su Ling, Mundelein
Russel Goulding & Anna Szal, Palatine
Vicki Gunther, Skokie
Cathy Hlohowskyj, Downers Grove
Patricia Joslyn, Winthrop Harbor
Kathy Morrow, Waukegan

Carol Rechteris, Rolling Meadows
Elmer Richardson, Arlington Heights
Paul Rozycki, Chicago
Robin Scheldberg, South Holland
Ted Villaire, Chicago
William Wallin, Wilmette
Irene Worley, Oak Park
Patrick Wulf, Chicago
Noel Zak, Palatine

On the Front Lines of Bird Rescue

by Caryn Hollander, WingTips Editor

I call myself an ambulance driver for the four-legged creatures of this world. Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation officially labels me as a Rescue & Recovery/Transport Driver. Either way, my newest volunteer job has me up close and personal with more birds and animals than I ever dreamed possible without working for a zoo.

It all started when I became an avid birder three years ago and learned about Flint Creek, a state and federally licensed, private, not-for-profit wildlife rehabilitation center that treats over 3,400 injured birds and other animals annually. I started following them on Facebook and contacted Dawn Keller, Founder and Director, to volunteer.

Last February, I was trained to pick up injured birds and animals from the suburbs and Chicago, drive them to Flint Creek's facility at Chicago's Northerly Island for initial medical attention, and deliver them to the organization's main facility in Barrington where they would be treated and remain until healthy for release. Dead birds would be cataloged and donated to the Field Museum.

My very first week, I transported an injured coyote. Opossums, rabbits and (of course) birds followed, and soon my car looked like Noah's Ark. Then as spring migration began, I shadowed another volunteer in my assigned territory to proactively find birds in need of help. Armed with nets, plastic gloves and paper bags, I learned to look around every building, under every planter box, and in every nook and cranny.

Over the next weeks, I recovered more than 25 dead birds ranging from American Robins to Cedar Waxwings, Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes, a Magnolia Warbler and even a Yellow-Billed Cuckoo. But to my dismay, I didn't rescue a single live bird during spring migration.

Things got better in the fall. In one case, I found a Common Yellowthroat wedged in a sidewalk grate surrounding a building. It must have hit the window, bounced off and landed in one of the little openings. I gently stuck my fingers through the holes under his body to lift him out. I think he was grateful to be released from his little prison. He was very quiet on the way to Northerly Island. Later that day, to my delight, he was healthy enough for release.

There are other gratifications as well. Last spring, for example, we received a call that a Great-horned Owl nest with two owlets was down in Deerfield. Flint Creek already had one of the owlets in its care, and the other was rescued a short time later. We had the job of rebuilding the nest in the original tree and returning the two owlets. I ran to Home Depot for supplies and with help of The Care of Trees,

secured the nest and the owlets in their new home. Within a few hours, mom and dad were reunited with their babies. That was an awesome experience.

And some of it is just plain fun. I've had one baby duckling try to escape through a hole in its cardboard box the entire ride, and another that managed to succeed. Thankfully, I found it safe under the back seat.



Unfortunately, and inevitably, not all of the stories have such happy endings. In November, a beautiful American Bittern that had been hit by a car in Glencoe died in my car on the way to Barrington. A few months earlier, a Canada Goose that was another casualty of a car collision died in my arms.

Nevertheless, for myself as well as other animal rescue/recovery workers, this work is a labor of love. It's also been a wakeup call about the dangers that windows and high-rise buildings pose to migrating birds. I was aware of it before, but seeing beautiful crumpled little bodies inches from my face really brings it home.

Treating injured animals, feeding them, and bringing orphaned animals to maturity takes hours and hours of TLC as well as funds for food, veterinary care and more. Most rehab organizations operate on a shoestring. (Flint Creek itself relies solely on donations with no government funding.) But it's worth it. I know if we could talk to the animals, they would be saying thank you.



Rare Local Visitor Lands at Lincoln Park Zoo

On November 6, Lincoln Park Zoo employee Matt Igleski was walking near the zoo's flamingo exhibit when he spotted a tiny, sparrow-sized dove huddling under some bushes. Realizing that it was too small to be a Mourning Dove, he grabbed some quick shots with his cellphone and raced back to his office to consult a field guide.



Photo at Lincoln Park Zoo by Matthew Cvetas

A few hours later, after posting his photos on the Illinois Birders' Forum, Igleski confirmed his suspicions: it was a Common Ground-Dove, a species he had never seen and one that had not been reported in northern Illinois since

1980. It was a vagrant, likely blown off course from somewhere in the southernmost U.S. or even farther south in Central or northern South America where the bird makes its home.

As with most unusual bird sightings, news of Igleski's discovery triggered a parade of local birders eager to catch a glimpse of the star visitor with its distinctive scaly head, neck and breast. (As birder/author Pete Dunne has written, the dove appears to be wearing a chain-mail mantle.) Dozens of birders had the opportunity to see the bird over the next two weeks, with the last reported sighting on November 20.

The Common Ground-Dove was among the last rarities reported in the Chicago area in 2015. Earlier surprises included a Yellow Rail found under a seat in Wrigley Field in April, a Snowy Plover on Montrose Beach in May, and a Kirtland's Warbler at Montrose's Magic Hedge two weeks later. Lake County also had its share of celebrity species, including a Wood Stork at a local forest preserve and a Pacific Loon at Illinois Beach State Park in the fall.

All of these birds and other vagrants were hundreds of miles from their usual territory. It just goes to show that you never know what will turn up in your backyard.