



WingTips

A Publication of the Lake/Cook Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society ♦ August 2017

On the Fly

Early on the morning of May 16, I was walking my dog at a local pocket park when I suddenly came face-to-face with a rare-for-Lake-County Yellow-crowned Night Heron in the pond. After recovering from the shock and the glow of the gold crown,

I alerted the birding community by posting the sighting on the Illinois listserv and then heard from local birders who flocked to see the star visitor throughout the day.

It was a wonderful opportunity to pay it forward to other birders whose reports have enriched my own birding journey.

The upcoming Lake/Cook Chapter 2017-2018 season outlined in the enclosed brochure provides many opportunities for you to continue *your* birding and environmental education journey. We look forward to sharing a great year with you.

– Rena Cohen, Chapter President



Lake/Cook Chapter Funds 3 Towers to Aid Declining Chimney Swifts

Chimney Swift populations have been declining at a rate of 2.5% annually since 1966 in North America and 3.7% a year in Illinois. Scientists theorize that one cause is the impact of insecticides on the flying insects on which this species feeds. Another is the loss of suitable nesting and roosting sites as more chimneys are capped or metal-lined, preventing the birds from attaching their nests to the interior walls. Only a few still breed in hollow trees.



To help provide 'bedrooms' for Chimney Swifts in our area, Lake/Cook Chapter has funded the construction of Chimney Swift towers at three nearby Cook County forest preserves: Crabtree Nature Center in Barrington Hills, River Trail Nature Center in Northbrook and Camp Reinberg in Palatine.

The chapter collaborated with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, which selected the sites, chose the design, and handled construction and installation. The structures

were built by Forest Preserve staff during the winter and installed in June and July, midway through the nesting season. No birds are known to have nested yet.

By October, the Chimney Swifts that summered in the area will be heading to their wintering grounds in the Amazon Basin of Peru, but they will return to the Chicago area next spring. Nesting begins in May and has been known to continue into August, with only one active nest in any structure and one brood of 3-5 eggs a year.

If you have a masonry or clay flue-tile chimney, have it cleaned in early March before the Chimney Swifts return. Then keep the top open and the damper closed from March through October to encourage nesting. These birds need all the help – and chimneys – they can get.



First Program of the Season Aug. 29: Denis Kania's 'A Little Bird Told Me'

Local birder and Morton Arboretum instructor Denis Kania has racked up a life list of over 4,000 species in travels to 21 countries. In a program that is part travelogue, part lesson in global conservation efforts, Kania will explain how his experiences have shaped his perspective on ecological conservation and discuss steps we can take at home that can have an impact on birds halfway around the world.



Endangered Pale-headed Brush Finch, Ecuador

The program – **A Little Bird Told Me** – is at 7 pm on Tuesday, Aug. 29 at Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road, Highland Park. All 2017-2018 programs are listed in the enclosed brochure and at www.lakecookaudubon.org.



Ohio Wind Turbine Project Stopped, Protecting Migrating Birds & Bats

In June, the Ohio Air National Guard (ANG) abandoned plans to build a wind turbine at Camp Perry, a training facility on the shore of Lake Erie near Port Clinton and birding hotspot Magee Marsh. The decision followed a lawsuit by the Black Swamp Bird Observatory and American Bird Conservancy that charged the turbine would be a “lethal bird-killing machine” in a critical bird migration corridor that is also a vital staging ground for endangered species such as Kirtland’s Warbler and Piping Plover. The area is also home to a large Bald Eagle population.



The lawsuit had asked the court to halt the project until the ANG obtained the proper permits and conducted environmental impact assessments required by the Endangered Species Act. The suit cited a radar study showing that large numbers of migratory birds and bats fly through the area at altitudes that would bring them within the 198-foot rotor-swept zone of the proposed turbine.

The ANG had conducted an earlier environmental assessment after a similar suit by the same groups successfully halted the project in 2014, but the plaintiffs argued that assessment was inadequate.

The most recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service radar studies conducted in Great Lakes coastal areas recommend that no turbines be built within 5-10 miles of any Great Lakes shoreline, given their demonstrated potential to decimate migratory populations. The planned Camp Perry turbine would have been located less than a mile from Lake Erie, deep within a Globally Important Bird Area.

Other wind energy projects continue to threaten birds in the Great Lakes region, including a wind farm proposed in Lake Erie offshore from Cleveland. The annual loss of birds from wind turbines was estimated as high as 573,000 in 2012 and is projected to exceed 1.4 million by 2030 as use of wind energy expands without proper project siting. See <https://abcbirds.org/program/wind-energy-and-birds/bird-smart-strategies/> for the American Bird Conservancy’s Bird-Smart Wind Energy recommendations.



Special Guest Program Oct. 12: Ecotourism Legend Victor Emanuel

Victor Emanuel, founder of the world’s largest avian ecotourism company and one of America’s top birders, has seen 6,000+ species during travels to every continent, received some of birding’s highest honors, and started the first birding camps for young people. In his first Chicago-area appearance since the publication of his new memoir *One More Warbler: A Life with Birds*, Emanuel will share his biggest adventures at a special Lake/Cook Chapter meeting and book signing co-sponsored by Heller Nature Center on Thursday, Oct. 12.



New Book by Lake/Cook Members: ‘Midwestern Native Shrubs & Trees’

Lake/Cook members Charlotte Adelman and Bernie Schwartz have just published *Midwestern Native Shrubs and Trees*, a companion volume to their earlier *The Midwestern Native Garden*. The new book provides a comprehensive illustrated guide to native woody plantings that provide ornamental and shade effects similar to nonnative species while also supplying superior food and breeding habitat for birds and butterflies.

Organized by season to showcase features like flowers and leaf color, the book lists popular nonnative woody plants in alphabetical order and then follows each listing with native alternatives that resemble the nonnative plant in height, notable ornamental features and cultivation requirements. Nature notes describe ecological benefits. The Bottlebrush Buckeye, for example, attracts Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, bees and butterflies including Eastern Tiger Swallowtail. Available on Amazon.



Welcome New Members

Pamela Andresen, Lake Forest
Mary Ann Ableby, Buffalo Grove
Steve Bailey & Sheryl DeVore, Mundelein
Linda Belles, Gurnee
Monica Buckley, Chicago
Vicky Byrd, Palatine
Barbara Caspersen, Wilmette
Carol Crawford & John Carroll, Grayslake
Meilyn Donahue, Wheeling
Elaine Ellis, Lake Bluff
Lisa Feich, Libertyville
Dennis Gaynor, Chicago
Larry Goldberg, Deer Park

Joanna Hosteny, Chicago
Jane Icenogle, Warrenville
Sharon Manuel, Brookfield
Joel McCloskey, Park Ridge
Amy McReynolds, Wauconda
Joyce O’Callaghan, Evanston
Kristi Overgaard, Barrington
Laurel Ross, Chicago
Vicky Senter, Chicago
Nancy Tikalsky, Zion
Jim Vincent, Chicago
Robin & Dennis Warford, Schaumburg
William & Donna Wittert, Northbrook
Brian Wolf, Evanston



Trap, Neuter & Release: Flawed Public Policy on Feral Cats About to Become Law in Illinois

Fighting like cats and dogs is an apt metaphor for the ongoing debate between supporters and opponents of the cat management program known as Trap, Neuter and Release (TNR). Now Illinois legislators have passed a TNR bill that will put public dollars to work for the endangerment of birds, mammals, cats themselves and even public health while also failing to achieve its expressed purpose of reducing feral cat populations. Before Governor Bruce Rauner signs the bill into law, consider the facts.

Today there are more than 100 million un-owned feral cats and outdoor domestic cats. **It is estimated that this army of felines kills as many as 2.4 billion birds every year in the US alone, making outdoor cats the largest human-caused mortality threat to birds.** Cats also kill billions of small mammals such as rabbits, squirrels and chipmunks.

Theoretically, TNR will diminish the carnage and control the wild and feral cat population by neutering these cats, vaccinating them at the same time, and releasing them to live out their lives. Unable to reproduce, and in combination with an effective stay-indoors policy for domestic cats, the feral population is supposed to wither.

Multiple studies have shown, however, that Trap, Neuter & Release doesn't reduce feral cat numbers. For one thing, we'll never actually catch and neuter all wild cats. Even a small population of fertile cats will maintain a healthy and deadly cat population. Undesired kitten litters dumped in fields and parks by usually well-intentioned but misinformed (or desperate) cat owners supplement the procreating cat colonies. The American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) Council on Environmental Issues has concluded that "managed cat colonies do not solve the problems of overpopulation and suffering, wildlife predation and zoonotic (animal-to-human) disease transmission."

Moreover, in the process of trying to save cats, TNR supporters actually doom them to a life of fierce competition for scarce food and **a high likelihood of dying an unpleasant death.** Figures vary, but the AVMA has estimated that feral cats have a 2-year mean lifespan compared to 10 years for owned cats. Mortality rates for feral cats can be up to 80% a year as they succumb to vehicle trauma, predation, disease, starvation or severe weather. If you love cats, this should be cause for concern.

The short, sad life of an outdoor cat also takes a toll on people. Cat feces contain oocysts (infectious eggs) carrying the *Toxoplasma gondii* parasite that causes toxoplasmosis – an infection that has been linked to health problems including miscarriage, fetal development defects, blindness

and memory loss. Some studies have also raised the possibility of connections to conditions such as schizophrenia, autism and Alzheimer's disease.

A 2013 study concluded, "Because cats are now so ubiquitous in the environment, one may become infected by (the defecation of outdoor) cats. Indeed, as cats increasingly contaminate public areas with *T. gondii* oocysts, it will become progressively more difficult to avoid exposure."



Despite the negative impact of TNR for birds, cats and humans alike, **Senate Bill 41 Animal Control – Feral Cats introduced by Illinois Senator Linda Holmes in 2016 is now awaiting Governor Rauner's signature.** The bill not only takes existing money from a fund for low-income county residents to help them pay for spaying, neutering or sterilizing adopted dogs or cats, but also redirects those funds to county or municipal programs to spay, neuter and vaccinate feral cats. This makes Illinois a sponsor of debunked science and flawed policy while also removing incentives for animal adoption.

Opponents of the legislation include the Illinois Environmental Council, Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy, Bird Conservation Network and Illinois Audubon Society as well as the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association. But none have mounted an effective opposition in the face of the well-funded cat lobby and the support of cat lovers.

As of early August, the bill was still on Governor Rauner's desk. **You can help stop it by writing the Governor to express your concerns;** contacting the Illinois Audubon Society, which has not yet adopted a feral cat policy despite opposing the bill; and urging your state senator and representative to stop directing public funds to TNR and other cat management programs.

Visit <https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/trap-neuter-release/> for more information about the TNR issue, and **raise your voice against the Illinois bill.** Your opinion can help protect our birds and cats as well as the public health.

Lake-Cook Chapter
Illinois Audubon Society
P.O. Box 254
Highland Park, IL 60035



Summer Story: A Tale of Two Lake County Nesters

This summer, for the third year, Bank Swallows have nested at the newly upgraded Rosewood Beach in Highland Park. The birds excavated dozens of nests in the large sand bank that formed after the beach was redeveloped, got displaced during a heavy storm in July, and promptly rebuilt.



Photo by Sonny Cohen

The presence of breeding Bank Swallows is unusual in Lake County, and the species is in sharp decline with more than half of the population lost over the past four decades. The nests typically extend at least two feet horizontally into the sand bank, helping protect nestlings from predators. The Rosewood Beach birds could be seen all summer flying in and out of the bank with their distinctive brown breast band.

The 10 state-endangered Common Terns that built nine nests at Waukegan Beach this summer were not so lucky. The nests were predated by a skunk, again frustrating a long-time effort to encourage breeding in Lake County and leaving no successful breeding sites in Illinois.



Chicago Tribune Photo by Steve Bailey

Common Terns used to nest near the Great Lakes Naval Station in North Chicago but abandoned the site in 2012 due to predation, high water levels and die-offs apparently caused by PCB-contaminated fish. A new colony on Waukegan Beach was destroyed by beachgoers in 2015. Signs this year kept humans away from the nests, but nothing could protect them from skunk. No eggs survived.