



# WingTips

A Publication of the Lake/Cook Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society ♦ August 2018

## On the Fly

On April 24, Lake/Cook Chapter lost former president and long-time chapter cheerleader Arnie Bock. Many of you will remember Arnie for his tireless promotion of Heller Honey and Illinois Audubon Society's now-ended stamp fund-raising project, his presence at the sign-in table at Lake/Cook meetings, and his always-upbeat attitude. I will also remember him for welcoming Sonny and myself to our first Lake/Cook field trip nearly 15 years ago, supporting us as we became active in the chapter, and periodically showing up at our house to drop off small bird-related tokens of appreciation. I will miss his friendship. May the birds be with you, Arnie.

– Rena Cohen, Chapter President



## First Program of the Season Aug. 28: #BirdThePreserves with Doug Stotz

In 2016, the Forest Preserves of Cook County sponsored a #BirdThePreserves initiative that unleashed hundreds of birders on over 20 county forest preserve sites in a Big Year competition. Over 250 species were spotted by 21 teams, highlighting the role of the preserves for migratory birds in particular. Hundreds of bird-related programs, events and bird walks were also hosted to draw the public into the preserves. To kick off our 2018-2019 season, Field Museum conservation ecologist Doug Stotz will discuss the project and the new insights it yielded about Chicago-area bird distribution, abundance, migration timing and breeding.



The program is at 7 pm on Tuesday, Aug. 28 at Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road, Highland Park. Stotz will also lead a Lake/Cook-members-only followup field trip at Bemis Woods South in Western Springs on Saturday, Oct. 6. All 2018-2019 programs and field trips are listed in the enclosed brochure and at [www.lakecookaudubon.org](http://www.lakecookaudubon.org).



## Lake/Cook Chapter to Host Statewide Spring Gathering May 17-19, 2019

Get ready! Lake/Cook Chapter is hosting the 2019 Illinois Audubon Society Spring Gathering with an expected attendance of well over 150 IAS members from around the state, Friday and Saturday night speakers, over 15 field trips, and a raffle and silent auction whose proceeds will support future chapter programs and initiatives.



Event headquarters will be Doubletree by Hilton Libertyville-Mundelein. Friday night's speaker will be local raptor enthusiast Vic Berardi, talking about Lake County's two hawk watches. Saturday night's keynoter will be David Ullrich, longtime director of

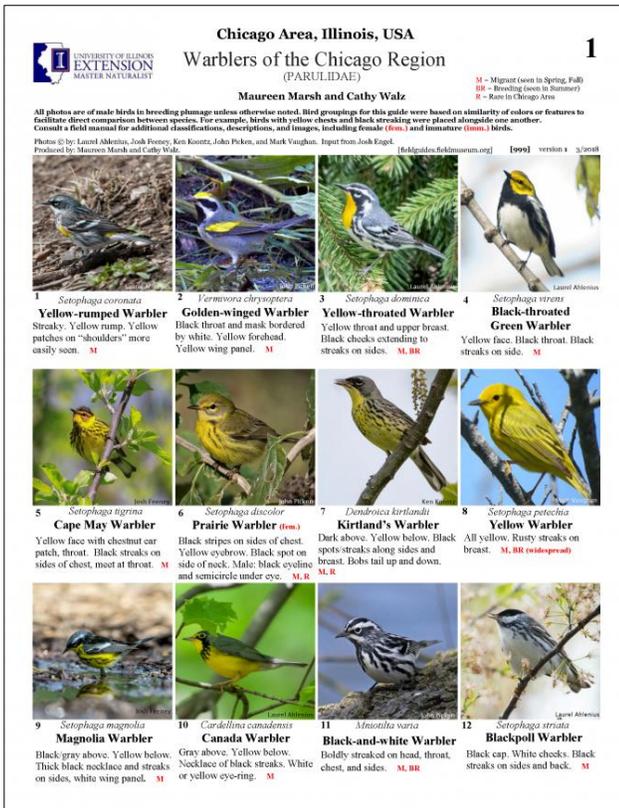
the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, discussing the environmental state of the Great Lakes. A full schedule will be released in January.

**This is a major undertaking, and we need everyone's help.** Do you have nature-related items to donate to the raffle (no books unless they are special, please) or empty gift baskets we can use? Are you able to head a committee handling event registration, food, raffle/silent auction, field trip maps, or field trip 'hosts' who will accompany and serve as emergency contacts for each group? Can you help assembling gift baskets, soliciting raffle items, staffing the silent auction, or with other tasks? Write [renabird3@gmail.com](mailto:renabird3@gmail.com) ASAP to volunteer.

We last hosted a statewide meeting in 2009, and it was such a success that people are still talking about it. Let's get all hands on deck to make the 2019 Spring Gathering equally memorable. We're already off to a good start. With your help – and the birds' – we'll make it happen.

**Sparrow & Warbler ID in 2-3 Pages Downloadable from Field Museum**

For newer birders looking for easy bird identification tools, the Field Museum's 'Field Guides' collection now includes downloadable, full-color, at-a-glance guides to the Common Sparrows of Chicago and Warblers of the Chicago Region. Lake/Cook members Mark Vaughan (sparrows) and Maureen Marsh (warblers) led the efforts, with fellow University of Illinois Master Naturalist Cathy Walz joining Marsh on the warbler project.



Page 1 of the 3-page Warblers of the Chicago Region Field Guide

The two-page sparrow guide pictures 19 species that reside or migrate through Chicagoland, with brief text indicating habitat, timing and key field marks. The three-page warbler guide features 36 adult male warblers in breeding plumage, plus a brief list of field marks and codes indicating whether the species is migrant, breeding or rare in the Chicago area. Warblers are grouped based on similarity of colors or features to facilitate direct comparison between species.

The guides are downloadable at <https://fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org/guides/guide/881> <https://fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org/guides/guide/999> They can be printed double-sided and laminated for easy outdoor use.



**Puffins, Guillemots, Eiders, Oh My! June 2019 Maine Trip Now Open**

If you've never seen Atlantic Puffins, Black Guillemots, Razorbills, Common Eiders or boreal birds like Spruce and Ruffed Grouse, Boreal Chickadee and Black-backed Woodpecker, here's your chance! We've arranged a chapter trip to Maine next June 5-9 that will be led by Red Hill Birding's Josh Engel. We'll be exploring Acadia National Park on the coast plus the boreal forests near the border with New Brunswick, Canada. We also expect to see many birds on their breeding grounds that we know only as migrants, including 20+ species of warbler.

Maximum attendance is 14. Price is \$1420 (double occupancy) plus airfare. Email [renabird3@gmail.com](mailto:renabird3@gmail.com) for an itinerary and to register.



**'Great Lakes, Great Issues' Talks Set by Lake Forest Open Lands**

Lake Forest Open Lands is sponsoring a free three-lecture series on challenges facing the Great Lakes. Topics are 'The Perils of Plastic' (Wednesday Sept. 12), 'Toxic Puzzle: Our Health and the Health of the Great Lakes' (Wednesday Oct. 10) and 'Dynamic Shore: Water Waves and Coastal Change' (Thursday Nov. 15). Speakers are leading research scientists. The series is funded by Illinois DNR's Coastal Management Program and will be held at the Gorton Community Center in Lake Forest. Registration is required at [www.LFOLA.org](http://www.LFOLA.org).



**Welcome New Members**

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Candida Abrahamson, Skokie                  | Joseph Leach, Chicago              |
| Alan Anderson, Des Plaines                  | Marty Longo, Blue Island           |
| Alex and Jane Atkinson, Skokie              | Tom and Ann McMahon, Evanston      |
| Janice Becker, Deerfield                    | Margaret Morrisette, Lake Bluff    |
| Tom Bergseth, Lake Forest                   | Sarah Moskowitz, Chicago           |
| Arlan and Linda Bushman, Chicago            | Lauralyn Persson, Evanston         |
| Steven Chun, Gurnee                         | Kate Ranft, Park Ridge             |
| Farley Connelly, Chicago                    | Michael Schmaus, Mount Prospect    |
| Tracy Finnegan and Bryan Cook, North Aurora | Donna Schroeder, Arlington Heights |
| Robin Fjelstad, Wheeling                    | Amanda Tichacek, Skokie            |
| Jennifer Hovey, Island Lake                 | Mark Vaughan, Evanston             |
| Stacy and Mike Iwanicki, Wonder Lake        | Enza Vicari, Melrose Park          |
| Elizabeth Keyes, Tinley Park                | Kenneth Zaleski, Mount Prospect    |
| Nellie Khalil, Patatine                     |                                    |



## 27 Red-headed Woodpeckers at Fort Sheridan: Good Sign or Not?

By Rena Cohen

Shortly after arriving at Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve at 6 am on May 5 for our first assigned stop on the 2018 Spring Bird Count, Brian Smith and I heard the distinctive 'Queeah!' call of our first Red-headed Woodpecker. Some 90 minutes later, when Brian entered our 16<sup>th</sup> RHWO in the eBird app on his phone, the app flagged the entry because the number exceeded previous reports at the site. By 10 am when we left the preserve, we had counted 27 RHWOs – **nearly quadruple our previous high count of 7.**

Brian and I were stunned, in part because Red-headed Woodpecker populations have been plummeting. North American Breeding Bird Survey data indicates an annual 2%+ population decrease from 1966 to 2014, **translating to a cumulative decline of 70% over the past five decades.**

As a result, the Red-headed Woodpecker is on the North American Bird Conservation Initiative's State of the Birds Yellow Watch List, which lists bird species at risk of becoming threatened or endangered without conservation action. The species is also listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

The causes of the decline are unclear. Most sources cite factors such as the loss of potential RHWO nest sites associated with cutting of dead trees, competition with European Starlings for nest cavities, and car strikes when RHWOs swoop out to catch insects in flight.

A study published in *The Condor* in 2017 pointed to three other potential culprits: **climate change, increases in forest cover, and predation by growing populations of Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks.** Researchers led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Walter D. Koenig did not find support for the hypothesis that European Starlings and Red-bellied Woodpeckers out-compete RHWOs.

The three contributing causes identified by the study are interlinked. The role of accipiter predation is based in part on an overall increase in Cooper's Hawk populations in North America over the past several decades as well as a 2012 study **that traced 85% of all RHWO deaths in South Carolina to Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks.** Increases in accipiter numbers, in turn, were affected by a combination of warmer winter temperatures and increased forest cover throughout the RHWO's range.

The study also found that higher temperatures and added forest cover played a more direct role in driving RHWO declines. Red-headed Woodpeckers favor oak savanna and

edge habitat where they can hunt for insects in the open from high vantage points and chisel nest cavities from tall dead trees, so the loss of that habitat has had an impact.

(Conversely, according to the study, previous changes in forestation and forest structure due to forest diseases and changing land-use patterns may have had a *positive* effect on RHWO populations. The clearing of forests following European colonization, the die-off of American chestnut trees in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the more recent loss of American elms from Dutch elm disease are believed to have benefited the species.)



As researchers continue to hunt for definitive reasons for the RHWO population decline, one **local study is being spearheaded by Anastasia Rahlin, an ornithologist at the Illinois Natural History Survey** at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The study is evaluating the impact of cavity competition from Northern Flickers and Eastern Bluebirds, potential acorn crop competition from Blue Jays, and how age structure in RHWO pairs may affect their competitive ability and breeding success in closed-canopy forests versus savannas.

Rahlin and her team are studying Fort Sheridan and eight other sites in Cook and Lake counties. Notably, **they counted more Red-headed Woodpeckers at Fort Sheridan than any other study site this past spring,** although not as many as Brian and I tallied on May 5.

Given the long-term population trends, the surge in RHWOs at Fort Sheridan does not signal a comeback for the species, but it raises interesting questions about the factors influencing the birds' attraction to the site and the potential effects of the restoration project that began at the preserve in 2017.

For my part, I'm looking forward to seeing what next year's Spring Bird Count will bring. It's always a thrill to see even one Red-headed Woodpecker. Counting nearly four dozen at a single site is something like a miracle.

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## Former Golf Course to Tee Off as New Preserve

Lake County birders will soon have a new 100-acre local site to explore, thanks to the closing of the Highland Park Country Club Golf Course. The Park District of Highland Park is in the process of transforming the property behind the city's Recreation Center into a passive natural recreation area with trail and habitat enhancements designed to support birds and pollinators, improve water quality, and provide access to non-golfers for the first time.

The site abuts the Skokie River (the East Fork of the North Branch Chicago River) and Skokie River Woods, a 25-acre stretch of restored wetland off Skokie Highway/Route 41. The habitat includes mature trees throughout the open space of the former golf course, several ponds that serve as detention basins, and an adjacent 10-acre woodland with native oaks and ephemeral ponds.

Over the past eight years, Lake/Cook member Joe Rockey has documented nearly 120 bird species ranging from 20 species of warbler to Black-billed Cuckoo, Olive-sided Flycatcher, American Woodcock and Tundra Swans on the property, even with limited access. The planned upgrades are expected to return the site to a more natural state that will support more birds and potentially attract new species.

The restored site will also include walking and biking trails for the community at large.

As part of the planning process, the Park District has opened the property to the public, invited area residents to explore the trails, and created a short online survey about features and amenities they would like to see at the site. More information, a video of the property, a trail map and the survey can be accessed at <http://www.pdhp.org/hpcc2nature/>. Your input can help shape the future of the site for birds and people, too.

