



WingTips

A Publication of the Lake/Cook Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society ♦ January 2020

On the Fly

Some birding outings linger in the mind long after they're over.

For me, indelible images from 2019 include the cooperative

LeConte's Sparrow that Jeff Bilsky and I encountered on an otherwise birdless day in the Skokie Lagoons last April; the Cerulean Warbler that improbably popped up at eye level on a May field trip at Ryerson and showed off for 20 minutes;

Atlantic Puffins frolicking in the ocean in Maine in June; and four lifer Black Rails captured and banded on Halloween night as Bonnie Duman and I traipsed through a marsh in Louisiana with a group wearing headlamps in search of this elusive species.

As we enter 2020, I wish you many special moments as you build your life list and appreciation of the natural world.

– Rena Cohen, Chapter President

Behind the 'Monty & Rose' Movie, Bob Dolgan's Ode to Piping Plovers

In 2019, Chicago birder Bob Dolgan had two close encounters with federally protected Piping Plovers before the celebrated duo known as Monty and Rose took up residence on Montrose Beach and became the first members of their species to successfully nest in Chicago in 64 years. Dolgan's first sighting came last January, when a Piping Plover was spotted in Chicago well after it should have flown south for the winter. The second was in May, when he stumbled upon nesting Piping Plovers at Sleeping Bear Dunes in Michigan, one of the main nesting sites of the small Great Lakes population.



A week after he returned from Michigan, Dolgan learned that two plovers were displaying nesting behavior at Montrose, 10 minutes from home. He became one of the first of an eventual 150+ volunteer plover monitors, decided the story should be captured on video, enlisted a videographer, and raised \$5,500 in a Kickstarter campaign to help cover costs. The resulting short documentary, **Monty and Rose**, is an official selection of the One Earth Film Festival to be held in March in Chicago.

The first north suburban screening of the 23-minute film will be at the Wilmette Theater at 7 pm on Thursday, Jan. 23. The evening will also feature the premiere of "Postcard from Waukegan," a short film chronicling Monty and Rose's first nesting attempt in Waukegan in 2018, plus a Q&A. Tickets are \$12 at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/monty-and-rose-screening-tickets-86884520941>



Can iNaturalist Save the World? Next Program Tuesday Jan. 21

Whether identifying flora and fauna in the field with a smartphone photo or using it to record your own observations, iNaturalist is an invaluable natural history mobile app for citizen scientists as well as a rich source of information for researchers and conservationists.



Local birder/restorationist Jeff Skrentny – a power user with 13,000+ iNat entries representing nearly 2,800 species of bird, insect, mammal and plant life – will discuss his experience with the app, its importance for the planet, and some of his most exciting sightings at our January program titled **Can iNaturalist Save the World? One Naturalist's Love Affair with iNat.**

The program is at 7 pm on Tuesday, Jan. 21 at Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road, Highland Park. All upcoming programs and field trips are posted at www.lakecookaudubon.org.



Big Year for Illinois Rarities: The Star Birds of 2019

For Illinois birders, 2019 yielded an unusual number of birds not typically seen in the state, including four species that made their first recorded appearance in the Land of Lincoln.

Those firsts included a **Lewis's Woodpecker** discovered at a feeder at Ballard Nature Center in Effingham in May, far from its home in the western U.S.; a **Limpkin** (below) found in June in southern Illinois, miles from its range in Florida and points south; a **Cassin's Kingbird** at Montrose Point in Chicago in September, half a continent away from its usual stomping grounds in the southwest U.S. and Mexico; and a presumed **Little Stint** at Emiquon Preserve near Peoria in August, marking a particularly notable sighting for a difficult-to-identify Eurasian shorebird rarely seen in North America.



All of these vagrants must be confirmed by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC) before entering the official list of Illinois bird sightings.

Other infrequent visitors also sent birders scurrying to catch a glimpse. In Chicago, the highlights included the fifth state sighting of an **Ancient Murrelet** at Montrose Beach in November – the 10th state report of a **King Eider** in the lagoon at Northwestern University in October – and the 13th state **Snowy Plover** appearance at Montrose in May.

The list also included the eighth state record of **Fulvous Whistling-Duck** along with **Long-billed Curlew** and **Swallow-tailed Kite**, two species regularly seen in Illinois in the 1800s but extremely rare since then.

Nevertheless, many birders argued that Illinois Bird of the Year honors should go to **Monty and Rose**, the charismatic Piping Plovers that successfully nested in Chicago last summer for the first time in 64 years. The species is not rare in Illinois but caused a sensation far beyond the birding community, creating broad public awareness of bird conservation. **Check Lake/Cook's Facebook page** to learn the ABA Bird of the Year winner, to be announced Jan. 12.



Feb. 1 Indoor Field Trip: Before Fort Sheridan Was a Forest Preserve

Today, with its uninterrupted sightlines from Sheridan Road to Lake Michigan, the 250-acre Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve is one of the jewels of the Lake County Forest Preserve District as well as a local birding hotspot. But from 1887 to 1993, the site was part of a U.S. Army post with a storied history that included a residency by George Patton Jr. decades before he became a World War II legend. To help preserve the base's history, nearly 3,000 photographs and postcards along with dozens of artifacts were transferred from the U.S. Center for Military History in Washington, D.C. to Lake County's Bess Bower Dunn Museum in Libertyville (formerly the Lake County Discovery Museum).

At 10 am on Saturday Feb. 1, museum educator Nicole Stocker will host Lake/Cook Chapter for a one-hour presentation about Fort Sheridan's history, architecture, notable residents and more. Attendees can then stay to tour the museum at 1899 West Winchester Rd., Libertyville. \$8 per person at the door. **Registration required at renabird3@gmail.com.**



Feb. 8 Bonus Program at Volo Bog: A History of Birding in America

At 1:30 pm on Saturday Feb. 8, Lake/Cook Chapter is co-sponsoring Madison-based birder Michael Edmonds who will discuss his latest book, *Taking Flight: A History of Birds and People in the Heart of America*. The book is a Midwest-focused cultural history of how and why people have worshipped, feared, studied, hunted, eaten and protected the birds that have surrounded them for more than 12,000 years.

The program at Volo Bog in Ingleside is free but space is limited. Reserve your spot at dnr.volobog@illinois.gov or 815-344-1294.



Welcome New Members

Dawn Anderson, McHenry
Chuck Berman, Oak Park
Candace Blank, Berwyn
Joshua Coolidge, Island Lake
Greg & Cathy Dubois, Joliet
John Gallagher, Evanston
Simon Hobbs, Evanston
Laurie Liebowitz, Deerfield

Jon Lippitz, Glencoe
Gladys Reyes, Hawthorn Woods
Judy Robins, Glenview
Alice Saville, Lake Forest
Stephanie Sedik, Highwood
Ted Wolff, Chicago

Tuning into Bird Song at a Nature Recording Workshop

By Mark Vaughan

I have been birding since the age of six, but I have always been more of a visual and behavioral birder than an auditory one. I was familiar with the vocalizations of the most common backyard birds, including Blue Jays mimicking the local Cooper's Hawk to chase away the other birds from my feeders in Evanston, but I had never learned to identify warblers, vireos or other less common local visitors by ear.

Then in June 2016, I attended an eight-day **Nature Sound Recording Workshop on the San Francisco State University Field Campus in the Sierra Nevada mountains** sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It was led by Greg Budney, the now-retired Audio Curator of the Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library, who has conducted similar sessions in that location since 1989 and is co-leading the upcoming 2020 workshop from June 6-13.

During my 2016 sojourn, I recorded the calls and songs of dozens of birds ranging from Lincoln's and Savannah Sparrows to a Willet, Wilson's Warbler, Horned Lark, Sandhill Crane and **Sage Thrush (one of my many life birds on the trip)**.

Especially memorable was my recording of a Northern Harrier, whose flight call I captured as it soared overhead on the first day of the trip. I was apprehensive about submitting my clip to the Macaulay Library because it's filled with hundreds of thousands of sound files from avian biologists and other researchers all over the world, and I was a barely even a beginner.

When I shared my concerns with Greg Budney, he told me **there were only 14 Northern Harrier recordings in the Macaulay archive at that time**, making my recording particularly valuable. Submit it, he said. So I did. Since then, I have uploaded more than 180 files, contributing to a project that supports research in fields such as behavioral ecology, taxonomy and conservation.

At the workshop, I learned how to capture bird vocalizations under a variety of field conditions and vastly improved my ability to determine where the sound is coming from – an asset for even a casual birder. I also began to distinguish feeding calls from alarm calls (for example) and started to tune into bird song with new ears, upping my birding to higher level since I can now add auditory clues to my bird identification.

I became so interested in nature sound recording that I **began scouring eBay for recording equipment that I could buy affordably**. Today I own four different

Sennheiser microphones (one short shotgun, two long shotguns, and an omni-directional model for use with a Telinga parabolic microphone that concentrates the sound to help screen out ambient noise), a Marantz digital recorder, AKG headphones (purchased at a cut rate because they lacked cables, which I eventually found on the unclaimed airline baggage website), and accessories like a windscreen and shock mount that help provide audio clarity in less-than-ideal weather conditions.



I now take all of my recording equipment with me virtually wherever I go. It's a much bulkier way to travel than just tucking a pair of binoculars in my carry-on, but **it has improved my birding experience immeasurably**. Next goal: learning my mnemonics beyond simple phrases like the "Drink your tea!" trigger that is the Eastern Towhee's signature song.

If you're interested in improving your auditory birding, scenic mountain vistas, Western birds, and great instruction in a small group setting, check out <https://sierra.sfsu.edu/content/natural-sound-recording-workshop-0> for next June's session.

And just for fun, here's a link to my Eastern Screech Owl recording at the Macaulay Library: <https://search.macaulaylibrary.org/catalog?mediaType=a&userId=USER325815&user=Mark%20Vaughan> I couldn't have captured that without my time at the workshop.

Mark Vaughan is a Lake/Cook member who created the Field Museum's downloadable two-page Common Sparrows of Chicago ID guide. He can be contacted at markvaughan60201@gmail.com

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



Local Birder Kicks Off Green Big Year: Follow Along!

As even non-birders know from “The Big Year” book and film, traditional Big Years involve driving and flying thousands of miles to see as many species as possible in a given geographical location in 365 days. Local birder Beau Schaefer announced this month that he is now tackling a variation – a **Green Big Year** – to find as many species as he can in Lake County in 2020 without using any fossil fuels. He’ll be biking, walking and kayaking. No driving allowed.

Beau lives across the street from Rollins Savanna in Grayslake, where he often leads field trips for Lake/Cook Chapter, so he started his **#greenbigyear2020** there and at adjacent Third Lake on Jan. 1. He ticked off some common landbirds and waterfowl but whiffed on hoped-for less common possibilities like Northern Shrike and Rough-legged Hawk that tend to show up at Rollins in the winter.

On Jan. 2, he logged 21 miles on his bike with stops at the Grayslake landfill (he combed through 400 gulls but found no winter specialties) and Rollins (where he added two

Short-eared Owls to his 2020 list at dusk, including one that crossed directly in front of him on the path).

The next day was a grueling 57-miler with a round trip to Waukegan Beach, Illinois Beach State Park South Unit, Lyons Woods and North Point Marina. The effort yielded a **Carolina Wren** at Waukegan, a **Hermit Thrush** at Lyons, and an **American Kestrel** and **Northern Shrike**

at different stops on the way home, but he missed the multiple Red-throated Loons and Long-tailed Ducks that other birders reported in the area the same day because his hands were too cold to set up his scope to scan for birds farther out in the lake. (Who can blame him?)

Beau invites interested birders to follow his progress at his Beau’s Birds blog

(<https://www.beausbirds.com>). You can also check out bikingforbirds.blogspot.com to read about Dorian Anderson, who completed an 18,000-mile, 28-state, 618-species Green Big Year in 2014.

