



The Meadowlark Messenger

March 2014 • Volume 31, No. 2

Champaign County Audubon Society • A chapter of the National
Audubon Society

Presidents' Column

Susan Stearns

Co-President of Champaign County
Audubon Society (CCAS)

Guess what! Sunday morning birdwalks through Busey Woods begin March 2 (7:30am at Anita Purves Nature Center parking lot) and the Woodcock walk is March 12 at Meadowbrook Park. That means it is time for spring migration! It's time to beat the winter blues and start going outside to see those spring migrants. Yay!

Those of you who are not experienced at birding may not be sharing in my excitement right now. You might be feeling more hesitant and unsure. You enjoy nature and want to experience it more, but you're not so sure about identifying birds.

I know exactly how you feel. If you've been reading my articles since Brian and I became Co-Presidents last year, you know that Brian is good at identifying animals and I am not. When I went birding for the first time, I could consistently identify a Blue Jay and a Cardinal. If I was lucky, I'd remember what a Robin looks like. That was it.

But lucky for me, I like to hang out with experienced birders. After all, I am married to one. Also, I'm good at spotting movement. I still remember my first Christmas Bird Count in 2009. I was with Brian, Helen Parker, and Beth Chato. Talk about feeling out of place being the only non-birder among some experienced birders. None-the-less, I had a great time. I was great at spotting birds and asking, "What's that one?" The more I spotted and asked, the more I learned.

Today, I still have a very small repertoire of birds I can identify. I have difficulty remembering names and identifying birds that I don't see frequently or talk about much. I'm great at making up new names when I unsuccessfully try to identify a familiar bird. While at the 2014 Backyard Bird Count, I saw children who were better than I am at bird identification.

Fortunately, when I start feeling inadequate as a birder, the experienced ones are quick to encourage me. They remind me that those who are great at identifying birds have been doing this most of their lives. They have years of experience and have been on a journey that I'm just beginning. The best way to learn while I travel on my journey is to travel alongside those with experience.

So next time you're thinking about going on a bird walk or helping with a bird count and you feel like you have nothing to contribute, remember that you are just beginning your journey. There are many birders out there who will be glad to take you under their wing and help you along the way.

Meanwhile, be sure to join us Thursday, March 6, 7:15pm at the Urbana Library Auditorium when Brian shares his adventures creating an ongoing photo record of birds at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve in northeastern Champaign County. I hope to see you there. As always, thank you for being a part of the Champaign County Audubon Society.

MARCH MEETING
Urbana Free Library
Thursday,
March 6, 7 PM
***Birds of the Middle Fork
River Forest Preserve:
An Ongoing
Photographic Study***
presented by
Brian Stearns
**In addition to talking about the birds
found on the preserve, Brian will
share his methods used and
adventures in capturing his
photographs.**



Brian Stearns is currently Co-President of the Champaign County Audubon Society and a member of the Middlefork Audubon Society. Having been fascinated with

wildlife since he was a small child, he spends much of his time observing local wildlife and maintaining a photo journal of his observations. Since 2009, he has helped the Champaign County Forest Preserve District by documenting the various species of birds found at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. Brian is recognized locally as a wildlife photographer and is well respected for the detail found in his photographs and his ability to capture the essence of the animals in their natural environment.

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Champaign County Audubon publishes *The Meadowlark Messenger* nine times per year. Comments regarding the newsletter or articles for submission are welcome by the Co-Presidents.

Recent Bird Sightings: FIELD NOTES from Beth Chato

Most notable during February were large mixed flocks of Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings, some quite close to town on the South Farms. A Merlin was seen there. The pond at South 1st Street and Windsor has had a variety of waterfowl: lots of Mallards, Redhead, Scaup, and a pair of early Wood Duck. Two Snipe were seen at the Springfield Avenue Boneyard Creek pond. Homer Lake has had Common Merganser, Lesser Scaup, Gadwall, and Canvasback, as well as an Eastern Towhee. A Bald Eagle flew over the Nature Center on February 12 and a Sandhill Crane also flew over town. Lake Springfield had White-winged and Black Scoters.

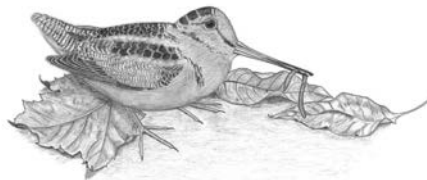
FEBRUARY BIRD COUNT

Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), Saturday February 15

A team of Audubon members spent the day watching the feeders at the Anita Purves Nature Center as part of the now worldwide Great Backyard Bird Count co-sponsored by Audubon and Cornell University. We also led a morning and an afternoon hike through Busey Woods. We tallied 23 bird species, which is about average (high 28, low 16) over the 14 years we have done this. Best birds were a Great Blue Heron, Flicker and Fox Sparrow. It was an exciting day with chances to interact with lots of Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, and families, and introduce them to some local birds.

Sunday Morning Bird Walks: March 2-May 25, 7:30-9AM.

Sunday morning bird walks through Crystal Lake Park and Busey Woods begin on March 2 and will continue every Sunday through May 25. Meet at the Anita Purves Nature Center parking lot. Bring binoculars if you have them. Audubon members will be present to help beginners.



WOODCOCK WALKS 2014

Meadowbrook Interpretive Center, Meadowbrook Park, Wed. March 12, 7-8pm

Labrador Twister. Pop-eyed Shot Dodger. Mud Snipe. How did one bird earn all of these aliases? Discover the secret life of the bird with the upside-down brain when you join staff and the Champaign County Audubon Society on this free twilight stroll. Bring a pair of binoculars if you have them. Call 384-4062 by March 10 if you plan on attending. This hike will be through mud and non-paved surfaces. No strollers please. Come to the Race Street entrance a few minutes before 7 pm. All ages (under 15 with adult)

Buffalo Trace Prairie, Lake of the Woods, Friday, March 14, 7-8pm

Join us in a search for the elusive wood snipe, AKA the American Woodcock, as the males perform their amazing courtship display at dusk. A short presentation will be followed by a hike to look for the sky dancers. Meet at the Buffalo Trace Prairie parking lot on Rt. 47 / N. Lombard across the street from the Museum of the Grand Prairie. \$2 per person; children 2 and under are FREE. Registration required; (217) 896-2455 or cwals@ccfpd.org.

Interpretive Center, Homer Lake, Friday, March 21, 7-8pm

Join us in a search for the elusive wood snipe, AKA the American Woodcock, as the males perform their amazing courtship display at dusk. A short presentation will be followed by a hike to look for the sky dancers. \$2 per person; children 2 and under FREE. Registration required; (217) 896-2455 or cwals@ccfpd.org.

AUDUBON NATURE SHOP

for Unique Nature-Related Gifts

ANITA PURVES NATURE CENTER, 1515 NORTH BROADWAY, URBANA, IL
9-4 MONDAY-SATURDAY

SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Spring will soon be here. Maybe time for some new binoculars or a bird book. Do keep the shop in mind for birding and bird feeding equipment, natural history and children's books, puppets, and inexpensive small toys.

Get Your Meadowlark Messenger Delivered Right to Your Inbox!

CONSERVATION CORNER - Helen Parker, Conservation Chair

It's time to emerge from hibernation, I guess, although personally I'd still like to fast-forward through the next four or so weeks. I know spring is on its way, but I'm tired of snow and ice--especially ice, NOW. It's a bit too early to tell how much of a toll this winter has had on birds & other wildlife. In theory the results of the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) should provide some data; but while it gives a snapshot of birds at a given spot on a couple of days, I'm not sure what it tells us about how populations have handled the harsh weather. This morning there was a flock of 50 or so robins in Blair Park--they weren't there for the GBBC. Maybe they were somewhere else.

Meanwhile, our society continues its war on the environment. Will we permit toxic chemicals to be dumped just above the Mahomet aquifer, from which we get our drinking water? That question is still open. In Alaska, the Pebble mine is still a possible threat, even though some of the companies originally involved in the project have pulled out. Another mine in Northern Minnesota (for Copper & Nickel) threatens to spill pollutants into prime bird habitat for 500 years. (See the National Audubon website for more information.) Somebody shot two whooping cranes; the penalties assessed were not commensurate with the crime. Hunters in Idaho seem determined to kill enough wolves to re-endanger them. (They just came off the endangered species list!)

There has to be some good news--and there is. It appears that wildlife diversity in urban areas is much higher than had been thought. While it's not as high as in wild places that are in some approximation of their natural condition, quite a few critters do manage to co-exist with us.

More in the good news department: The Arctic Ocean is awash with good news! A recent court decision that drilling in the Chuckchi Sea violated the law prompted Shell Oil to back off its plans to drill this summer, a big win for Arctic birds and wildlife.



THE SONG OF THE ROBIN in MARCH

“The Robin is the only bird as yet that makes a business of singing, steadily singing, - sings continuously out of pure joy and melody of soul, carols. The jingle of the Song Sparrow, simple and sweet as it is, is not of sufficient volume nor sufficiently continuous to command and hold attention, and the Bluebird’s is but a transient warble, from a throat overflowing with azure and serene hopes; but the song of the Robin on the elms and oaks, loud and clear and heard afar through the streets of a village, makes a fit conclusion to a spring day. The larks are not yet in sufficient numbers or sufficiently musical. The Robin is the prime singer as yet. The [Red-winged] Blackbird’s *conqueree*, when first heard in the spring, is pleasant from the associations it awakens, and is best heard by boating on the river. It belongs to the stream. The Robin is the only bird with whose song the groves can be said to be now *vocal* morning and evening, for, though many other notes are heard, none fill the air like this bird. As yet no other thrushes.”

- **Henry David Thoreau**, *Journal* 1852

Friends of Champaign County Audubon, a reminder: All local Friends membership fees were due as of January 1. Your contribution of \$15 supports the local Chapter. Please renew or consider signing up on page 5 of this newsletter or send dues and membership information to our membership chair, Caitlin Lill, 607 West Vine Street, Champaign, IL 61820.

The Earth Care Team of First Presbyterian Church of Urbana invites you to attend a Three-Session Seminar Series on Sustainability and the Champaign County Land Resource Management Plan

The Problem: In Champaign County some of the world's most fertile soil is being converted from farmland to other uses. Each year between 1988 and 2005, an average of 563 acres of county farmland was taken out of production. Its new uses included 4,310 acres for residential development, 283 acres for industrial purposes, and 1,150 acres for commercial use.

Tackling the Problem: A Champaign County Land Resource Management Plan was adopted in 2010 after an Advisory Panel appointed by the Champaign County Board to assess the state of the environment in the county concluded that current development patterns are not sustainable and are damaging the County's natural environment and compromising its economic viability.

Purpose: This three-session seminar will examine the Management Plan and its attempt to foster sustainable development in the county. It will also consider how you and other county citizens can help ensure that recommendations of the plan are followed.

Dates, topics, and speakers are as follows:

March 30: Gary Jackson, a former member of the Champaign County Board Environmental Advisory Panel, will summarize the findings of the panel and its recommendations. The report concluded that Champaign County lacked an over-all comprehensive plan, valuable soil resources were being converted to urban uses, and parkland acreage and open space fell short of national recommendations. Jackson also will provide a brief overview of the scope and content of the Land Resource Management Plan adopted by the county in 2010.

April 6: Dan Olson, Executive Director of the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, stewards of the county's natural and historic resources through conservation, education and compatible outdoor recreation experiences, will consider whether the Management Plan adequately protects the preserves from the negative impacts of discretionary development in adjacent areas and minimizes disturbance of their natural quality, habitat value, and aesthetic character. He also will point out ways in which citizens can be engaged in the long-term sustainability of the preserves.

April 13: Susan Chavarria, Regional Planning Manager of the Champaign County Planning Commission, will explain the role of the commission in guiding development in Champaign County and review the Management Plan's anticipated future land use patterns. She will focus particularly on aspects of the plan intended to preserve prime agricultural land and encourage urban land use that is compact and contiguous to existing cities, villages, and unincorporated settlements.

The seminars will be held from 10:45 to 11:30 AM in the Fellowship Hall of First Presbyterian Church of Urbana, 602 West Green Street. The public is invited to attend.

Passenger Pigeons

2014: Centennial of a Species' Passing

As large as a pileated woodpecker, but sleeker, the passenger pigeon was built for speed, grace and maneuverability. In the mid-1800s an estimated 3-5 billion birds wandered the eastern half of the United States in huge flocks, finding and descending upon localized abundant masts of beechnuts and acorns to fuel their massive numbers.

Even after 100 years the story of the passenger pigeon can still inform today's conservation challenges . . . and even its successes.

Special Exhibit at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center

To learn more, please visit the 2014 special exhibit at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center, which opens on Saturday April 5. The exhibit will commemorate the 100-yr anniversary of the passenger pigeon's extinction, and will celebrate its unique ecology, physiology, and its historical relation to America's peoples.



Join Audubon. Yes, I'd like to join! Please enroll me as a member



Membership for 2014

Friend of Champaign County Audubon Society \$15.00..... new renewal
(includes CCAS newsletter only)

Friend of CCAS and National Audubon Society \$35.00..... new renewal
(includes "Audubon" magazine & CCAS newsletter)

My check for \$_____ is enclosed, made **payable to Champaign County Audubon Society (CCAS)**. Your information and NAS contribution will be forwarded to National.

Name: _____
 Address: _____ C4ZG500Z
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ 7XCH
 (Please provide 9-digit zip code)

To receive newsletter electronically, please provide e-mail address:

Send this application and your check to: Champaign County Audubon Society, Membership Chair, P.O. Box 882, Urbana, IL 61803-0882. Thank you!

CCAS Member Activities & Benefits:

- 14 Audubon Adventures
- Classrooms
- Mini-grants to educators
- Kendeigh grants for scientific studies
- Great Backyard Bird Count
- Youth Bird Count Day
- Nature Shop at the Nature Center
- Meadowbrook prairie restoration
- Field trips, Annual Bird Counts
- Annual Birdathons
- Monthly member meetings
- Meadowlark Messenger

Education Corner, Stacey Clementz

Education Program Specialist, Champaign County Forest Preserve District, Homer Lake, sclementz@ccfpd.org

Teacher Resources: Bird Sleuth Investigator 2013

Educators can download a free copy of this student research magazine from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. In addition to student research projects investigating questions such as 'Which seed attracts more birds?', 'Does the time of day affect when birds come to the feeder?' and 'How does the type of tree affect the type of bird?', the issue contains bird illustrations and science writing and poetry from K-12 students nationwide.

<<http://www.birdsleuth.org/student-publication/>><http://www.birdsleuth.org/student-publication/>

Grants: Living in a Material World Grants

To help K-12 teachers bring the real world of materials science into their classrooms, the ASM Materials Education Foundation awards 10 grants of \$500 annually. The "Living in a Material World" grants recognize teacher creativity. Their purpose is to enhance awareness of materials science and the role of materials scientists in society. Applicants must submit a two-page proposal describing a curriculum-based, hands-on project involving students' observations, communication, and mathematics and science skills that will increase their awareness of the materials around them. For more information, visit

<<http://www.asminternational.org/web/guest/foundation/teachers/teacher-grants-k12>><http://www.asminternational.org/web/guest/foundation/teachers/teacher-grants-k12>.

Lowe's Toolbox for Education Grant Program

Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation will donate \$5 million to schools and school parent-teacher groups at more than 1,000 different schools during the school year. Grant applicants may request between \$2,000 and \$5,000 per school. The program has two grant cycles in a school year: Spring (**February 15**) and Fall (**October 15**). Visit

<<http://www.toolboxforeducation.com/index.html>><http://www.toolboxforeducation.com/index.html> for more information.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES : Join other volunteers and the Urbana Park District (UPD) for **Stewardship Saturdays**. Help collect seeds, remove invasive weeds, plant natives, improve trails and restore the native landscape. Please dress accordingly; gloves, tools and refreshments are provided. Call Anita Purves Nature Center (384-4062) to notify the UPD you are coming, and so you can be notified if the work session has to be canceled! **Stewardship work days:**

- | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|----------|--|
| March 8 | Busey Woods | 9-11 am. | Meet at the Anita Purves Nature Center |
| | Weaver Park | 1 -3 pm. | Turn right into park at entrance on East Main near Smith Road. |
| March 22 | Meadowbrook | 9-11 am. | Meet at Race Street parking lot. |
| | Perkins Road | 1 -3 pm. | Meet at Dog Park parking lot on Perkins Road. |



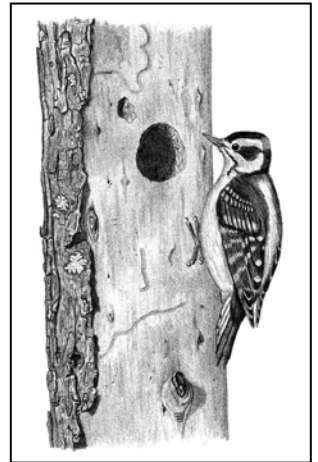
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Calendar of Events, March 2014

- Sundays** **March 2 - March 30, 7:30 - 9 AM.** Sunday morning bird walks through Crystal Lake Park and Busey Woods begin on March 2 and will continue every Sunday through May 25. Meet at the Anita Purves Nature Center parking lot. Bring binoculars if you have them. Audubon members will be present to help beginners.
- Thursday** **March 6, 7 PM.** **Monthly meeting at Urbana Free Library.** *Birds of the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve: An Ongoing Photographic Study* presented by Brian Stearns.
- Wednesday** **March 12, 7- 8:00 PM.** **The annual Woodcock walk** will be at **Meadowbrook Park.** Meet at the Meadowbrook Interpretive Center south of the Race Street parking lot.
- Fridays** **March 14 & 21, 7- 8:00 PM.** Woodcock walks at **Lake of the Woods** and **Homer Lake**, respectively.
- Thursday** **March 20. 7:15 PM.** **Champaign County Audubon Society Board Meeting** at Anita Purves Nature Center. **ARRIVAL OF SPRING 11:57 AM.**

