



The Meadowlark Messenger

December 2011 • Volume 28, No. 9

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

President's Column

Darin Eastburn & Caroline Mallory
Co-Presidents of Champaign County
Audubon Society (CCAS)

The State of the Society

With the end of the year close at hand, this is a time for reflection and reports, and for us that includes reflections on the activities of the Champaign County Audubon Society. Each year the CCAS reports on our activities to the National Audubon Society. So I thought that I would take this opportunity to share some of this information with members and to ask for your input on the activities and workings of the CCAS.

For its size, CCAS is fairly active, presenting many opportunities for members of the community to learn about the natural environment and to participate in activities that help us study and improve these natural systems. We host nine presentations each year, in which invited speakers provide information on some aspect related to birds and their environment. These have included birding travelogues, presentations on ways to attract birds to your yard, and reports on research projects. We also support and participate in events and workshops put on by other agencies, such as the Champaign County Forest Preserve District's spring bird festival and the Urbana Park District's Strawberry Jam.

The society sponsors many opportunities to observe birds. Sunday morning bird-walks are held

during the spring and fall migration seasons. On these walks, participants can see an amazing array of bird species, many of which are only here for a short time each year. We also lead field trips to interesting birding locations in the area, including Heron County Park, Clinton Lake, and the Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area. CCAS members are also encouraged to participate in efforts to help monitor bird populations, such as the Christmas Bird Count, the Great Backyard Bird Count, and the Eagle Count.

The CCAS provides financial support for research, education, and habitat improvement projects. One of our major efforts is the awarding of Kendeigh Memorial grants for bird-related research projects. These grants are usually given to student researchers at local colleges and universities. We also provide mini-grants to educators in Champaign County to encourage bird- and nature-related educational activities, and we organize and sponsor Audubon Adventures: a program for providing educational kits developed by the National Audubon Society to elementary classrooms. This past year we also provided financial support for nature-related infrastructure projects including the natural playscape at Homer Lake and the newly opened ADA-compliant path providing access to the boardwalk at Busey Woods.

So we are doing quite a bit, but are there other projects that you think we should consider or areas where

we should refocus our efforts? In particular, are there things that we can do to attract the participation and interest of a broader slice of our community? If you have ideas on ways to increase the impact of the activities of the CCAS, or wish to share other comments about the society, please don't hesitate to send us a letter or email. Mailing address: CCAS, P.O. Box 882, Urbana, Illinois, 61803. Email: darin.eastburn@gmail.com or mallory.caroline@gmail.com.

DECEMBER MEETING

at the Urbana Free Library
Auditorium

**Thursday, December 1
7 PM**

**ARMADILLOS IN
ILLINOIS**

presented by

Joyce Hofmann
of the Illinois Natural History
Survey



Defense posture of armadillo

Champaign County Audubon Society
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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

Homer Lake, 10/14-23, was visited by a White Pelican, a new bird for the park list. **The Swine Ponds**, 10/29, had a Harris' Sparrow along with lots of White-crowned and other sparrows. **Meadowbrook/Forestry**, 11/15, had Rusty Blackbirds and 2 pair of calling Great Horned Owls. **Homer Lake**, 11/16 had a very late Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and a Saw-whet Owl. The **Clinton Lake Loon trip** on 11/19 found quite a few Common Loons, and a Pacific Loon, along with large numbers of Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls. We also had a flock of 40 or so Pine Siskins and a Ross' Gull.

From further afield there was a Sage Thrasher at **Montrose Harbor**, 11//1, and an Avocet at **Lake Decatur**; and a Mew Gull at **Lake Chatauqua**, 10/29.

The **Chicago area** on 10/30 had Red Crossbills, Redpolls, and Pine Siskins, so perhaps we can look for a good winter finch year.

Champaign County Christmas Bird Count

It's that time again--time for the Champaign County Christmas Bird Count! This year it's December 17. Our count circle is centered at Deers, which means it runs from Busey Woods to Homer Lake, with everything in between. While the count runs from dawn to dusk, you do not have to be out the entire day--we welcome people who are only available for a short time. Also: WE NEED FEEDER WATCHERS! This is really simple--just count the birds at your feeder (or in your yard) for up to two hours on the count day. Keep track of the maximum number of a given species that you see and how much time you spend watching. Then phone or e-mail me your numbers. PLEASE contact me if you are able to participate. At the end of the day comes the fun part: We gather at the home of Beth Chato to eat chili (plus whatever else people bring) and put everybody's list together to see what we saw!

--Helen Parker, Champaign County Compiler, 367-3130; h-parker@Illinois.edu



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS - 2011

Champaign County

Saturday December 17

Contact: Helen Parker: 367-3130 or h-parker@illinois.edu

Clinton Lake

Sunday December 18

Contact: Rhetta Jack, lupewinku@lanscape.net

Forest Glen

Wednesday December 28

Contact: Marilyn Campbell: owlwatcher@egix.net

(Or contact Helen Parker, I stay in touch with Marilyn)

Middle Fork

Sunday January 1

Contact: Steve Bailey: sdbailey@INHS.illinois.edu

EAGLE COUNT - 2012

Saturday January 14

We try to count all the eagles on the Illinois River & backwater lakes from Havana to Beardstown. Meet 9 AM at Nature Center parking lot; return at dark.



AUDUBON NATURE SHOP

Unique Nature-Related Gifts

ANITA PURVES NATURE CENTER, 1515 NORTH BROADWAY, URBANA, IL

**CONSERVATION CORNER -- Helen Parker, Conservation Chair
Good News Department**

In an unusual display of good sense, the Obama administration has (at least for now) blocked the infamous Keystone XL pipeline. This pipeline, which would bring a rather ghastly flow of bitumen from the tar sands of Alberta to refineries in Texas, would pass over the Ogallala aquifer, where a spill would threaten the water supply for a huge area of the western great plains. It would also threaten other huge areas of land including fragile wildlife habitat. While its proponents claim that a) the oil it represents is badly needed (true only if we do not curb our extravagant consumption) and b) they can transport it safely (almost certainly false--not only is Keystone's safety record poor but accidents are certain to happen), the pipeline would be a disaster waiting to happen.

Removal of Top Predators Has Profound Effect on the Rest of the Food Web.

This should come as no surprise to anybody who realizes the interconnectedness of life, but now there have been documented studies. For example, the absence of sea otters from some of the waters of southern Alaska lead to an increase in sea urchins (the otter's favorite food) which produced a decrease in kelp (on which the urchins feed), which resulted in a decline in the small fish that use the kelp as breeding and hiding places, which led to a decrease in larger fish that ate the little fish, which left less food for the eagles that normally preyed on the fish--and the eagles instead are eating seabirds. Presumably the decline in the birds has other effects, but that was as far as the studies, which were trying to find out why the eagles were eating the seabirds, went.

In another example, in the Yellowstone area, when wolves were hunted out, the elk increased; the elk chewed on young aspen trees, limiting the growth of woodland plants. With the return of the wolves, the trees are growing again. How long it will take for full recovery remains to be seen. There are a number of other examples, but the concept is clear. Remove top predators, and the whole ecosystem is in trouble.

Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD)

With the publication of a book called "The Last Child in the Woods", we learned that our children who did not spend time outdoors in natural surroundings suffered from "Nature Deficit Disorder" (NDD). Well, guess what--adults can also suffer from NDD. Our bodies were NOT designed to spend all or most of our waking hours sitting in a chair staring at a screen. (Proof, if you need it--the hormone we call "vitamin D" is produced in our bodies by sunshine--it does not need to come as a pill.) Without exposure to the outdoors, we are less healthy both mentally and physically. In the Landscape and Human Health Laboratory on the U of I campus, Associate Professor Frances Kuo studies the effect of being in the midst of the natural world. Scientists have documented less stress, more self-control, more cooperation with others, quicker recovery from illness, and other benefits. Some researchers have taken to calling exposure to nature "vitamin G, as in "green".

Protect yourself from NDD--come on the Christmas Bird Count!

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Bird of the silent wing and expansive eye, grimalkin in feathers, feline, haunting ruins and towers, and mocking the midnight stillness with thy uncanny cry! The owl is the great bugaboo of the feathered tribes. His appearance by day is hailed by shouts of alarm and derision from nearly every bird that flies, from crows down to sparrows. They swarm about him like flies, and literally mob him back into his dusky retreat. Silence is as the breath of his nostrils to him, and the uproar that greets him when he emerges into the open day seems to alarm and confuse him as it does the pickpocket when everybody cries "Thief".

- John Burroughs

Meadowlark Messenger

Operation Migration – Whooping Cranes on Their Way!

As of this writing, the migrating whooping cranes have been spending time in Livingston County, IL for a couple weeks due to difficult migrating weather. They will hopefully be coming through this area soon! Keep an eye on the BirdNotes discussion list for local sightings.



A few years ago, Operation Migration (OM) began flying a new migration route, taking them through Piatt County and giving our members an opportunity to see the cranes locally. CCAS sponsors a 'mile' each year as part of OM's MileMaker campaign.

Seeking Volunteers!

Please give us a hand with membership duties. Someone is needed to maintain the membership rosters, the e-newsletter list, and print out mailing labels for the monthly newsletter. The estimated time commitment is approximately 2 hours per month. If you are interested, please email Janet Jokela at <mailto:jjokela59@hotmail.com>jjokela59@hotmail.com, or Darin Eastburn at <mailto:eastburn@illinois.edu>eastburn@illinois.edu. Thank you.



Get Your Meadowlark Messenger Delivered Right to Your Inbox!

Would you like to go paperless and receive your newsletter earlier? You can receive all the information you depend on from this newsletter in your inbox! Please visit our website (www.champaigncountyaudubon.org) and look under "What's New" for a link to a page where you can enter your email address. (*Please be patient with us as we work out the kinks of this system; you may still receive a printed newsletter for a limited time after signing up.*)

Our monthly newsletter, in print form, costs our chapter an average of \$284.30 for each issue. As an environmental organization, the Board would like to encourage members to receive the newsletter via e-mail or through our website: www.champaigncountyaudubon.org. Either way will save our chapter money that can then be used for environmental projects and nature education. If you just want to check the website for the newsletter and receive neither the print nor e-mail copy, contact John Dunkelberger at 344-4973 (leave a message on the answering machine) or at jdunkel@hotmail.com to have your mailing label pulled from our mailing list. By checking the website and clicking on the newsletter link, you can read the Meadowlark Messenger whenever you need information on meetings, field trips, or any of our other activities. Thank you.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES, Bob Vaiden Habitat Chair

Help rebuild our shattered environment! 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:**

December 10th: Busey Woods 9 -11 am. Meet at Anita Purves Nature Center
 Weaver Park 1 – 3 pm. Turn right at entrance on East Main near Smith Road.

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



Membership for 2010

Friend of Champaign County Audubon Society \$15.00 _____
(includes CCAS newsletter only)

new renewal

Friend of CCAS and National Audubon Society \$35.00 _____
(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: _____

C0ZG500Z

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

7XCH

(Please provide 9-digit zip code)

Send this application and your check to:

Champaign Co. 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 Champaign County Audubon Society (CCAS) Offers \$100 Mini-Grants!

Due March 4th

Our annual Mini-Grant program offers help to Champaign County educators who wish to enhance teacher and student knowledge of, and concern for, the environment. A limited number of mini-grants up to \$100 each are available. In the past, we have funded items such as: classroom materials, special books, guest speakers, registration fees for environmental conferences. Check out the Educator's Resources page on our website for more information or contact me at 217-896-2455 or <mailto:sclementz@ccfpd.org>sclementz@ccfpd.org.

Help support Champaign County educators!

If you would like to donate funds to support the Mini-Grant program, please send a check to PO Box 882 Urbana IL. 61803 by March 1st. Make checks out to CCAS.

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OLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES Bob Vaiden, Habitat Chair

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Stewardship work days:

February 11th: Busey Woods 9 -11 am. Meet at Anita Purves Nature Center

Weaver Park 1 - 3 pm. Pull off East Main Street just west of Smith Road.

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Get Your Meadowlark Messenger Delivered Right to Your Inbox!

Would you like to go paperless and receive your newsletter earlier? You can receive all the information you depend on from this newsletter in your inbox! Please visit our website (www.champaigncountyaudubon.org) and look under "What's New" for a link to a page where you can enter your email address. (Please be patient with us as we work out the kinks of this system; you may still receive a printed newsletter for a limited time after signing up.)



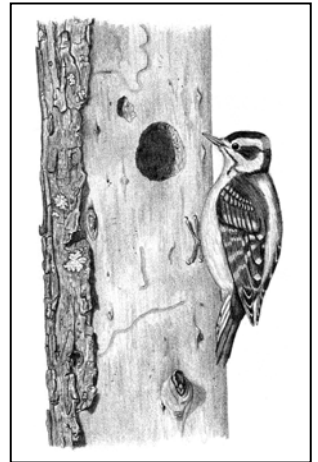
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Calendar of Events, December 2011

- Thursday December 1, 7 PM. General meeting** at Urbana Free Library Auditorium. Joyce Hofmann of the Illinois Natural History Survey will present a program on "Armadillos in Illinois".
- Thursday December 15, 7:15 PM. Champaign County Audubon Society Board Meeting** at Anita Purves Nature Center.
- Saturday December 17. Annual Champaign County Christmas Bird Count.**
- Thursday December 22, 5:30 AM. Winter Solstice**



Other Noteworthy Bird Counts:

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Clinton Lake | Sunday December 18. | Contact: Rhetta Jack, lupewinku@landscape.net |
| Forest Glen | Wednesday December 28. | Contact: Marilyn Campbell: owlwatcher@egix.net (or
Contact Helen Parker who stays in touch with Marilyn) |
| Middle Fork | Sunday January 1. | Contact: Steve Bailey: sdbailey@INHS.illinois.edu |
- Eagle Count - 2012 Saturday January 14** We try to count all the eagles on the Illinois River & backwater lakes from Havana to Beardstown. Meet 9 AM at the Nature Center parking lot; return at dark.