



The Meadowlark Messenger

ChampaignCountyAudubon.org

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

February Program

There will not be a program scheduled for February, but we hope to resume in March.

In the meantime, check out our past programs on our [YouTube channel](#). Access details and more information can be found on our website: www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/birdwalks-and-programs.

Christmas Bird Count 2021

Colin Dobson, CCAS President

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on a gloomy and windy day on Saturday, December 18, 2021. This year, 65 species were found on the day of the count with 4 other species found during the count week period. This is above the 5-year average for the count but did not beat the 2020 CBC species tally (71 species). The main highlight of the day was Aerin Tedesco finding 2 Black Scoters in Savoy—a first-ever for the count!

Champaign County Audubon’s first count was in 1941. Count circles are set with a 15-mile diameter to be covered. Our original circle included the Lake of the Woods Preserve. In 1978, the circle was shifted east to remove Lake of the Woods and add Homer Lake. The circle is now centered on Deers. A total of 142 species have been seen on any count since the beginning. The highest year’s count was 80 species in 2008.

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Champaign County Audubon Society

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- Vice President: Roger Digges
- Secretary: Jennifer Wick
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- Nathan Powazki
- Megan Skrip

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- Education: (vacant)
- Field Trip: Nathan Powazki (Chair); Beth Chato, Colin Dobson, Brody Dunn
- Finance: (vacant)
- Membership: Sara Johnson
- Program: Alida de Flamingh
- Communications: Sara Johnson (Chair); Shoshie Bauer, Jeff Bryant (Birdnotes Listserv), Susan Pollock, Megan Skrip, Sarah Stewart

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

Contact us!

P.O. Box 882, Urbana, IL 61803
ChampaignCountyAudubon.org
mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org

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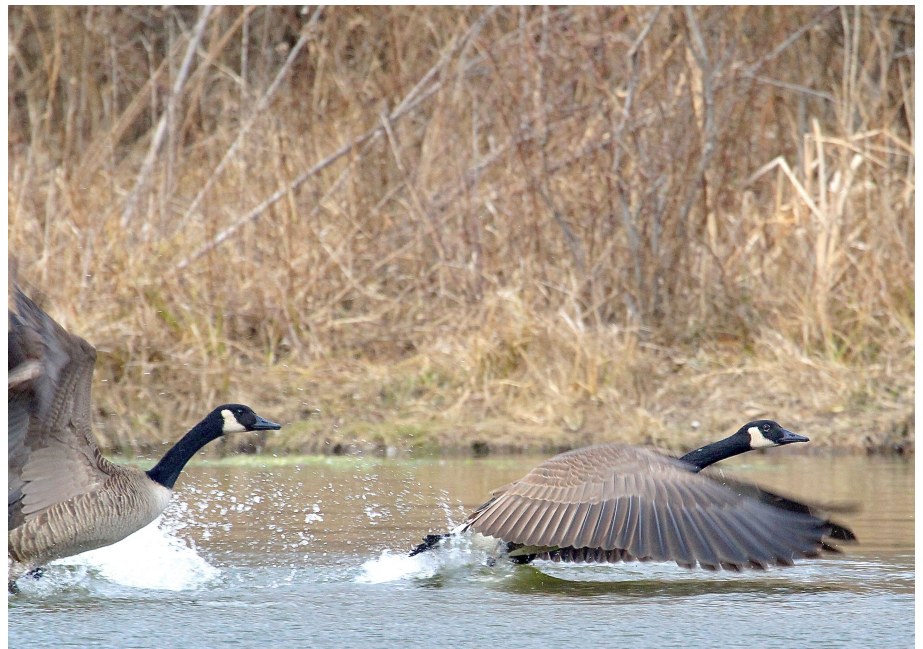
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Field Notes

Nate Powazki, CCAS Field Trip Chair

Happy new year, everyone! We hope that you had a great holiday season, filled with great times with family, and, hopefully, some birding! I know I enjoyed going home and getting some Christmastime birding done. Even though the weather has been chilly lately, the birding is still hot, if you know where to look! As rivers and lakes continue to freeze up north, and smaller bodies of water freeze locally, the waterfowl becomes more and more concentrated at a few hotspots. In several recent visits to Riverbend Forest Preserve in Mahomet, I have seen hundreds of Canada Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese, and plenty of gulls, pintails, and mallards. On closer inspection, there are scaups, mergansers, Cackling Geese, Ring-necked ducks, and even a scoter! In the woods the Cedar Waxwings and Tufted Titmice are all over, and I have seen Yellow-rumped Warblers and Golden Kinglets as well. Other notable birds include a Common Redpoll at the feeders at Homer Lake Forest Preserve. Those who brave the cold will be rewarded!

If you are looking to do some winter birding, but don't know where to start, a great place is Clinton Lake, about an hour west of Champaign. Colin Dobson, CCAS president, and I will be leading a birding field trip out there on Saturday, February 12. Due to recent spikes in COVID-19 cases, we won't be meeting in Champaign to carpool together; instead, everyone will meet at 8 am at 7251 Ranger Rd, De Witt, IL 61735. 



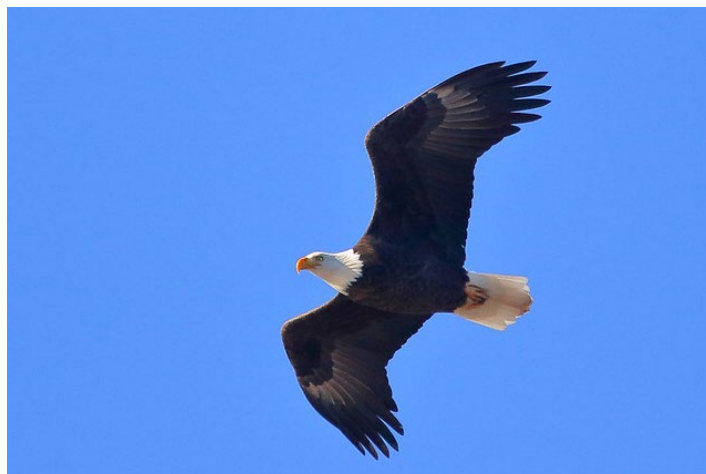
Canada Geese. Photo by Nate Powazki.

Forty-Fourth Annual Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey

Roger Digges, CCAS Vice President

Cathy and I stood atop a windswept levee in the middle of a frozen Chain Lake near the north end of Sanganois State Fish and Wildlife Area scanning the trees along the shore for a spot of white or a dark “birdy” lump. Even though the dense, early morning fog was lifting, seeing still wasn’t great. Even so, we could tell there weren’t any eagles in the trees. However, sweeping the shoreline, I was intrigued by a dark lump on the ice in the foreground which I eventually realized was a Bald Eagle. Mature? Immature? Hard to say. The white head and tail of a mature bird would be hard to make out against the white ice and the white mist. We scanned left and found another dark lump and another, and a fourth to the right. On the other side of the levee were two even more distant specks, but with effort we could make out white heads and tails. Six Bald Eagles were resting on the ice that morning, four mature birds and two immature. Cathy and I were jubilant. Why? And what were two septuagenarians doing on a narrow levee in a frozen lake on a misty morning in mid-January ahead of an approaching snowstorm anyway?

Maybe it’s best to start at the beginning. In 1979 the National Wildlife Federation initiated a nationwide count of Bald Eagles. Six years earlier, the Bald Eagle had been listed as an endangered



Bald Eagle. Photo by Jeff Bryant.

species under the Endangered Species Act just a year after DDT, a major cause of the national symbol’s decline, had been banned in the U.S. A midwinter survey would give wildlife organizations and the federal government a measuring stick for how regional Bald Eagle recovery plans were working. Today the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for coordinating the national survey, organizing results, and maintaining a long-term data base in coordination with the U.S. Geological Survey.

Here in Illinois, the midwinter survey is coordinated by the Illinois Audubon Society (a separate organization from National Audubon, and eight years older). The IAS enlists dozens of volunteers who spend a day counting eagles along 45 non-overlapping routes. Generally, the same volunteers follow the same route each year to assure continuity, although from time to time new volunteers are needed.

Cathy and I began our involvement with the Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey in 2018, when we learned CCAS member Helen Parker was no longer able to do her route, and volunteered to take over. We were assigned her section of the Illinois River from Havana to Beardstown. While there is no road in that section which runs close to the river, we can access it and its backwater lakes at various points— the Havana waterfront, Bath waterfront, Sanganois, Beardstown levee, access points on the west side of the river from Frederick and

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Birdnotes Listserve

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Visit ChampaignCountyAudubon.org.

Click “Go Birding” at the top of the page.

Click the “Join Birdnotes” button.

Upcoming Events

Wild Writings Reading Group

CCAS's reading group, Wild Writings, plans to resume meeting in March during the third Thursday of the month. Check our next newsletter for details.

To join or learn more, email our Program Chair, Alida de Flamingh, at alida.ccas@gmail.com.

Birding Field Trip to Clinton Lake

Saturday, February 12, 8:00 am

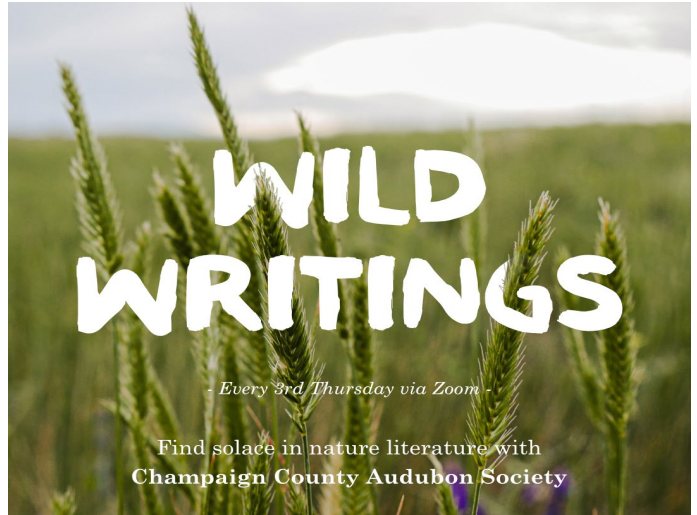
All ages and birding skills are welcome!

Meet at 7251 Ranger Rd, De Witt, IL 61735 to join this field trip led by Nate Powazki and Colin Dobson. Questions? Contact Nate Powazki at natepow234@gmail.com

Recently Spotted at Clinton Lake

Several different species of birds have been spotted out at Clinton Lake in the last few weeks. There have been many birds sighted on the lake, including American Coot, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, and Great Blue Heron. Species that have been observed in the trees in the woods include Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Tufted Titmouse, and White-Breasted Nuthatch. In addition, birds of prey recently spotted include Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrel. Maybe we will spot some of these other species on the field trip.

Bird list from <https://www.waxwingeco.com/birding-hotspot.php?id=L4459874>.



Red-tailed Hawk. Photo by Jeff Bryant.



Tufted Titmouse. Photo by Mark Olsen on Unsplash.

Welcome, New Members!

Shoshanna Bauer, Arlene Halfhide, Elisabeth Jenicek, Paula Luesse, Lisa Tyler, Allison Williams

Thank you, Renewing Members!

Richard Burkhardt, Marsha Daniels, Norman Denzin & Katherine Ryan, Beverly & Peter Fagan, Steve Heater, Rich Howard, Charlie Smyth & Audrey Ishii, Julia Kellman, Brock Martin, Dawn Schultz, Grace Schoedel, Mary K. Solecki, David Thomas, Rachel Vinsel, Joe Williams

Special thanks to renewing members who donated above and beyond annual dues:

Ondine Gross, Susan Pollock, Anne Robin, Robert Taylor

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Browning, and a rather harrowing but productive drive on a track that crosses Anderson Lake then traverses a narrow levee between the lake and the river. But eagles aren't only found at the river or its backwaters. Cathy spotted two majestic looking mature Bald Eagles this year standing in corn stubble along Route 78.

The midwinter survey is conducted during two weeks in early to mid-January, this year January 5-19, with a target date of January 7-8. We had planned to conduct our survey on the 8th, but the ice storm intervened as did our schedule and so ended up going on the 14th, starting out in dense fog with Havana and Beardstown under a winter weather advisory for snow. We never know what to expect with weather, the river, or the birds. Sometimes the river is frozen solid in most places and sometimes it's ice-free. Sometimes, rarely, even the backwaters are open. We've counted as few as 8 eagles and as many as 51.


This year the river was flowing freely, the backwaters were frozen, and we found 25 eagles,

about two-thirds of them mature birds. With visibility anywhere from one to three miles due to the fog, we probably missed some further away from our vantage points but were satisfied to find those we did. As usual, many were just far-off lumps that move from time to time just to show us who they are. On the other hand, one beautiful mature bird sprang up from the Anderson Lake levee just feet from our car and flew out over the river in a long sweeping turn to give us a good look at its plumage.

The bonus is always finding birds one didn't expect, in our case this year, more than 300 Tundra Swans gleaning farm fields miles from the river, and many hundreds of Greater White-fronted Geese gathering ahead of the storm on the open edges of Chain Lake. Our best sighting came when we were stopped near a country crossroad, trying to figure out where we were, when we spotted a female Northern Harrier coursing low over a field heading in our direction. We followed her with our binoculars until she filled our whole field of view and we thought she was going to hit the car, but she rose gracefully, made her turn expertly, and headed back over the field. Beyond her, two male harriers were hunting in tandem, one just behind and off the wing of the other.

It was a long day for us; we didn't get back until dark. But citizen science is good work, and the eagles and other birds make it more than worthwhile.

Information about the history of Bald Eagle decline, protection, and recovery can be found at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife website, Midwest Bald and Golden Eagles, History of Bald Eagle Decline, Protection, and Recovery, <https://www.fws.gov/midwest/eagle/history/index.html>

Information about the Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey nationally can be found at citizenscience.gov, Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey, <https://www.citizenscience.gov/catalog/249/#> 

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Yes, I'd like to become a member!

When you join the Champaign County Audubon Society, 100% of your dues and donations support our efforts (and they're tax deductible!).

\$ _____ CCAS Membership (\$15 due each January).

\$ _____ Additional donation to CCAS

\$ _____ TOTAL

Or Join Online!

Save time by contributing via your mobile device or computer! [Visit our website to join or donate online.](#)

I am a new member I am renewing my membership

Name: _____

Email: _____ Phone # (_____) _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ - _____

CCAS members will be automatically enrolled to receive our newsletter by email; check this box if you would prefer to receive a **paper** copy.

Checks should be made payable to CCAS. Send this form and your payment to: CCAS Membership Chair, P.O. Box 882, Urbana, IL 61803-0882. Thank you!

Our Mission:

Promote interest, enjoyment, and understanding of all aspects of our natural environment, and actively encourage the protection of wildlife and native habitats.



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- **New members:** Go online to <http://bit.ly/nas-g50> or call 1-844-428-3826. Please tell them Champaign County Audubon Society sent you using our chapter code "G50."
- **Renewing members:** Go online to <http://bit.ly/renew-nas> or call 1-844-428-3826.



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