



The Meadowlark Messenger

ChampaignCountyAudubon.org

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

December Program

Meadowbrook: A History

Thursday, December 7, 2023, 7:00 pm

Urbana Free Library Auditorium

Join us for a presentation by Roger Digges, CCAS Vice President



Our December program will feature Roger Digges, author of a newly published book, *Meadowbrook: A History*. Roger will be focusing on how the Urbana Park District created a diversity of habitats from corn and bean fields. He will show photos of the various habitats and point out how they benefit wildlife. Roger and his wife Cathy, both long-time Champaign County Audubon Society members, have walked at Meadowbrook in the early morning for more than 17 years and are intimately familiar with the park, its habitats through seasonal changes, and its wildlife.



This will be the Society's second in-person meeting on December 7 at 7 p.m. in the downstairs community room at the Urbana Free Library. The presentation will be preceded by a brief business meeting for the election of next year's Board.

View past programs on our YouTube channel. Access details and more information can be found on our website: www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/birdwalks-and-programs

In This Issue

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|---|--------------|
| <i>Field Notes</i> | Pg. 2 | <i>Membership Renewals</i> | Pg. 4 |
| <i>Bird of the Month</i> | Pg. 3 | <i>Location of the Month: Kauffman Park</i> | Pg. 5 |
| <i>Welcome, New Members</i> | Pg. 3 | <i>Christmas Bird Count</i> | Pg. 5 |
| <i>CCAS Annual Elections</i> | Pg. 4 | | |

Champaign County Audubon Society

Officers

- President: Colin Dobson
- Vice President: Roger Digges
- Secretary: Jennifer Wick
- Treasurer: Todd Kinney

Members at Large

- Beth Chato
- Megan Skrip
- Vacant

Committee Chairs

- Bylaws: Roger Digges
- Conservation: Zachary Sutton
- Education: (vacant)
- Field Trip: (vacant);
Beth Chato, Colin Dobson
- Finance: Todd Kinney
- Membership: Brock Martin
- Program: (vacant)
- Communications: Colin Dobson
(Chair); Jeff Bryant (Birdnotes Listserv),
Susan Pollock (newsletter), Megan
Skrip (webmaster)

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

Get this newsletter in your inbox!



Would you like to go paperless and help our funds go further? Please visit the [Membership](#) page on our website and enter your name and email address.

Find us on social media!



Facebook
[@ChampaignAudubon](#)



Twitter
[@ccaudubon](#)



Instagram
[@champaigncountyaudubon](#)



Broad-tailed Hummingbird. Photo by Deanna Uphoff.

Field Notes

A Broad-tailed Hummingbird, recorded as a first sighting in Champaign County, visited the yard of Deanna Uphoff in early November. eBird lists 42 reports of this bird from November 8 to 10 with 29 photos uploaded for those interested in seeing the bird. Photos show this first-time visitor flitting between honeysuckle and a hummingbird feeder in Uphoff's yard.

This unusual and later-season visit underscores the importance of keeping hummingbird feeders out and filled until December to help the late migrants along their journey. The presence of feeders does not discourage birds from migrating but simply provides sustenance as they stop to fuel up before moving further south. Although most hummingbirds travel to their winter habitats by October, some birds may migrate later, arriving in early December.

Uphoff took up a collection from human visitors and plans to donate the funds to Champaign County Audubon Society.

Email us (mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org) if you happen to see a hummingbird at your feeder this time of year, as it is not likely a Ruby-throated! One of our board members can come to check out the sighting.

CCAS welcomes member submissions for the newsletter. If you would like to submit an article for Field Notes to share with the CCAS membership, please email our CCAS newsletter editor (spollock.ccas@gmail.com).



Broad-tailed Hummingbird. Photo by Steve Zehner.

Bird of the Month

Roger Digges, CCAS Vice President

Probably the most popular and iconic photograph of a bird in winter is one of a male Northern Cardinal, bright red against white snow. Besides the fact that such photos are so stunning, you likely pictured in your mind immediately because there are so many such photographs, and because there are so many cardinals (130 million in the eastern and central US, southernmost Canada, and much of Mexico according to [All About Birds](#)). They live here year round, and unlike some birds, they keep their bright plumage throughout the year. Whether it's 25 below 0 in January or 100 degrees in July, you can find cardinals almost anywhere in Champaign County where there is dense foliage available, including your own backyard.

Before we explore why these birds are so common, let's take a closer look at the Northern Cardinal. The bird was given the name cardinal by early European explorers and settlers because its brilliant

red plumage reminded them of the robes and caps worn by Roman Catholic cardinals. Ornithologists call it the Northern Cardinal because it has, by far, the northernmost range of the three cardinal species. The Pyrrhuloxia (or Desert Cardinal) lives in southern and western Texas, southern New Mexico and Arizona, and much of northern Mexico. The Vermilion Cardinal resides in Colombia and Venezuela.

Like a number of other birds, the Northern Cardinal is sexually dimorphic. While the male's bright plumage is easily seen, so as to attract the attention of females, female cardinals tend to blend into the surrounding vegetation in their subtle brown plumage with only hints of red in their wings, tail, and crest. This, of course, offers camouflage for females as they incubate eggs on

their nest. Both sexes sport thick orange beaks, although the males' beaks are larger, and crests, although, again, the males are bright red.

Northern Cardinals primarily eat seeds and fruit but supplement these foods with insects. They primarily feed their nestlings insects. Cardinals build their nests wedged in the forks of small trees, shrubs, or vine tangles, 1–15 feet above the ground, and hidden in dense foliage. The female and male go location hunting with nest materials and “discuss” the merits of different sites. She does most of the building, although the male sometimes brings nest material, bending twigs she has broken to fit the shape of her body and pushing them into a cup shape. She'll add softer material to cushion

the eggs. It will take the female up to 9 days to build a nest she'll only use once. She will incubate the eggs for 11–13 days while her mate brings her food, and both parents will feed the nestlings for the next week or two.

It is easy to attract Northern Cardinals to your yard. They love dense undergrowth,

shrubs, and trees, and, if you provide that kind of habitat,

may choose to nest not far from your house. We have seen male and female cardinals going back and forth from one of our small trees to gather food and bring it to their young. Cardinals will readily use feeders. We find they prefer black oil sunflower seed.

How are cardinals doing? Great! Because of the growth in suburban and other residential yards, and people providing food in feeders, Northern Cardinals have gradually expanded their range. The [North American Breeding Bird Survey](#) shows a 0.32% annual increase in the number of cardinals since 1966. While this bird seems to be compatible with the habitat we provide, please pay attention to the many birds which are not and be their defender.



Northern Cardinal. Photo by Colin Dobson.

Welcome, New Members!

Clara Dunlop, Nicole Orozco, Daniel Warren

CCAS Annual Elections

The Champaign County Audubon Society board is a low-pressure way to learn about conservation issues we face in Central Illinois and is an opportunity to use your skills for good!

Want to get involved in conservation in our community? Curious about board leadership? We are currently seeking enthusiastic individuals who can help run our organization.

The following slate of candidates for the 2024 Board will be voted on during our meeting on December 7.

Officers

President: Colin Dobson

Vice President: Roger Digges

Secretary: Jennifer Wick

Treasurer: Todd Kinney

Committee Chairs

Bylaws: Roger Digges

Conservation: Zak Sutton

Education: Janice Enos

Field Trip: Aerin Tedesco

Membership: Brock Martin

Program: Elizabeth Rodriguez

Communications: Colin Dobson

Member at Large: Elizabeth Chato

Member at Large: Megan Skrip

Member at Large: Susan Pollock

To learn more about CCAS, sit in on a meeting, or join a committee, email CCAS at mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org.



Membership Renewals

Now is a great time to renew your CCAS membership for the coming year. Being a member helps you stay connected with all the Audubon activities happening in Champaign County. In addition to supporting local conservation efforts, such as educator mini-grants, there were several members-only opportunities this year, such as the Magic Stump viewing at Virginia Theatre in February and the Champaign County Forrest Preserve Owl Night in November. Please reach out to ccas.membership@gmail.com if you have any questions about renewal or your membership.



Canvasback Duck. Photo by Jeff Bryant.



Long-eared Owl. Photo by Jeff Bryant.

Location of the Month: Kaufman Park

By Colin Dobson, CCAS President

Kaufman Park is located on the west side of Champaign just north of Springfield Avenue. The main component of this park is Kaufman Lake, which is a long, narrow lake that has a trail along the whole edge. This park can be worth a stop anytime, but late summer and winter are the two best periods of the year to visit this park to see plenty of birds! There are two primary parking areas, the large one on the east side by the small lakehouse, and on the west side. This parking lot is accessed by the short road that continues west along the south side of the lake from the east parking lot.

The reason I chose to feature Kaufman Park in December is that when most of the other lakes freeze in the Champaign-Urbana area, most of the geese and ducks move to Kaufman Lake. Although December may be a tad too early, this is a great time to start checking the lake from time to time. January and February are the two best months to see birds on the lake here, but it can freeze when temperatures become very cold. A hole



A male Ring-necked Duck and a female Canvasback sleeping among a flock of geese at Kaufman Park in February 2021. This is an example of what part of an open water hole may look like in the winter, some diving ducks mixed in with Canada Geese. Something you do not see every day! Photo by Colin Dobson.

of open water usually forms in the center of the lake because of large numbers of waterfowl that move over to the lake, but as temperatures become colder, this hole can freeze and force birds to go elsewhere.

In years past, Long-eared Owls have also been found in the spruce trees in the southwest section of the park during this same period. If you happen to find one, please give the owl space. Owls can become very stressed when approached by humans so it is best to give an owl plenty of distance. One of the best ways to look for an owl is to look for pellets and ‘white wash’ (or poop) on the ground or branches of a tree. Because an owl typically uses the same tree to roost during the day, over time a bird regurgitates more pellets, therefore making it more obvious that a bird might be there. If you happen to see evidence of an owl, look up. One (or more than one) may be above you!

In late summer, this is a great location to see either night heron species, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned. Black-crowned is the expected species, but one or two juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Herons have been found over the last few years as well. These herons can be seen throughout the lake, but especially along the western shoreline sitting on exposed logs near the shoreline, viewed from the east parking lot. Lastly, because the lake is surrounded by plenty of trees (and a diversity of tree species as well) this can also be a great spot to look for migrants as well as some sparrows during the winter! A short walk on the trail along the perimeter of the lake can be perfect to see some of these as well as any of the other birds as well!

Christmas Bird Count

The Champaign Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 16. Please contact us at mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org if you are interested in helping. Colin Dobson is the compiler once again.

Learn more about CBC at <https://www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/christmas-bird-count>.

Join Champaign County Audubon Society!

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.

Our Mission:

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

Join National Audubon Society

When you join National Audubon Society you receive one year of Audubon magazine. You also have the option to receive local birding and community events delivered to your inbox from CCAS.

- **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.



The Champaign County Audubon Society is a Chapter of National Audubon Society, Inc.