



The Meadowlark Messenger

ChampaignCountyAudubon.org

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

April Program

Listening to Nature: Bird Sounds and Accommodating All Birders

Thursday, April 1st, 7pm CT

Join us for another virtual monthly meeting and seminar, presented on [Zoom](#)! While George Casselberry has multiple challenges, among them being legally blind and using a wheelchair, he also has superpowers. He’s a musician who composes, writes, sings, and plays the harmonica. He is also a docent at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, where he has learned hundreds of calls of birds from around the world. The first person known to have distinguished the sex of young Fire-tufted Barbets, a Malaysian bird, by noting slight difference in pitch, George was asked to write



a paper on the subject. He is a gifted and meticulous ear birder. George will talk about how he became an ear birder (he started very young), the process and resources he uses for learning bird sounds, and some of the challenges he faces in bird identification. George birds with his local Audubon chapter and will discuss challenges that parks present to birders of differing mobilities and how Audubon chapters can better accommodate all birders.

All seminars are recorded and posted to our [YouTube channel](#) afterward. Access details and more information can be found on our website: www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/birdwalks-and-programs

In This Issue

<i>Field Notes</i>	<i>Pg. 2</i>	<i>A Red-Tail Timeshare</i>	<i>Pg. 5</i>
<i>CCAS Supports the Kingfisher</i>	<i>Pg. 2</i>	<i>April CCAS Board Meeting</i>	<i>Pg. 6</i>
<i>Upcoming April Events</i>	<i>Pg. 3</i>	<i>Thank You, Donors!</i>	<i>Pg. 6</i>
<i>Save the Dates!</i>	<i>Pg. 4</i>	<i>Apply for a Mini-Grant</i>	<i>Pg. 8</i>

Champaign County Audubon Society

Officers

- President: Colin Dobson
- Vice President: Roger Digges
- Secretary: Jennifer Wick
- Treasurer: John Dunkelberger (Interim)

Members at Large

- Beth Chato
- Jeff Peyton
- Zak Sutton
- Tyler Owens
- Megan Skrip

Committee Chairs

- Bylaws: (vacant)
- Conservation: Jeff Peyton
- Education: Tyler Owens
- Field Trip: Nathan Powazki
- Finance: Janet Jokela (Interim)
- Membership: Sara Johnson
- Program: Alida de Flamingh
- Communications: Sara Johnson, Chair. Megan Skrip (Print Newsletter), Carie Nixon (Community Calendars) Brody Dunn (Board Listserv), Jeff Bryant (Birdnotes Listserv)

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.



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Field Notes

Submitted by Beth Chato

Recent sightings: Lots of waterfowl including swans, and Sandhill Cranes back at Middlefork on March 1st; the year's first Eastern Phoebe was found on March 5th and a Bewick's Wren on March 14th, both at Meadowbrook. 

CCAS Supports the Kingfisher

Colin Dobson, CCAS President

The Champaign County Audubon Society stands in full support for the Belted Kingfisher to be the next mascot of University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. We believe this is the best option for the next mascot for the university and hope those still involved will decide in favor of the mascot! 

Got a birding question?

Ask the board and your Q & A could be in our next Meadowlark Newsletter!

Email us at:
mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org with your question or
send via snail mail to:
**P.O. Box 882,
Urbana IL 61801**



Upcoming April Events

Sunday Morning Bird Walks

April 11th & April 25th, 7:30–9am

Meet at the Anita Purves Nature Center parking lot
FREE! All skill levels and ages — under 15 with adult

Please remember that this spring, we:

- **Require sign-ups** — Please use this form if you fully intend to participate: <https://tinyurl.com/1eohcpsx>

- **Are limiting walks to 10 participants** — If you decide you are unable to attend, please remove your name from the sign-up so someone else can attend! Do not attend if you feel unwell or were potentially exposed to COVID-19. Face masks worn over the mouth and nose, as well as strict adherence to social distancing and COVID-19 guidelines, are required.



Ready those binocs! Photo by Erik Mclean/Unsplash.

On alternate weeks, stay tuned for virtual bird hikes via Facebook Live! Learn more on our website: www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/sunday-morning-birdwalks/

Champaign County Dark Sky Week

April 5th – 11th

Online

Reconnect with the night sky during the first ever Champaign County Dark Sky Week! This collaboration between the Champaign County Forest Preserve District and CCAS, with the help of local professionals and organizations, aims to help you rediscover the wonder of the night and bring awareness to light pollution and dark sky initiatives. Learn more about the initiative and upcoming events by visiting:

www.champaigncountydarkskyweek.org



Wild Writings Reading Group

Online

It's not too late to join CCAS's new reading group, Wild Writings! For its first discussion, the group is reading two essays from Kathleen Dean Moore's *Holdfast: At Home in the Natural World*. To join or learn more, email our Program Chair, Alida de Flamingh, at alida.ccas@gmail.com.



Photo by Nino Maghradze/Unsplash.

Save the Dates!



Illinois Audubon Society Chapter Big Day

May 1st

The Chapter Big Day is a competition between participating chapters of the Illinois Audubon Society for the most species observed in a 16-hour period (12:00 am to 4:00 pm). Registration is open to members and non-members. Chapter and Individual Big Day Champions will be awarded. Competitors may bird alone or with others anywhere within Illinois.

Counts must be turned in by May 4 to the designated coordinator for each Chapter team. Coordinator contact information will be provided to registered participants. Learn more:

<https://illinoisaudubon.org/field-trip/2021-chapter-big-day-competition/>



Spring Bird Count

May 8th

The Spring Bird Count is a yearly bird count on the Saturday between May 4th and 10th. Each Illinois county has a compiler responsible for recruiting volunteers and assigning them to survey areas. Volunteers record all birds seen or heard, along with the number of hours they spend “owling” (pre-dawn hours) and looking for birds during the day, and the number of miles driven and walked. If you are interested in participating, please email Beth Chato at ejchato@gmail.com.

Learn more: <https://spring-bird-count.inhs.illinois.edu/>



2021 Bird-a-Thon

May 9th – 16th

The Bird-a-Thon is CCAS’s annual fundraiser where teams eagerly search for as many bird species as they can find. Pledge donations are based on the number of species seen or a flat amount. Please participate or choose a team and pledge your support! Learn more:

www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/bird-counts-and-bird-a-thon/

A Red-Tail Timeshare

Megan Skrip, CCAS Member at Large (Twitter: [@Birdology101](https://twitter.com/Birdology101))

There's a hot piece of real estate in Champaign County where the rent is low and the view is great, but the tenants are never the same two years running. Since at least 2017 (the year I moved to the area), this high-turnover penthouse has been maintained by a pair of Red-tailed Hawks. It's a huge, sturdy nest, built of locally sourced branches in a lofty pine tree. And, remarkably, it has hosted a different family every spring: red-tails one year and Great Horned Owls the next—as reliable as clockwork.

Red-tailed Hawks are notable nest-builders, crafting and refurbishing multiple large stick nests over their lifetimes, while Great Horned Owls are notable nest co-operators, opportunistically taking over the recent homes of other raptors, often red-tails. These owls won't even refurbish someone else's fixer-upper, or use the same nest twice...unless it's been renovated for them.

And so, it appears that the timesharing renters of this particular Champaign County nest have come to a longstanding, if not wholly equitable, arrangement: In odd years (2017, 2019, and looking good for 2021), the hawks revamp the nest with fresh material and settle in to raise a brood (apparently two fledglings in each of the past two attempts). Then, in even years (2018, 2020, and my money's on 2022), the owls reclaim the refurbished nest and trash it as they raise their own young (one fledgling in 2018 and two in 2020). The owls then leave the property to the hawks to rebuild and use the following year.



Owl nestlings in 2020. Photo by Brad Scott.

The great horneds, after all, have the advantage of choice—they begin their courtship in December and have chosen a nesting site in January, well before the hawks have even begun (I'm guessing) to think about starting a family. The owls' floofy young then take their first steps out of the nest (a behavior called "branching") in March, the same month that the Red-tailed Hawks finish setting up house. In May, after owl fledglings have long flown away, hawk babies are still nest-bound fuzzballs!

Every year for this particular Champaign County nest, the Great Horned Owls have first right of refusal. Is it still a mess from last year's untidy owl kids? Hard pass. Has it been nicely redone, remodeled, and cleaned up by last year's hawk tenants? Sign that lease. By the time the hawks come around to check out the property again, it has been claimed for months.

Over the past four years (and going on five), this nest has not been empty for a single breeding season, suggesting that it's in a prime location for both raptors. The surrounding habitat seems ideal, a mix of mature trees for perching and plentiful grassland, crisscrossed with the tunnels of abundant, and apparently very delicious, rodents. One evening at twilight in 2020, I was lucky enough to even spy the mother owl descend swiftly from her perch near the




Hawks setting up house in 2021. Photo by Brad Scott.

continued on pg.6

nest tree, snag a rodent in the grass, and deliver the meal to her eager young. Fast food indeed.

Of course, I'm a relative newcomer to this neighborhood, so I do not know when the nest was built, or for how many years these species have been trading it. Both are highly territorial, though, so it's very likely that the same pairs are returning to this timeshare again and again. It also remains a mystery to me where the pairs nest in their "off" years. I'd

like to believe that the owls simply take over the red-tails' other preferred nest elsewhere, sharing another site perhaps even better than this one. But I cannot know for sure.

I do know that their annual switcheroo has been a great source of entertainment, and highly educational. As long as that pine tree stands, hopefully for decades more, it will undoubtedly remain an in-demand residence for these fascinating birds. 



Birdnotes Listserve

Join our Birdnotes Listserve to get the latest local bird sightings in your inbox! Visit ChampaignCountyAudubon.org. Click "Go Birding" at the top of the page. Click the "Join Birdnotes" button.

Upcoming Board Meeting

The next CCAS board meeting is *Monday, April 19th at 7pm CT on Zoom!*

All CCAS members are welcome to attend. Email sjohnsonccas@gmail.com for connection details.

Welcome, New Members!

*Joy Bowling, Rosemary Buck, Christina Fliege,
Jillian Greene, Brock Martin, Dawn Haken,
Kevin Wilson*

Thank You, Renewing Members!

*Connie Bandy, Joyce Beitel, Marsha Daniels,
Tamara Ducey, Susan Farner, Melinda Febus,
Steve Heater, Louise Johns, Dwaine & Chris
Keller, Paul Kenis, Antje Kolodziej, Mark Koster,
Mary Kraft, Carla Cravens Mansini, Douglas &
Carol Maddox, Kathy O'Neill, Philip O'Neill,
Julie Nieset, Brock Price, Barbara Ramsey, Lynne
Reagan, Maureen Van Hoorn, Donna Wagner,
Lucy Whalley, Jacquelin Wilen*

Thank You, Donors!

A special thanks to new and renewing members who donated above and beyond annual dues:

New Member

Gayle Tilford

Renewing Members

*Michael Barnhardt, Andrea Bretl, Joyce Burdge,
L. Brody Dunn, Robert Fiedler, Derek Liebert,
Kay Lindsay, Jane Myers, Traci Nally, Terry
Prinn, Ruth Wene*

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. 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.



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.



Audubon

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



Champaign County Audubon Society
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Urbana, IL 61803-0882

MINI-GRANTS FOR EDUCATORS

The Champaign County Audubon Society is offering \$250 mini-grants to educators in Champaign County to support environmental education

**Apply by
April 10th, 2021**

www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/education/



Breeding pair of Red-tailed Hawks in March 2021; see page 5. Photo by Brad Scott.