



The Meadowlark Messenger

ChampaignCountyAudubon.org

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

February Program

Eavesdropping on Warblers to Defend Against Brood Parasitism

Thursday, Feb. 4th, 7pm CT

Join us for another virtual monthly meeting and seminar, presented on [Zoom](#)! This month, Shelby Lawson, Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, will tell us how Red-winged Blackbirds respond to the warning or “seet” call of Yellow Warblers to defend their territories. Yellow Warblers produce a seet call specifically to warn other Yellow Warblers about Brown-headed Cowbirds, which lay their eggs in the warblers’ and other species’ nests. Shelby and her colleagues found that Red-winged Blackbirds eavesdrop on warblers and respond to seet calls as much as to cowbird chatters and predator calls.

Follow Shelby on Twitter: [@Bird_Sock](#)



Learn more about Shelby’s research, featured on Audubon News: <https://www.audubon.org/news/when-yellow-warblers-warn-brood-parasites-red-winged-blackbirds-listen>

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

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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.**

Contact us!

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Field Notes

Submitted by Beth Chato

Saturday, December 19, 2020 was the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. The Champaign Audubon Count was organized, and the data was collected, by Brody Dunn. This year, 36 people, in 20 parties, took part using COVID-19 safety protections. Combined they walked about 87 miles and drove 250 miles; 71 different species were seen, and 8,582 individual birds counted. (This included 2,288 European Starlings and 1,216 Canada Geese.) An addition to the historical list of seen species was an Ovenbird. Other highlights were a Ross's Goose and a Northern Saw-whet Owl and, seen the week of the count, a Peregrine Falcon and a Snowy Owl.

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



Christmas Bird Count Stats for Champaign County

36 Participants:

Walked 87 Miles

Counted 71 species and 8582 Birds!

Thank you for your Participation!



Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey

Roger Digges, CCAS Vice President

On January 13th, my wife, Cathy, and I set off early in the morning to travel to the Illinois River. It was our fourth year of participating in the Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey (<https://illinoisaudubon.org/programs/imbbs>), a more than four-decade-old project currently overseen nationally by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and coordinated in Illinois by the Illinois Audubon Society (IAS). The purpose of the survey is to get a rough count of where and how many eagles overwinter in the lower 48. The IAS oversees dozens of volunteer birders who count eagles along 45 non-overlapping routes on the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers and other areas. Our route, which we more or less inherited from Champaign County Audubon members Beth Chato and Helen Parker, runs from Havana to Beardstown, a distance of 35 miles by highway, more, I'm sure, as the river winds. Our purpose, of course, was to count eagles. But before we could count them, we had to find them.

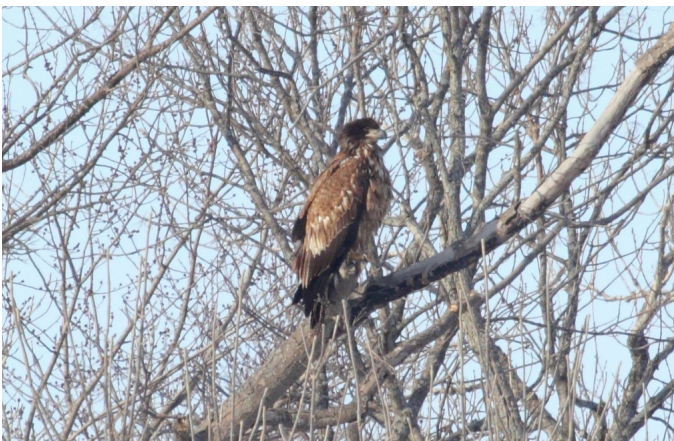
This isn't as easy as it might seem. First of all, there are limited places where one can access the river or its backwaters. Much of the land along the river is private property and/or roadless. Second, and this surprised me at first, eagles can be very difficult to see. This is partly because of distance. Like most birds, Bald Eagles are wary of humans and tend to perch at what they consider to be a safe distance from people. Even mature eagles with the iconic white head and tail are hard to find perched a thousand feet away in a dense woodland backlit



Bald Eagle, blending in except for its head. Photo by Jeff Bryant.

by a milk-white sky. But it takes eagles five years to acquire that classic look. Immature birds are dark, and a challenge is trying to find them camouflaged in a tangle of dark trunks and limbs. But patience, multiple times scanning a woodland, and often asking your partner, “What do you think? Eagle or just a weird branch?” does pay off. Usually if you look long enough (which is somewhat uncomfortable if you're looking into an icy wind), you may see a hint of movement, or a clearer outline. And so you count it.


On January 13th we went to our “go-to” places on the river between Havana and Beardstown—the Havana riverfront, the Bath “riverfront” (actually a backwater lakefront), Sanganois Conservation Area, the Beardstown riverfront, the dead ends of roads out of Frederick and Browning, the low gravel drive across the dike at Anderson Lake. We were amazed. We were expecting another single digit count like we had during another mild winter, that of 2018–19. But birds don't always, often, usually conform to birders' expectations. We found eagles every single place we stopped, sometimes as many as a half dozen, that group “talking” to each other as only eagles can. When we drove back toward Havana from Anderson Lake, we added the numbers and realized we had counted 52 Bald Eagles, our highest count yet—eagles perched, flying, even standing on the ice of backwater lakes. We were pleased that at least 18 of those birds were



Immature Bald Eagle. Photo by Jeff Bryant.

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immature, maybe as many as 22, as it's pretty hard to tell whether or not a bird has a white tail and head when they're standing on ice! Immature birds mean that the species is doing well.

If you get an opportunity to help with the midwinter survey, take it. Even if you don't, go out some cold day in January to the Illinois or Mississippi (Keokuk, Iowa, is a great place to see a lot of eagles) and just look. Yes, we can see eagles right here in Champaign County, but it's great to see them in numbers. 



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In Memoriam

We offer our warm sympathies to the family of Shirley M. Walker, long-time CCAS supporter.

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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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Champaign County Audubon Society
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you find?**

**24th Annual Great
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Red-bellied Woodpecker. Photo: Deborah Bifulco/
Great Backyard Bird Count

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